Foundational Knowledge
Stratification Theories/ Class Analysis

SECTION ONE

SOURCE:
***International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.** Ed. William A. Darity, Jr.. Vol. 8. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. p166-167.

Stratification

The term *stratification* refers to the system of inequalities within and between societies, the processes of assignment to positions within a social hierarchy, and the means by which resources are allocated. Various theories have tried to explain how and why stratification systems emerged. The most prominent of these were developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries following industrialization, which altered the social structures of traditional feudal and agrarian societies and gave rise to more complex urban societies. Before industrialization, societies were more stable and had much less economic inequality, and clear, fixed boundaries separated groups like the nobility from their subjects (see Lenski 1966).

In his pioneering account, Karl Marx explained stratification as a product of the mode of production—the principal system of market organization (e.g., capitalism). He outlined a progressive transition from feudalism to capitalism and finally to socialism. Marx claimed that the organization and development of modern, industrial capitalist societies were driven by class relations. He argued that capitalist societies would grow increasingly divided between a capitalist class that owns the capital and therefore controls the means of production and a growing labor class (proletariat) that sells its labor to capitalists in order to survive. Marx predicted a struggle between capitalists and workers leading to the destruction of the capitalist system and the formation of a socialist society free of classes. Moving beyond his historical prediction, modern Marxists have reconceptualized his class schema to focus on authority, the inherently antagonistic relations between workers and owners/managers, and the exploitative nature of capitalism (see, for example, Wright 1997).

In the early twentieth century, Max Weber added a focus on social status and political power to Marx's more purely economic perspective. He proposed class, status, and party as the three dimensions of stratification in modern societies, though he also discussed the role of castes and professions. Though Weber's writings conceptualizing class were not very developed or novel, he

has been deployed widely in class schemas focused on prestige, occupations, status, and skill. Weber's present-day influence can most be seen in the use of his concept of *closure*—that is, the process by which organizations define boundaries that establish which members receive certain benefits and which do not.

Structural functionalism, which traces its roots to the work of Émile Durkheim, perceived stratification systems as universal to every society, from simple hunter-gatherer tribes to complex, modern industrial societies. Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore (1945) offered a particularly influential account of the "functional necessity of stratification." Structural functionalist theories were criticized for neglecting conflict and for failing to address the possible lack of stratification in small egalitarian tribes or the reduction of stratification in modern social democracies. Today, structural functionalism has few followers in the social sciences.

A common characteristic of these early attempts was the effort to develop general laws. During the post–World War II (1939–1945) period, however, social scientists have moved away from grand, all-encompassing theories of stratification toward more flexible perspectives, which perceive stratification as a result of the interplay between multiple actors and multiple dimensions of inequality. One of the main new issues gaining attention was that of gender. Scholars argued that gender played a central role in the formation and functioning of stratification systems. They showed that women's exclusion from social life placed them in an inferior position, resulting in lessened life chances and status. While women's standing in social and economic life has improved over the past half-century, women are still restricted by gender roles and patriarchy. Rich literatures examine the impact of family structure, occupational segregation, devaluation of women's work, and sex-based pay gaps.

Other issues that came under greater scrutiny were race and ethnicity. Scholars demonstrated that one's racial and ethnic background greatly influences one's life chances. U.S. sociologists have devoted a great deal of attention to black-white differences in residence, educational achievement, and employment status. Many focused on residentially segregated ghetto communities where unemployment, poverty, and single parenthood were highly concentrated. Though many sociologists have demonstrated that some racial and ethnic differences can be explained by class-based factors like income level, there is an emerging literature on how race, gender, and class intersect to shape disadvantage.

There also has been great interest in the actors and processes that reproduce and maintain social inequalities. Many sociologists focused on the role of elites in the reproduction and maintenance of social inequalities. American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956) argued that a "power elite" controls the economy, state, and military. Some scholars have described elites as a conscious, homogenous social class, which actively reproduces itself and guards the privileges it possesses. Perhaps the most productive line of inquiry has concentrated on the linkages between social origins and levels of attainment. Peter M. Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan (1967) famously analyzed the relationship between paternal occupation, education, and attained occupation. Debates about modeling techniques and historical and crossnational patterns of mobility and attainment

dominated analyses of stratification from the 1970s to the early 1990s. Some scholars took the study of reproduction, mobility, and attainment in new directions and emphasized the role of social ties and culture. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued that access to high culture and learned practices, which he referred to as *cultural capital*, enable the children of the privileged to get ahead and facilitate the reproduction of social inequalities. Bourdieu also offered the concept of *habitus* to account for the embodied disposition that dominant classes exercise instinctively to reproduce their higher status. The concept *social capital* emerged to refer to the resources that flow through social networks.

In recent years, with the rise of globalization and the expansion of neoliberalism across the globe, debates about the global stratification system gained a great deal of attention. World systems theorists, led by Immanuel Wallerstein, contend that industrial core countries have an exploitative relationship with the less-developed periphery. The perseverance of poverty in the Third World, the weakening position of traditional labor classes in industrialized countries, and rising income inequalities within nearly every country lead many to believe that we are now facing a global system benefiting a small minority while hurting the rest. While many note the massive levels of inequality between countries, there has been a lively debate about whether global inequality is increasing or decreasing. Glenn Firebaugh (2003), for example, claims that inequality between countries has decreased, while Branko Milanovic (2005) contends it has increased. Regardless, global inequality in income, health, and well-being remains enormous and in the future stratification scholars are likely to focus more on the plight of the dis-advantaged in less-developed countries, where the majority of the world's population resides.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blau, Peter M., and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. *The American Occupational Structure*. New York: Wiley.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean-Claude Passeron. [1970] 1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*. 2nd ed. Trans. Richard Nice. London: Sage.

Davis, Kingsley, and Wilbert E. Moore. 1945. "Some Principles of Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 10 (2):242–249.

Firebaugh, Glenn. 2003. *The New Geography of Global Income Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lenski, Gerhard E. [1966] 1984. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Milanovic, Branko. 2005. *Worlds Apart: Measuring International and Global Inequality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mills, C. Wright. [1956] 2000. *The Power Elite*. New York:Oxford University Press.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origin of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. Vol. 1 of *The Modern World-System*. New York: Academic Press.

Wright, Erik Olin. 1997. *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

By Yunus Kaya / David Brady

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)

"Stratification." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by William A. Darity, Jr., 2nd ed., vol. 8, Macmillan Reference USA, 2008, pp. 166-167. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*

SECTION TWO

SOURCE:
***International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.** Ed. William A. Darity, Jr.. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. p561-565.

Class

Much has been written on class in the years since Seymour Martin Lipset wrote his entry in the first edition of this encyclopedia, published in 1968. Lipset viewed the literature on class in terms of "social stratification," which he believed was divided into two approaches, the functionalist and the "social change" perspectives. Nevertheless, the bulk of his piece was centered not on contemporary studies, but on Karl Marx (1818–1883), Max Weber (1864–1920), and Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who, Lipset argued, continued to animate the central debates of his time. The classics are no less important today, but this essay will aim to balance them with the now canonical debates of the mid-twentieth century and the vast and multifaceted literature that has amassed since then.

MARX, WEBER, AND DURKHEIM

Any discussion of class must begin with Karl Marx. As Lipset once noted, while David Ricardo (1772–1823), Adam Smith (1723–1790), and others may have written about class before Marx, it was Marx who set the terms of debate for later sociological thinkers (Lipset 1968). For Marx, classes do not exist in societies where production for the group results in an equitable distribution of resources and requires that each member or unit contribute to the collective requirements of life. Classes emerge only when one subset of a community seizes private control of the means of production (e.g., land, factories) and coercively extracts *surplus labor* from another subset of the community, that is, labor that neither the first group needs nor the second group must give in order to survive.

Marx viewed the extraction of surplus labor as a fundamentally exploitative act, since the real exchange value of any given commodity is only ever equal to the labor time socially necessary to make it. This is called the *labor theory of value*. Any effort to squeeze out *surplus value* requires that human beings be forced to work for free beyond the labor time socially necessary both to

maintain their labor power (e.g., through food and raiment) and to produce its equivalent in commodities. Thus, one's class is determined by one's relationship to the means of production: those who own the means of production and therefore forcibly extract surplus value comprise one class, while those who do not own the means of production and are therefore coerced to generate surplus value form another class. Like master and bondsman under slavery and lord and serf under feudalism, capitalism is predicated on two classes: the factory owners or *bourgeoisie* and the factory workers or *proletariat*. All of these, however, only form "objective" classes, meaning that they are classes determined merely by their proprietary relationship to the means of production. The subjective form of class, by contrast, is a class that is conscious of itself as a collectivity of similarly positioned individuals and is therefore capable of class action. The distinction between objective and subjective forms of class is infamously that of the class-in-itself (*an sich*) and the class-for-itself (*für sich*).

According to some interpretations of Marx's work, particularly those of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), the transition from a merely existing working class to a conscious and therefore revolutionary working class is inevitable, as is the classless communist society that workers will eventually found. Because of its revolutionary and progressive potential in every epoch of production, class is said to be the very motor of history (Marx and Engels [1848] 1998; Marx [1852] 1996; Marx [1867] 1906). Hence, the oft-quoted claim,"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels [1848] 1998, p. 34).

Max Weber did not doubt the existence of exploitative class relations in modern society. Rather, he questioned Marx's definition of class, its centrality in modern life compared to other forms of domination, and the apparent inevitability of class action in Marx's work. In Weber's foundational piece on this subject,"Class, Status, Party" (1922), class is conceived of not as a group but as a sea of unconnected individuals who share the same "life chances," of which ownership of the means of production is just one example. Life chances comprise the bargaining power that one brings to the market for the purpose of maximizing income and includes professional authority, skills, and education. Just because one shares a similar set of life chances with others, however, does not mean that one will join with similarly positioned individuals in class action. Shared life chances are a necessary condition of class action, but they are by no means a guarantee, for there are other forms of domination apart from the economic that have the capacity to contravene class action. Societies that are organized according to "status" are less susceptible to class action, because they are stratified according to noneconomic concerns such as family, ethnic, or religious heritage. Partisan allegiances may also be an impediment to class solidarity (Weber 1946).

Émile Durkheim's foremost contribution to class analysis was to conceive of it in terms of occupational specialization in a modern and largely peaceful division of labor. Durkheim sought to explain the transition from the "mechanical solidarity" of primitive societies, whose coherence was based on the resemblance of actors and the dominance of a collective consciousness, to the "organic solidarity" characteristic of modern societies, whose coherence was based on the complementarity of highly specialized individuals. Organic solidarity breaks down only when individuals are coerced into tasks that they do not want to perform. Thus, the central challenge of

modern societies is to match individuals with tasks that suit their natural talents. This is why organic solidarity may be achieved by contracts or exchange, which bind individuals through a system of rights and duties, and in turn give rise to rules that guarantee regular cooperation between the divided functions (Durkheim [1893] 1960).

STRATIFICATION

Kingsley Davis (1908–1997) and Wilbert Moore's (1914–1987) now-foundational piece, "Some Principles of Stratification" (1945), marked the translation of Durkheimian sociology into contemporary debates on class. Davis and Moore took as their challenge the question of how modern societies so successfully channeled their members into an elaborate and specialized division of labor. Infusing Durkheim with Weber's emphasis on skills as life chances on the market, they reasoned that this monumental undertaking would require nothing less than a mechanism that could motivate the most qualified people to train for, seek, and perform the duties of the most important positions. Famously they hypothesized that an unequal system of occupational rewards was necessary to track the talented to their rightful place in the division of labor. Thus, professionals earn more than manual laborers, because the former positions must have greater builtin economic incentives to motivate the most highly talented to undertake the costly educational sacrifice necessary for those jobs. Social inequality, in other words, was not the result of the exploitation of one part of society by another and therefore a thing to be abhorred, but merely the system through which society unconsciously placed its most talented members into the most functionally important roles, without which society would be imperiled.

Among the more prominent early responses to Davis and Moore was that of Melvin Tumin (1919–1994), who argued that "functional importance" is an ideological construct. Power, he insisted, is a better measure of who gets ahead, such that the result of stratification, far from tracking the most talented people to the top, actually strangles talent at the bottom, making stratification deeply dysfunctional. Later Lipset and Reinhard Bendix (1916– 1991) showed conclusively that the belief in upward mobility far exceeded the actual rate in the United States, while Peter Blau (1918–2002) and Otis Duncan (1921– 2004) introduced path analysis to demonstrate the enduring effects of parental background and schooling on occupational attainment (Tumin 1953; Lipset and Bendix 1959; Blau and Duncan 1967).

But if Davis and Moore marked the introduction of Durkheim and Weber into the functionalist approach to class, then Ralf Dahrendorf (1957), the founder of modern conflict theory, did so for Marx and Weber. Dahrendorf sought to create an alternative to Talcott Parsons's (1902–1979) functionalist social system that could better account for internal conflict. A "Left Weberian" who saw class as fundamentally exploitative, Dahrendorf argued that Marx's focus on property as the ultimate marker of class was limited, especially in light of the control exercised by nonowner managers. Property and the coercive extraction of surplus value were for him subordinate forms of a more general social relation, authority, which served as the basis of binary "class conflict" in a variety of social settings including, but not limited to, industrial production. Dahrendorf, however,

was criticized for expanding the meaning of class so far beyond the economic realm as to make the term meaningless (see, for example, Coser 1960).

Responding to Nicos Poulantzas (1936–1979), whose *Political Power and Social Classes* (1973) identified a "new petty bourgeoisie," Erik Olin Wright (1978, 1997) argued that a new class of white-collar workers had emerged as a result of elaborate organizational hierarchies and the separation of ownership from directive control of large industrial corporations (Giddens and Held 1982). Workers and owners continued to occupy diametrically opposed class positions, but white-collar workers had come to occupy "contradictory class locations" in which the latter enjoyed some degree or combination of autonomy, skill, and authority on the job. Though critics have argued that Wright smuggled Weber into his Marxist framework by expanding the basis of class location beyond exploitation and production, Wright nevertheless found a dividing line between white-collar employees who identify more with labor and those who identify more with capital, thus articulating a bourgeois-proletarian divide for a new age.

TWO CHALLENGES

In the aftermath of the Soviets' repression of democratic movements in Hungary (1956–1957) and Czechoslovakia (1968–1969), class analysis and in particular Marxism were assailed on several fronts both for what was seen as the perversion of Marx's humanist vision by state-sponsored socialism and for the exclusion of non-class-based identities, inequalities, and movements from public discourse. With respect to the latter, Frank Parkin (1979), another Left Weberian like Dahrendorf, criticized structural Marxism's assumption of internally homogeneous classes, as well as its inability to account for the enforcement of social boundaries between elites and workers. As an alternative, Parkin advanced the concept of "social closure," the process by which social collectivities, whether by class, race, gender, or a combination of these, seek either to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities (in the case of elites) or to usurp rewards previously denied to them (in the case of nonelites).

Alberto Melucci (1980) likewise criticized the social-movement literature for emphasizing the political realm of movement activity while neglecting its nonpolitical or "social" dimensions. This, he noted, made sense in the study of working-class movements, which often have an institutionalized political arm, but did not square with women's movements, for instance, which, in addition to struggling for political rights, also seek to address social concerns of difference and recognition and do not vie for state power. More recently, Sonya Rose (1992) has argued that gender is not a secondary by-product of class relations as Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) and some Marxist feminists have suggested, but rather a central component thereof. Thus, in late nineteenth-century England, factory wages were adjusted by gender not only to the benefit of capital, but also to the benefit of men, as it reinforced a discourse of female respectability tied to the subordination of women in the household and society at large.

E. P. Thompson's (1924–1993) critique of structural Marxism in the *Making of the English Working Class* (1963) was a lightning rod for emerging controversies within Marxism itself. The main point of

this critique is that workers do not constitute a class because they share a similar structural position, but because they forge themselves into a class through their own language, culture, and struggle. The working class on this account is always already a conspirator in its own creation, thereby negating the analytical necessity for the in-itself/for-itself dichotomy. This challenge to the structural Marxism of Poulantzas, Perry Anderson (1980), and Louis Althusser (1971), among others, was led initially by the British cultural studies school of Thompson, Raymond Williams (1977), and sociologist Stuart Hall (1983).

Subsequent research, not all Marxist, has celebrated the agency of class actors, as in James Scott's account of subversive everyday behavior in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985); the indigenous culture of workers, such as Craig Calhoun's "reactionary revolutionaries"; and the proces-sual, as opposed to the positional, dimensions of class formation exemplified by Anthony Giddens's concept of "structuration" and Pierre Bourdieu's (1930–2002)"habitus" (Bourdieu 1977; Przeworski 1978; Sewell 1980; Calhoun 1983; Bourdieu 1984; Giddens 1984; Katznelson and Zolberg 1985; Fantasia 1988; Bourdieu 1990; Steinmetz 1992; Somers 1997).

For Bourdieu, as an example, class typically functions at the level of shared dispositions or *habitus* (e.g., tastes, bodily carriage, language), which, though stemming from certain shared material conditions, manifests itself more as a "feel for the game" than as a primarily economic relationship. One is, without the effort of reflection, a "virtuoso" in negotiating the social terrain of one's class, very much as a professional soccer player, to use Bourdieu's analogy, knows precisely when and with what force and curvature to kick the ball in a breakaway situation. These dispositions only emerge recognizably as "class" when crises drag the material and dispositional differences among groups from the field of the unspoken (referred to as *doxa*) to the field of public opinion. Habitus, it is important to note, is not a fixed set of dispositions, but rather given to improvisation and thus to transforming the terms of class belonging. The analytical result is that class, through habitus, is neither structure nor agency, but structuring or both simultaneously.

THE FUTURE

One possible implication of this constant reworking of class is that it is no longer a workable analytical concept. Paul Kingston's *The Classless Society* (2000) is among the latest in a long line of studies that question the predictive power of class in shaping mobility, culture, voting, and consciousness, among other outcomes. On the other hand, there is a movement afoot to rebuild class analysis. David Grusky and Jesper Sørensen (1998), for example, contend that class models can be made more plausible if analysts radically disaggregate occupational categories to the unit occupational level. Moreover, the eclipse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the attendant rise of neoliber-alism have put the question of class back on the table if there had ever been any doubt. Noting the deepening class polarization since the late 1970s, David Harvey (2006) has argued that neoliberalism is a failed utopian rhetoric masking a far more successful project to restore economic power to the ruling classes. Future lines of inquiry include new forms of international class formation, the evolving relationship of party to class as the institutionalized Left goes into

decline, and the disappearance of wage-based employment and thus of the very basis of social citizenship and welfare.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser, Louis. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left.

Anderson, Perry. 1980. *Arguments within English Marxism*. London: New Left.

Blau, Peter M., and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. *The American Occupational Structure*. New York: Wiley.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *Logic of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity.

Calhoun, Craig Jackson. 1983. The Radicalism of Tradition: Community Strength or Venerable Disguise and Borrowed Language? *American Journal of Sociology* 88: 886–914.

Coser, Lewis A. 1960. Review of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* by Ralf Dahrendorf. *American Journal of Sociology* 65: 520–521.

Dahrendorf, Ralf. [1957] 1959. *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Davis, Kingsley, and Wilbert E. Moore. 1945. Some Principles of Stratification. *American Sociological Review* 10: 242–249.

Durkheim, Émile. [1893] 1960. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Trans. George Simpson. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Engels, Friedrich. [1884] 1972. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*. New York: International Publishers.

Fantasia, Rick. 1988. *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giddens, Anthony, and David Held. 1982. *Classes, Power, and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Grusky, David B., and Jesper B. Sørensen. 1998. Can Class Analysis Be Salvaged? *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 1187–1234.

Hall, Stuart. 1983. The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees. In *Marx: A Hundred Years On*, ed. Betty Matthews, 56–85. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Harvey, David. 2006. *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*. London and New York: Verso.

Katznelson, Ira, and Aristide Zolberg. 1985. *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kingston, Paul W. 2000. *The Classless Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1968. Social Class. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, vol. 15, 296–316. New York: Macmillan.

Lipset, Seymour Martin, and Reinhard Bendix. 1959. *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Marx, Karl. [1852] 1996. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. In *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver, 31–127. Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Marx, Karl. [1867] 1906. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Modern Library.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. [1848] 1998. *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*. London and New York: Verso.

Melucci, Alberto. 1980. The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach. *Social Science Information* 19: 199–226.

Parkin, Frank. 1979. *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Poulantzas, Nicos. 1973. *Political Power and Social Classes*. Trans. Timothy O'Hagan. London: New Left.

Przeworski, Adam. 1978. Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Debates. *Politics and Society* 7: 343–401.

Rose, Sonya. 1992. *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sewell, William H., Jr. 1980. *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848*. Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Somers, Margaret. 1997. Deconstructing and Reconstructing Class Formation Theory: Narrativity, Relational Analysis, and Social Theory. In *Reworking Class,* ed. John R. Hall, 73–106. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Steinmetz, George. 1992. Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives in Working-Class Formation: Narrative Theory in the Social Sciences. *Social Science History* 16: 489–516.

Thompson, E. P. 1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Gollancz.

Tumin, Melvin M. 1953. Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis. *American Sociological Review* 18: 387–394.

Weber, Max. [1922] 1946. Class, Status, Party. In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 180–195. New York: Oxford University Press.

Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

Wright, Erik Olin. 1978. *Class, Crisis, and the State*. London: New Left.

Wright, Erik Olin. 1997. *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*. Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cedric de Leon

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
"Class." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by William A. Darity, Jr., 2nd ed., vol. 1, Macmillan Reference USA, 2008, pp. 561-565. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3045300351/GVRL?u=sunybuff_main&sid=GVRL&xid=7850b20d. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018.

SECTION THREE

SOURCE:
International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Ed. William A. Darity, Jr.. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. p568-571.

Class Conflict

Class conflicts are a crucial determinant of historical change, for "history … is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels [1848] 1998, p. 2); they are endemic because class interests are contradictory, and irresolvable as long as the mode of production remains unchanged. Class conflicts are inherent in the relationship between owners of means of production, who appropriate most of the surplus value created through production, and the direct producers whose share allows them, at best, only to reproduce themselves as workers. Non-Marxist theories of class, based on functionalist or Weberian perspectives, tend to underemphasize the collective dimension of class and its foundation in the objective relationship of people to the means of production. They define class, instead, as an attribute of individuals constructed on the basis of their education, occupation, income, ownership of resources, place in the occupational hierarchy,

and so on. Consequently, they conflate class with socioeconomic status, thus obscuring the qualitative differences between class structure and social stratification.

In precapitalist social formations, class struggles assumed different forms, depending on the level of development of the productive forces, and the forms of appropriation of the surplus. Land was the main means of production and complex patterns of land ownership were reflected in complex networks of class relations and struggles between masters and slaves, "patricians and plebeians, lords and serfs, guild-master and journeyman" (Marx and Engels [1848] 1998, p. 2), landowners and tenant farmers, and so forth. The Roman and Greek economies, for example, were"slave economies," despite the presence of free, independent peasants and small producers, because "the main way in which the dominant propertied classes of the ancient world derived their surplus … was due to unfree labor" (de Ste. Croix 1981, p. 52). And the process of "primitive accumulation" through which money and commodities became capital, and serfs, independent peasants, and small producers became wageworkers, entailed the expropriation of direct producers from the land through unrelenting class struggles; its history "is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (Marx [1867] 1967, pp. 713-716).

In capitalist social formations today, where labor is formally free, the struggle centers around wage levels and the length of the working day, for capitalists seek to keep wages low, working hours long, and profits high. In the market, where workers and capitalists meet as equal commodity owners, capitalists purchase the only commodity workers can sell: labor power. The use value of labor power is the production of value far greater than its own (i.e., the value of the wages capitalists pay); this value is embodied in the product. In the context of production, there is no equality: Capitalists control working conditions, the labor process, the length of the working day, and they own the product (Marx [1867] 1967, chs. VI and VII). Workers' demands for the eight-hour day led to violent class struggles in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Foner 1986). Conflicts about the length of the working day persist today; some employers impose overtime rather than hire more workers and low wages force many workers to hold more than one job or work more than eight hours a day.

The revolutionary worldwide confrontation between capital and labor predicted in the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels [1848] 1998) has yet to happen, however, and localized attempts in Eastern Europe, China, and Latin America have failed. Workers today do not have class consciousness in the classic sense; they do not share a sense of themselves as a class with common anticapitalist grievances and, consequently, they are not a "class for itself" united and with clarity of purpose (Marx [1846] 1947). They are only concerned with economic survival, not with the overthrow of capitalism: They are merely a "class in itself," objectively identifiable by social scientists, but lacking self-awareness. Workers' spontaneous consciousness is largely individualistic and "economistic," a phenomenon that Marxist theorists have addressed in different ways.

V. I. Lenin argued that "the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness" ([1902] 1967, p. 122), hence his support for the role of a "vanguard party"

and the bourgeois intelligentsia in politically educating the working class. Adhering to the principle of historical materialism, that social existence determines consciousness (Marx and Engels [1846] 1947, pp. 13-14), Georg Lukacs emphasized the role of *praxis* or human activity in the formation of class consciousness. It is through working-class praxis that society can become conscious of itself, for the proletariat is both the subject and object of history (Lukacs 1971, pp. 18-19). Only from the class standpoint of the proletariat is it possible to comprehend social reality as a totality, a crucial prerequisite to acting as a self-conscious class (p. 20). It is unclear, however, how this comprehension will emerge, because the forces of history unfold independently of individuals' intentions and consciousness. Consciousness, Lukacs states, is "*subjectively* justified" in its historical context, though it "*objectively* … appears as 'false consciousness' … [because] it by-passes the essence of the evolution of society … [and] fails to express it adequately" (pp. 47-50; italics in original). Whatever the intended motives and goals of this "false consciousness" may be, however, they further "the *objective* aims of society" (p. 50; italics in original).

Class consciousness, consequently, is something different from the ordinary thoughts individuals develop through praxis; it is neither "the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class" (p. 51). Rather, it is "the appropriate and rational reactions 'imputed' … to a particular typical position in the process of production" (p. 51). Using Weber's methodology (Kalberg 2005, pp. 14-22), Lukacs constructs an ideal type of class consciousness, by relating it to society as a whole and then inferring the thoughts and feelings that individuals in different class positions would have if they had access to knowledge of the totality (i.e., the mode of production) and of their place in it (p. 51). Impeding the development of "true" proletarian class consciousness are commodity fetishism and other reifications characteristic of capitalist culture. Lukacs's arguments imply, however, that as capitalism develops, workers will eventually discern their place and objectives in the totality and will therefore consciously further the "aims of history."

Whether social reality will eventually become "transparent" or ideology will always cloud class consciousness and, more generally, people's spontaneous understanding of their conditions of existence, remains an unresolved issue. Louis Althusser's view is that ideology as such, unlike specific ideologies, "has no history"; it is, like Freud's unconscious, omnipresent and eternal (Althusser 2001, p. 109). To say that ideology is eternal is to point out that individuals, spontaneously, cannot penetrate the logic of history and thus acquire knowledge of the unintended consequences of their actions. The opacity of social reality is a transhistorical aspect of the human condition, unlikely to change even after capitalism has been superseded by a society in which the direct producers are in control of the mode of production. And to say that ideology has no history is to recognize that all forms of consciousness and all systematic products of intellectual labor (morality, religion, philosophy, and politics) are the outcome of human material practices under historically specific conditions of existence (Marx and Engels [1846] 1947, pp 14-15).

The capitalist state rules through repressive (e.g., army, police, prisons) and ideological (e.g., family, schools, media, religion) state apparatuses. Through the latter, individuals are transformed into subjects, uncritically accepting their subjection to the Subject (i.e., God, Race, Nation, and Capital) whose power is exerted through the subjectification process. Ideologies have a material existence

in practices, rituals, and institutions; they interpellate individuals as particular subjects (e.g., male, female, black, white, worker, capitalist, criminal), eliciting immediate recognition because individuals, whose social existence is embedded in ideological and material practices and rituals, are "always-already subjects" (Althusser 2001, pp. 112-119). In a society in which class is part of the common sense understanding of the world and of political discourse, class would enter into the formation of subjectivities. In the United States, however, where people are "afflicted with a serious case of social amnesia" (Aronowitz 1992, p. 72), it is the interpellation of cultural identities that structures people's subjectivities. It is through identities, rather than class, that people understand their lives and this is why the power of ideology stems from "the degree to which, in Althusser's terms, it becomes … lived experience" (Aronowitz 1992, p. 36). Thus conceived, ideology precludes the spontaneous emergence of class consciousness, without the intervention of political parties and intellectuals bringing to the working classes an analysis of their lives that may tear away the ideological veils.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels confidently predicted that class conflicts would eventually result in the overthrow of capitalism. Their argument rests upon the notion of a dialectical relationship between the active and the reserve armies of labor, which assumed that the same workers would, because of the ebbs and flows of capital accumulation, experience both periods of poverty and unemployment and of economic well being. These experiences would, presumably, be the material condition for the rise of a class-conscious working class, the "grave diggers" of the bourgeoisie, self-consciously engaging in anticapitalist class struggles (Marx and Engels [1848] 1998, pp. 23-24; Arrighi 1990, pp. 29-30). But while that was the case in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as capitalism spread throughout the world it divided the global working classes, with most of the active armies located in the advanced capitalist countries and most of the reserve armies located in the poorer countries. Within countries, the gap between the active and the reserve armies grew large, and the ideological effects that emerged from workers' sharing common conditions of existence largely disappeared after World War II. Today, globalization has produced a "reshuffling" of the global working classes; most of the active army is now in the poorer countries, whereas workers in the wealthy countries face declining wages and competition from immigrant labor willing to work for less (Arrighi 1990, p. 53).

As these changes accelerate, class conflicts might become more widespread, but this does not necessarily mean that class consciousness will eventually replace other forms of workers' consciousness, such as, for example, identity politics, racism, or xenophobia. In any case, class conflicts will continue for as long as capitalism remains the dominant mode of production. Such conflicts have been and will continue to be fought under a variety of ideological banners because people, as "ensembles of social relations" (Marx 1947, p. 198), live their lives at the crossroads of multiple experiences. Marx pointed the way toward an understanding of the relationship between social change, conflicts, and consciousness. In the process of studying change, "it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out" ([1859] 1970, p. 21). From Marx's standpoint, class consciousness should not

be understood in purely economic terms, but in all its complexity. It emerges from changes in people's experiences and participation in class conflicts, which together pose challenges to the ideologies that have shaped their representations of those conflicts and experiences. Common experiences, the basis for the emergence of class consciousness, are "determined" by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms (Thompson 1966, pp. 9-10). These insights from Marx and E. P. Thompson indicate that it is necessary to examine the underlying class basis of contemporary processes of political mobilization and of struggles such as those happening in Bolivia, Mexico, and Venezuela. Underlying populist and indigenous movements for social justice and national independence from imperialist and corporate domination are material class interests, which fuel the rise of political leaders like Evo Morales (Bolivia), Lopez Obrador (Mexico), and Hugo Chavez (Venezuela), as well as the national and transnational opposition to them.

While class conflicts are inherent in class societies, this does not mean that if classless societies become possible in the future, conflicts will end. Class conflicts are grounded in struggles around the production and appropriation of the surplus. Under capitalism, they presuppose the existence of the capitalist and working classes. Were these classes to be abolished and some form of collective ownership of the means of production to replace capitalism, social conflicts would not end, however; the division of labor would continue to divide the population according to occupation, skills, and economic rewards. Struggles over redistribution of income would replace class conflicts focused on the abolition of the mode of production. And because racial, ethnic, gender, and other differences irreducible to class would continue to exist, struggles about recognition (Fraser 1995) would continue as well. Conflicts based on social stratification would continue for as long as the subjective and material conditions inherited from capitalism persisted and competed with new forms of consciousness, practices, institutions, and so forth. The interconnections between experience and consciousness suggests, however, that as class conflict disappeared, the material conditions for social antagonisms at the level of social stratification would likely be eroded as well. In any case, as long as capitalism is the dominant mode of production, class conflict will continue to shape national and transnational political struggles.

SEE ALSO *Class ; Marx, Karl ; Middle Class ; Surplus Value*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser, Louis. [1971] 2001. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Aronowitz, Stanley. 1992. *The Politics of Identity: Class, Culture, Social Movements*. New York: Routledge.

Arrighi, Giovanni. 1990. Marxist Century, American Century: The Making and Remaking of the World Labour Movement. *New Left Review* 179 (January–February): 29-63.

de Ste. Croix, G. E. M. 1981. *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Foner, Philip S. 1986. *May Day: A Short History of the International Worker's Holiday, 1886-1986*. New York: International Publishers.

Kalberg, Stephen, ed. 2005. *Max Weber: Readings and Commentary on Modernity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Lenin, V. I. [1902] 1967. What Is To Be Done? In *Lenin: 1897 to January 1917*, 97-248. Vol. 1 of *Selected Works in Three Volumes*. New York: International Publishers.

Lukacs, Georg. 1971. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. [1846] 1947. *The German Ideology*. Ed. R. Pascal; trans. W. Lough and C. P. Magill. New York: International Publishers.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. [1848] 1998. *The Communist Manifesto*. Ed. Christopher Phelps. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Marx, Karl. [1859] 1970. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Ed. Maurice Dobb; trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya. New York: International Publishers.

Marx, Karl. [1867] 1967. *The Process of Capitalist Production*. Vol. 1 of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Ed. Frederick Engels; trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling. New York: International Publishers.

Thompson, E. P. 1966. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books.

Martha E. Gimenez

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
"Class Conflict." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by William A. Darity, Jr., 2nd ed., vol. 1, Macmillan Reference USA, 2008, pp. 568-571. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3045300354/GVRL?u=sunybuff_main&sid=GVRL&xid=10796c7b. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018.

SECTION FOUR

SOURCE:
Elizabeth Borland
Encyclopedia of Social Problems. Ed. Vincent N. Parrillo. Vol. 1. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008. p134-135.

Class Consciousness

Class consciousness is an awareness of one's position in the class structure that can be shared by members of the same class. It enables individuals to come together in opposition to the interests of other classes and, therefore, can be important for people challenging inequality and exploitation. Although members of any class can have class consciousness, it is particularly important for those in the working class because they are at the bottom of the class hierarchy and have the most to gain from being unified.

The concept of class consciousness originates in the work of Karl Marx, who emphasized that it is important for the working class (proletariat) to see itself as a group with shared interests in order for workers to come together and overthrow the dominant capitalist class (bourgeoisie) and to take control of the means of production in a revolution. Although Marx never actually used the term *class consciousness,* he distinguished between "class in itself," where workers merely have a common relation to the means of production, and "class for itself," where they organize to pursue common class interests.

In *The Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Friedrich Engels encouraged workers to unite by informing them of their exploitation by 19th-century capitalists who forced them to endure bad working conditions, long working hours, and wages so low that many families had to send their children to work to supplement the family income. Marx and Engels wrote that proletarians faced alienation—estrangement from both their work and the world in general. *The Communist Manifesto* states that because the dominant classes control major social institutions like education and religion, they can shape cultural norms and values so that members of the proletariat will blame themselves for their misfortunes. An individual who blames him-or herself will fail to recognize that others have the same problems and will fail to see a collective solution for them. Thus, Marx and Engels thought that an awareness of the increasingly exploitative nature of capitalism would make class consciousness inevitable and that it would help workers around the world to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

Marxists express concern about the lack of class consciousness among workers, particularly in the most developed nations, where Marx predicted that communist revolution would occur first. Engels introduced the concept of false consciousness to explain how workers can develop a mistaken or distorted sense of identity and their place in the social hierarchy. Because people with false consciousness identify with the bourgeoisie rather than with other workers in the same class, they do not develop a true class consciousness that would disrupt the social order. For example, waiters employed in a five-star hotel may associate and identify with their wealthy customers and fail to recognize that their interests are more aligned with the interests of the hotel's kitchen workers, security and maintenance staff, housekeepers, or other people who make a similarly low wage. This would make waiters less likely to see themselves as working class, to recognize that their wealthy customers and the owners of the hotel mistreat them, to participate in efforts to organize for better pay or working conditions in the hotel, and to support social policies that challenge inequality in society. In contrast, waiters with a class consciousness, who recognize other hotel workers as fellow members of the working class and have interests opposed to those of wealthy customers and owners, would be more likely to work together to demand change.

Michael Mann's work further developed the idea of working-class consciousness by specifying varying levels of class consciousness. He identified four different elements of working-class consciousness: *class identity,* one's self-definition as part of a working class; *class opposition,* the perception that the capitalist class is an enemy; *class totality,* the acceptance of identity and opposition as the defining characteristics of one's social world; and *having a vision of an alternative society without class.* These elements help us to contrast class consciousness in different settings. For instance, Mann compared the working class in Western economies and said that workers in Britain were likely to see themselves as members of the working class, but they were not likely to envision a classless society or work toward worker revolution. In contrast, Italian and French workers were more likely to participate in unions that directly oppose capitalism in favor of socialist or communist platforms. Mann's arguments can help explain why class organizing has been more prominent in some countries than in others, and why socialist or communist parties have been supported only in some societies.

Despite these conceptual advances, class consciousness is considered difficult to study: It is hard to measure using common survey methods, and it is always changing because classes themselves are always in flux as people interact with one another. Class consciousness may change as people learn about their positions in society, about the status of others, and about social stratification in general. What it means to be working class can vary across time and space, making it hard for workers to have a common awareness of class. Recently, some sociologists argued that class consciousness is an overly rigid concept. Instead, they proposed class formation; that is, the dynamic process of interclass relations and how class is practiced, represented, and constructed in daily life. To study class formation, scholars might examine how class is part of the organization of workplaces, family traditions, and neighborhoods, paying attention to how class images and identities affect other perceptions of society and how evolving class formation can increase or decrease the potential for resistance and social change.

Elizabeth Borland

See also Alienation ; Class ; Countermovements ; False Consciousness ; Identity Politics ; Inequality ; Oligopoly ; Social Change ; Social Conflict ; Socialism ; Social Movements ; Social Revolutions ; Stratification, Social

Further Readings

Fantasia, Rick. 1995. "From Class Consciousness to Culture, Action, and Social Organization." *Annual Review of Sociology* 21:269–87.

Mann, Michael. 1973. *Consciousness and Action among the Western Working Class.* London: Macmillan.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. [1848] 1998. *The Communist Manifesto.* New York: Signet Classic.

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
Borland, Elizabeth. "Class Consciousness." *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*, edited by Vincent N. Parrillo, vol. 1, SAGE Publications, 2008, pp. 134-135. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3074000092/GVRL?u=sunybuff_main&sid=GVRL&xid=e6ebc5d7. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018.

SECTION FIVE

SOURCE:
***Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*.** Ed. Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2007. p545-547.

False Consciousness (I)

The term *false consciousness* generally refers to the claim or hypothesis that the proletariat (and perhaps other classes or social groups as well) unwittingly misperceive their real position in society and systematically misunderstand their genuine interests within the capitalist social relations of production. False consciousness denotes people's inability to recognize inequality, oppression, and exploitation in a capitalist society due to its adoption of the views that naturalize and legitimize the existence of social classes in capitalism.

Historically, the phrase *false consciousness* was first and only once used by Friedrich Engels in his private letter to Franz Mehring written in 1893. In this letter, the phrase seems to be employed to underline the point that detachment of thinking process from historical, social conditions by assuming an independent realm for the world of thought is a mistake. It should be noted that the phrase seems to have no categorical meaning in the context of the letter. Likewise, Karl Marx had never used *false consciousness* as a category, or even used the term at all. However, since the publication of Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* in 1920, the notion of false consciousness gained popularity among Marxist scholars. This term was further developed later and became a subject of long-lasting dispute. Especially among socialist activists and scholars, it has been argued that Marx's implicit conception of ideology as false consciousness can be inferred from his later works, especially from his theory of commodity fetishism.

In Lukács's work, *commodity fetishism*, which basically refers to social relations between people as relations between things, has been generally treated as the main mechanism that identifies capitalism. In capitalism, commodity—the product of human creative labor manifested as goods—becomes the source of value by the concealment of its real origin, which is labor. This is also the process of commoditization of labor in which value is detached from human activity and attributed to money. This means that commodity fetishism is at work in a capitalist marketplace through the mystification of commodity as a sacred object and making money the real criterion of value. In other words, commodity is in essence a product of labor that creates value to be determined by socially necessary labor time required for the production of commodities.

However, the market mechanism in capitalism operates in such a way that labor is perceived and therefore exchanged as if it was just an ordinary commodity among other commodities. For Marx,

this is a rejection of seeing labor as the genuine origin of value and reducing its status to a mere commodity that can be simply exchanged for money. Thus, commodity fetishism turns reality upside down, inverts the real order of causes, and conceals the essential mechanism of capitalism. For instance, workers perceive themselves as free individuals who are capable of forming their own judgment to hire their labor power on payment in the labor market. What they earn simply seems to be what they receive in exchange for their labor time expended in a workplace. Within capitalism, this exchange relation between labor power hired as a commodity in the labor market and money given by the entrepreneur in return seems to be an equal and a natural relation.

At first glance, there seems to be no injustice in this relation: One individual hires the labor power, and another receives it by paying its proper value within a predefined market mechanism, which operates not by enforcement but by mutual agreements. In fact, this is how it is generally perceived by the oppressed, subordinated, and exploited people within the capitalist social production relations.

But this appearance hides the real mechanism operating in capitalism: exploitation. For, in the exchange relation between capital and labor, there are no independent individuals; mutual dependency is rather the main characteristic of this relation. A worker has to work, and an entrepreneur has to hire labor power. Apparent freedom in the exchange relation conceals this mutual dependency. On the other hand, it is impossible to know whether one gains the real value of one's labor, simply because the so-called proper value of a certain work is determined by market mechanism. Nevertheless, how the market operates, how it measures and decides this "proper value" remains mysterious.

Further, in precapitalist societies, exploitation was direct and transparent. It could be empirically observed and measured. However, because the process of surplus value extraction does not occur at a specific moment and become inherent in every second of the employment period, it is impossible to see and measure the amount of surplus value and process of its extraction within capitalism. In other words, it is impossible for a worker to realize and measure how many hours in a day that worker works for himself or herself in return for his or her service and how many hours for the accumulation of surplus value. Therefore, in a capitalist system, the real value of labor cannot be calculated. Instead, just an arbitrary amount of money determined by the market mechanism is paid in service of labor and this conceals the process of surplus value extraction, which is exploitation.

That is why the concept of false consciousness does not simply refer to psychological state or an accidental situation. False consciousness, as an inevitable consequence of commodity fetishism and reification, is a phenomenon in which people living in a capitalist society necessarily construct reality in an illusionary and misleading fashion and thus have a natural tendency to misperceive how capitalism works.

The notion of false consciousness has been also evaluated as a concept that is closely related with the theory of ideology. In its history, ideology was first associated with negative meanings and

generally understood as false representation and distortion of the social reality or legitimating power relations. Nevertheless, especially after V. I. Lenin and Antonio Gramsci, the concept of ideology has become a positive concept that implies an action-oriented set of beliefs, a collective system of meanings and representations peculiar to class relations, or more properly a totality of forms of social consciousness. In this respect, whether ideology can simply be grasped as false consciousness or not has become a highly problematic and controversial issue in the theory of ideology. Even though the term *false consciousness* was considered important, and therefore was defended and revised by socialist activists and scholars like Henry Lefebvre and Herbert Marcuse, it has been also claimed that this notion brings about certain epistemological problems.

The main epistemological problem regarding the theory of ideology is that the notion of false consciousness implies the existence of nonideological, objective, scientific knowledge with regard to the subject. Hence the following questions arise: How can the privileged subject's position of being rescued from false consciousness be justified? How could a social theory that describes false consciousness be seen as scientific and others as ideological? Can a theory objectively determine the genuine interest of a certain social group? In this sense, it seems that these epistemological questions concerning the conception of false consciousness are focused on the controversial relationship between science and ideology.

Further, this term has also been criticized politically, for it seems to be a rationalization of Marx's failure to predict the expected revolution. From this perspective, this term seems to be a core concept of a political conspiracy theory that cannot be logically falsified. This term is just an expression of an attempt to justify why people do not believe in Marxism and prefer to live in a capitalist society rather than a socialist or communist one.

On the other hand, recent philosophical studies regarding this term have defended the legitimacy and even inevitability of its usage in giving an account for why workers do not spontaneously realize the fact that they are exploited and why they do not, by that very fact, act against capitalism. Further, some feminist scholars have recently paid special attention to this term in order to explain why women accept and justify male domination. Similarly, it has also been argued that false consciousness is also at work in people's misrecognition of other forms of oppression experienced in everyday life, such as racism, heterosexism, and colonialism.

—*Sinan Kadir Çelik*

Further Readings

Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso.

Eyerman, R. (1981). *False consciousness and ideology in Marxist theory*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

Gabel, J. (1975). *False consciousness: An essay on reification*. New York: Harper Torchbook.

Larrain, J. (1983). *Marxism and ideology*. London: Macmillan.

Lewy, G. (1982). *False consciousness: An essay on mystification*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Lukács, G. (1972). *History and class consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Meyerson, D. (1991). *False consciousness*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

Pines, C. L. (1993). *Ideology and false consciousness: Marx and his historical progenitors*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Rosen, M. (1996). *On voluntary servitude: False consciousness and the theory of ideology*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
"False Consciousness." *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, edited by Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr, vol. 2, SAGE Reference, 2007, pp. 545-547. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2660300295/GVRL?u=sunybuff_main&sid=GVRL&xid=6e942a76. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018.

SECTION SIX

SOURCE:
Encyclopedia of Power. Ed. Keith Dowding. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2011. p240-242.

False Consciousness (II)

At its simplest, the concept of *false consciousness* denotes a misperception of reality, particularly a cognitive inability to comprehend accurately those social relations that are exploitative. It is commonly associated with the work of Karl Marx (1818–1883), where it forms part of an analysis of the conflict between social classes. In Marxist theory, *false consciousness* refers to a failure of the members of the subordinate classes, the non-owners of the means of production, to comprehend the true nature of their oppression. It explains how they are duped and inadvertently come to accept and support the interests of the class that owns productive resources, which in Marxian terms necessarily constitutes the ruling class. This is sustained through a methodical misrepresentation of material and productive social relations in the consciousness of wage-laborers, which for Marx betrays the real relations between classes. Such a deception, he held, perpetuates the power of the capitalist class. Marx distinguished between a *class-in-itself*—a shared objective position in productive relations, and a *class-for-itself*—a subjective knowledge of this position. He realized that during the period in which he lived the proletariat lacked the latter, a unified class consciousness—hence, the familiar term "false class consciousness"; a collective realization is a prerequisite for working-class empowerment, so the workers would, he hoped, in due course develop a true consciousness.

Although Marx himself did not use the actual words *false* and *consciousness* together (his coauthor and collaborator Fredrick Engels coined the phrase), the concept is nevertheless

developed in his writings, and he frequently critiqued the related concept of *ideology*. Ideological distortion upholds the privileged position of the dominant class. In *The German Ideology* (1845), Marx and Engels claim that ideology and consciousness have a material premise. It is, as *The 1859 Preface* famously states, social being that determines consciousness, and not, as had previously been held, the other way round. It follows that if consciousness is mediated via the existing mode of production, it can be transcended only through a radical transformation of its economic premise.

Despite its theoretical subtlety, the concept has a number of immediate problems. It is a difficult concept to investigate empirically. Can one really obtain true knowledge of a collective consciousness that is said to be false? And if so, is it then legitimate to enforce, perhaps involuntary, the supposedly accurate understanding onto the falsely conscious? Further, with their dislike of metanarratives, postmodernists have typically objected to universal categories of "the truth" that include claims to a correct and authentic consciousness. On a practical level, differences in the status and earning potential of nonskilled, semiskilled, and skilled labor, and competition for consumer items has created the kind of internal divisions within the working class that tend to frustrate the possibility of generating a shared consciousness.

Despite these difficulties, the concept has influenced the thinking of Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser, who have, in their own ways, developed Marx's ideas of consciousness and ideology. In a contemporary setting, these ideas have also received critical interest from a feminist perspective. The manipulated self-perception in which social contradictions are concealed is now said to obscure the realities of gender domination and serve the interests of patriarchy. On the premise that illusionary thinking propagates servitude, and given that both Marxists and feminists point to the social mechanisms that deliberately frustrate consciousness-raising (to generate subjective awareness in subservient classes of their oppressive conditions), the move from class to gender is analytically consistent. In sum, it seems likely that as long as societies are divided distinctively by large class and gender inequalities, and as long as subject classes remain passive, the concept of *false consciousness* will continue to attract interest.

Chris Wyatt

See also Domination ; Exploitation ; Feminist Theories of Power ; Hegemony ; Ideology ; Marx, Karl ; Subordination

Further Readings

Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy*. London: Monthly Review Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. (Original work published 1929–1935)

Lukács, G. (1971). *History and class consciousness*. London: Merlin Press. (Original work published 1923)

Marx, K. (1977). The German ideology, The poverty of philosophy, The eighteenth brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, and Preface to a contribution to the critique of political economy. In D. McLellan (Ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected writings*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
Wyatt, Chris. "False Consciousness." *Encyclopedia of Power*, edited by Keith Dowding, SAGE Reference, 2011, pp. 240-242. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX1959300138/GVRL?u=sunybuff_main&sid=GVRL&xid=b1e3d1c6. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018.

SECTION SEVEN

SOURCE:
***Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*.** Ed. Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2007. p729-732.

Ideology

It is generally granted that the term *ideology* was first coined by French philosopher Compte Antoine Destutt de Tracy in the early years of the first republic. Destutt de Tracy's support for institutional reform, particularly of the French educational system, led him to side with the revolutionaries in 1789. He quickly decided that their program was too radical and extremist for his taste. As a result, he abandoned active political engagement, severed ties with the National Assembly, and subsequently found himself imprisoned in the Bastille for a year at the height of the crisis that ultimately led to the Reign of Terror of 1793–1794. It is believed that during his time in the Bastille, and under the influence of his readings of Condillac and especially Locke, he first formulated the notion of ideology.

For Destutt de Tracy, ideology was to be a critical epistemological program, a science of ideas, with practical political import. Consistent with the Anglo empiricists, Destutt de Tracy located the source of ideas in "feelings"—external and internal sense perceptions. If, on analysis, an empirical source could not be located for a particular idea, that idea was deemed vacuous and to be jettisoned. Ideology would thus provide an analytic tool by means of which individuals, free from external direction, could verify the correctness of their ideas and discard those which had no basis in empirical reality. It was Destutt de Tracy's expectation that the influence of religious indoctrination during children's education would be the main butt of this "scientific" analysis of ideas.

Upon his release, Destutt de Tracy began to attract a group of likeminded *idéologistes*, spawning a movement that ultimately came to significantly influence the Second Class of the National Institute, which was responsible for political and moral science and education. While the *idéologistes* had supported Napoleon's 1799 coup, the critical program of ideology soon came

into conflict with Napoleon's designs, in particular his reestablishment of state religion. As a result, the *idéologistes* came under greater and greater suppression, with Napoleon himself ultimately dismissing them as dreamers and windbags—*idéologues*. And so, while Destutt de Tracy had clearly intended his science of ideology to be a tool to demystify something like a false consciousness he saw as imputed by religious indoctrination, by the time Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels take up the notion of ideology in the 1840s, the term, following Napoleon's contemptuous dismissal of those he viewed as obstacles to his political program, had ironically taken on the derogatory connotation of an abstract idealism expressing some kind false or distorted consciousness. Subsequent to Marx and Engels, the notion of ideology has been developed primarily within the broad Marxist theoretical tradition. As a result of the work of Louis Althusser in particular, a significant psychoanalytic dimension has also been brought into the analysis of ideology over the past several decades, particularly through figures associated with the development of postmodern and post-Marxist theory. While the term has taken on many different meanings—Terry Eagleton identifying sixteen, for example—in various areas of theory over time, the focus here is on identifying some of the main contours of the development of the notion within Marxist theory, through to contemporary post-Marxism.

Marx and Engels take up the notion of ideology during the process of settling accounts with their erstwhile philosophical consciences, as Marx described his and Engels' earlier work in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* from 1859. The "ideology" they analyzed in *The German Ideology*, written in 1845 and 1846, is associated with a kind of mystification that they attribute equally to the Old and Young Hegelians within the developing tradition of German Idealism. What is common to both is the notion that products of consciousness exist independently of living human beings, and determine the material conditions and concrete relationships that constitute social life. Such products of consciousness may be juridical, spiritual, political, philosophical, moral; together they form the culture and conventions that constitute the superstructure of any particular society.

For Marx and Engels, the view characteristic of German ideology inverts the actual relationship between social life and the products of consciousness. German ideology functions on the assumption that consciousness produces life, whereas in fact life produces consciousness. The ideals expressed in political, philosophical, juridical, etc., realms do not determine the material conditions and social relationships characteristic of a particular society; rather, it is the material conditions of social life that determine cultural or superstructural ideas and ideals—the general conceptual apparatuses through which any society understands itself, as something like its worldview. As such, the relationships of power, domination, and oppression that characterize the material conditions of social life become reflected in the cultural superstructure. In Marx and Engels's view, the actual nature of this reflection of relationships of power within ideology is, famously, not innocent, even if unintended. The cultural world view developed on any particular material base is characterized by the ideals of dominant groups, and tends, not surprisingly, to legitimize existing relationships of power, and thus to obscure and mystify the real antagonisms and oppression characteristic of concrete social life.

It is this latter notion that is most closely associated with Marx and Engels's analysis of ideology; that is, the notion that ideology is a kind "false consciousness" that distorts the actual material conditions of social life and legitimizes and reinforces the hegemony of dominant groups. More generally though, it is the notion that ideology constitutes a kind of mystification, wherein the actual relationships and material conditions that constitute social life are mistaken as relationships between abstract ideas that forms the core of Marx and Engels's analysis of ideology. This core is reflected, for example, in their analysis of commodity fetishism from volume one of *Capital*, where Marx and Engels argue that within the realm of commodity exchange, concrete social relationships between human beings are mistakenly understood to be nothing other than relationships between things—between fully abstract "commodities"—thus obscuring the actual nature of the concrete social relationships that constitute the realm of commodity exchange.

By the time that Antonio Gramsci takes up the notion of ideology in the early 20th century, official Marxist theory had been tending in the direction of a vulgar materialist position, rooted in strict, economic determinism, for quite some time. Such a position, of course, leaves little room for progressive political or philosophical theory, because both philosophy and politics are embedded in a superstructure fully determined by the economic base, and hence are fully ideological in the negative sense of being characterized by the conceptual world view of those occupying dominant positions vis-à-vis economic production. Only the inevitable revolutionary activity spurred by the concrete contradictions and antagonisms within the economic base can ultimately transform the bourgeois ideology characteristic of the cultural superstructure.

In opposition to this tendency toward economic determinism within contemporary Marxist thought, Gramsci offered a more dialectical analysis of the relationship between the material conditions of production and the cultural, ideological superstructure. On such a view, the material conditions of economic production and the cultural sphere each inform and alter the other. As such, Gramsci sought to reestablish the relative autonomy of philosophical and political theory, and hence their relevance to progressive struggle. On his view, ideology was not synonymous with the dominant ideology through which groups that had attained hegemony within the economic sphere legitimized the power relations that characterized the material conditions of society. Progressive theory could produce progressive ideology that functioned to undermine such hegemony. In this way, Gramsci's work paralleled the work of Lenin, who also saw ideology as an effective tool to facilitate class struggle and revolution. Indeed, Gramsci endorsed Lenin's emphasis on political organization and the significance of ideology for the project of revolutionary struggle.

Gramsci's significance to the development of the notion of ideology within Marxist thought was made even greater as a result of his influence on the subsequent development of Western Marxism, particularly on the critical of the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School theorists sought to develop a critical theory of society as a whole that integrated analyses of economic, political, psychological, and cultural structures which function together to perpetuate the domination and oppression characteristic of advanced industrial societies, and to suppress the emancipatory potentials that remained latent within modern society. In the view of the first generation of

Frankfurt School theorists, modern society as a whole is dominated by a positivistic and instrumental rationality that permeates all cultural and economic realms of social life. Such rationality aims at the domination of external and internal nature, and thus ultimately expresses itself in irrational forms and structures of social and individual oppression.

The integrated approach of the Frankfurt School precluded any simple distinctions between economic base, and cultural, ideological superstructure, and thus any notion that ideological structures could be interpreted simply as some kind of distorted reflection of the material conditions of social life, and that a transformation of material conditions of production was all that was necessary in order to develop an undistorted, *true* conception of the actual nature of social life. For the Frankfurt School theorists, the ideologies that permeated all facets of social life were themselves expressions of the same instrumental, positivistic rationality that also found expression in the material conditions of production characteristic of advanced, capitalist societies. As such, and following Gramsci's lead, ideology critique became a central aspect of any progressive or revolutionary activity aimed at emancipating individuals from various forms of oppression. Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Frankfurt School to the tradition of Western Marxism was their introduction of Freudian and Nietzschean elements to the Marxist, materialist critiques of mass culture and the "culture industry," enlightenment ideology in all its aspects, positivism, and so on, in which they engaged.

The latest phase in the development of the notion of ideology within the Western Marxist tradition was inaugurated by the work of Louis Althusser. Althusser's conception of ideology and its function was profoundly influenced by psychoanalytic theory, particularly that of Jacques Lacan. While Freud had been a significant influence on the Frankfurt School, and on Sarah Kofman's analysis of ideology in relation to the metaphor of the camera obscura, it has been Althusser's appropriation of Lacan that has most influenced the development of the notion of ideology in contemporary Marxism and post-Marxism. In opposition to the old Marxist model, already deeply problematized by Gramsci and the Frankfurt School, of an ideological superstructure that distorts the real material conditions of society, Althusser, following Lacan, argues that the "reality" that ideology purportedly distorts is inaccessible, because it is always linguistically and symbolically constructed, hence mediated by our relationship to the symbolic order. On this view, ideology is not a simple distortion of the real material conditions of society, rather, it is that which constructs our imaginary relationship to reality.

Building on this Lacanian basis, Althusser argues that ideology has a concrete, material existence in the apparatuses and practices associated with our everyday life and our interactions with other human beings and with social institutions. As such, ideology functions to construct both individuals as subjects as well as all intersubjective relationships, thus forming our very conception of ourselves and the world within which we live, a construction that we take to be obvious and natural. It is the obviousness of this ideological second nature that Althusser identifies as a distortion— ideology distorts insofar as it does not present itself as a representation of reality, but rather as the real itself. Although reality is already ideological on Althusser's view, it is certainly the case that different ideologies represent to us different constructions of our social and imaginary

reality, which can be either progressive or reactionary. Althusser saw it as the task of his materialist philosophy to engage in a rigorous, "scientific" analysis of society, not in order to uncover the real, material conditions of social life, but rather to discern the ways in which individuals are always already inscribed within ideology.

Althusser's conception of ideology has had an enormous influence on the subsequent development of this notion within Marxist, post-Marxist, and poststructuralist theory, an influence clearly seen in theorists as disparate as Foucault, Jameson, Eagleton, Laclau and Mouffe, Butler, Derrida, and Zizek. The latter develops the Lacanian dimensions of the notion of ideology even further than had Althusser. For Zizek, ideology not only functions to construct reality for us, but, crucially, to set limits on what is actually possible within social life, in order to either assign blame for impossibility to an Other—the Jews within Nazi ideology, "Islamofascism" within post-9/11 ideology—or to postpone or avoid an actual encounter with the impossible, and hence with the inevitable pain and trauma such an encounter would bring with it. Thus, while the invasion and occupation of Iraq was done in the name of the "freedom" and "security" of all nations, including the Iraqi people themselves, the implicit notion within its ideological justification is that freedom and security are, in fact, impossible, a notion that justifies both toleration of oppression in all of its forms all over the world, allowing us to avoid the trauma of actually confronting such oppression, and an endless "war on terror" that can function to maintain the status quo of global power relations.

Recently, the pessimism often associated with the kind of ideology critique engaged in by the Frankfurt School, and the inescapability of the ideological construction of subjectivity and reality associated with postmodern and post-Marxist theory, has been the source of frustration and incredulity on the part of progressive activists, many of whom have tended to dismiss ideology critique as the domain of pure theory, and not particularly germane to activism itself. Indeed, the precise relevance of these categories to the project of progressive activism remains an open question.

—*Pierre Lamarche*

See also *Adbusters* ; Engels, Friedrich ; False Consciousness ; Frankfurt School of Critical Theory ; Gramsci, Antonio ; Lenin, V. I. ; Marx, Karl ; Marxist Theory ; Semiotic Warfare , Think Tanks

Further Readings

Althusser, L. (1984). *Essays on ideology*. London: Verso.

Althusser, L. (2001). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production*. New York: Columbia.

Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.

Jameson, F. (1988). *The ideologies of theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kofman, S. (1998). *Camera obscura: Of ideology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Laclau, E. (1977). *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory: Capitalism, fascism, populism*. London: New Left Books.

Larrain, J. (1979). *The concept of ideology*. London: Hutchinson.

Marx, K. (1967). *Capital, V. I*. New York: International Publishers.

Marx, K., & Engels F. (1974). *The German ideology*. New York: International Publishers.

Zizek, S. (Ed.). (1994). *Mapping ideology*. London: Verso.

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
"Ideology." *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, edited by Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr, vol. 2, SAGE Reference, 2007, pp. 729-732. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2660300399/GVRL?u=sunybuff_main&sid=GVRL&xid=805685c3. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018.

SECTION EIGHT

SOURCE:
***Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*.** Ed. Richard T. Schaefer. Vol. 3. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008. p1253-1256.

Social Mobility

Social mobility refers to a person's or group's ability to transition markers of social status in a society. In the United States, one way that social status is determined is by economic class. Class positions are largely based on occupation, education, income, and wealth, although prestige other than that attached to those categories is also a major factor in some cases. There is also a tendency for some groups to be associated with lower educational achievements, lower occupational status, and lower amounts of wealth. For instance, on average, non-Whites and women are in lower positions on these scales than are Whites and men. Overall, both of these statuses play important roles in determining the class position an individual is in, and the likelihood of that person moving unto a higher class position. This entry looks at the sources and measures of social mobility and describes the U.S. class system and trends in mobility from one class to another.

Capital-Based Mobility

Pierre Bourdieu argued that social mobility is determined by four types of *capital.* The first, *economic capital,* refers to any access to money and wealth. Next, *social capital* refers to any benefits received from social networks and other relationships. *Cultural capital* is the overall knowledge, skills, and cultural background that are passed from parents to their children. Finally, *symbolic capital* refers to any symbols of prestige and power that one is able to possess. In U.S. society, all capital associated with the upper class is highly valued and allows for greater social mobility. However, upper-class capital tends to be the result of high levels of education and wealth and greater access to those resources. This results in an unfair advantage for those in higher class positions, leaving those in lower-class positions without the same access to opportunities.

Social mobility is determined by two types of statuses. An *achieved status* is any attribute that one can gain, such as earning a college degree or trade training. These types of achievements help increase one's likelihood of obtaining a more prestigious occupation or making more income. An *ascribed status* is what an individual is born into, such as a particular race or gender. Although these characteristics cannot be controlled, there is a tendency for some groups to gain large amounts of prestige based on their *ascribed status,* such as being born into a particular family (e.g., the Hiltons, Rockefellers).

The General Social Survey (GSS), conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), takes measures of "occupational prestige." Prestige is determined by the level of respect associated with a particular occupation and is ranked from 0 as the lowest score to 100 as the highest score. When an individual changes professions that have the same occupational prestige score, this is referred to as *horizontal mobility.* However, if an individual moves up or down the occupational prestige rankings, this is referred to as *vertical mobility.* This can occur as *upward social mobility,* when an individual gains something that allows him or her to move into a higher class position, such as earning a college degree. On the other hand, *downward social mobility* occurs when an individual loses something that helps that person maintain a current class position (e.g., loss of a job). *Intragenerational social mobility* refers to social mobility that occurs in one's lifetime, and *intergenerational social mobility* is the relationship between the social class of a family and the social class that its children are in as adults.

Class Divisions

Class stratification in the United States is complex and determined by many factors. In general, however, U.S. society can be divided into six major classes: the upper- and lower-upper classes, the upper- and lower-middle classes, the working class, and the poor.

The upper-upper class (approximately 0.5–1% of the population). These individuals are born into families with a great deal of wealth. This wealth has been maintained through the generations and is often referred to as "old money." Most people in this class position tend to be White. Most in this class position do not need to work and gain most of their income from pre-owned assets.

The lower-upper class (approximately 4% of the population). This class typically comprises people who have newly acquired wealth. They are usually referred to as the "working rich," because most of their wealth comes from income. Most non-Whites who have acquired significant wealth are considered members of this class category.

The upper-middle class (approximately 15% of the population). People in this class are likely to have postsecondary degrees and tend to be employed in high-prestige professions. The high amount of income earned helps those in this class generate enough assets to increase their wealth.

The lower-middle class (approximately 27% of the population). This group mostly comprises people typically working in either lower skilled white-collar jobs or highly skilled blue-collar jobs. Only about half of those in this class are likely to have a college degree. Although their wealth is modest, most manage to accumulate assets in the form of a home or savings account.

The working class (approximately 33% of the population). Those who work low-level white-collar and most blue- and pink-collar jobs make up this category. Most of these people do not have a college degree, and they tend to work in occupations that require few technical skills. Most of those employed do not have employment benefits and little or no wealth.

The poor class (approximately 20% of the population). People in this class tend to work many low-wage jobs at once, making it difficult to accumulate wealth. Most people in this class are non-White, especially African American. About half of the people who occupy this class position have completed high school. Although an estimated 40% own their homes, these homes are usually in inner-city and rural neighborhoods with few resources.

Measures of Social Mobility

Social mobility occurs with changes in educational achievements, occupational prestige, income, and accumulated wealth. In the United States, educational opportunities are unequal and greatly determined by class and race. Those in the upper classes have access to better education and are likely to have the social networks and finances to help put the younger generation into good colleges. Those in lower-class positions do not have the same advantages. They are more likely to attend schools that have inadequate resources, and they are more likely to receive a subpar education by comparison. Most non-Whites tend to occupy the working- and lower-class rungs in society, so they are disproportionately less likely to receive a good quality education.

High occupational prestige tends to be associated with the high education levels required for those positions. For example, professions ranked with high prestige scores include physicians, lawyers, and various scientists. In the United States, there is an unequal distribution by race of those employed in certain professions. Whites in higher class positions, compared with their non-White counterparts, have the adequate capital to succeed in high prestige occupations. Non-Whites, especially African Americans and Hispanics, tend to work in less prestigious occupations. As a result, most non-Whites do not experience upward social mobility. Further, globalization has

contributed to outsourcing many middle-class jobs, leaving those U.S. residents out of work. Income also tends to predict social mobility because it can provide families with assets and inheritance to use or pass down to their children. Although income disparities between White and Black households have existed until the 1980s, contemporary studies suggest that this difference is slowly shrinking. However, income becomes irrelevant when recognizing the primary role of wealth on social mobility. Wealth includes real estate, stocks, bonds, and other assets, and tends to significantly increase income. For instance, a White upper-middle-class family is more likely to have inherited wealth from parents, to have been provided with access to a good education, to have a prestigious occupation, and to live in a nice house in a nice community compared with their non-White counterparts. As a result, African American families are less likely to be provided with opportunities to accumulate wealth for themselves and their children.

Past and Current Trends

There have been four main social mobility trends in the United States since 20th-century industrialization. First, social mobility, especially among men, has been fairly high. Second, the overall results of data on social mobility indicate that it has been rising. Both are the results of an industrialized society. Third, social mobility from one generation to the next tends to be small. On average, it takes at least three generations for true social mobility to occur. Fourth, social mobility since the 1970s has been uneven. For instance, in the 1970s, social mobility was relatively stagnant. It remained stagnant for most of the population during the 1980s, and rose again in the 1990s. In the 2000s, however, social mobility is considered more of an anomaly rather than the standard.

Among non-White racial groups, a relatively small number of African Americans began to accumulate wealth during the 1980s and 1990s. However, this did not even the playing field with wealthy Whites because Blacks were more likely to have debt as the result of no inheritance. Furthermore, income statistics for Blacks have stayed virtually the same since the 1980s. Income among Hispanics has decreased slightly since the 1970s, which also contributes to lack of social mobility in general for this group. Asian Americans as a whole have shown upward social mobility, but this picture varies among the different Asian groups. For instance, Chinese, Japanese, and Asian Indians have had increasing levels of education and wealth compared with other Asian immigrants such as Vietnamese, Hmong, and Cambodians. American Indians and Alaskan natives also have far lower incomes compared with Whites, with almost one-fourth living in poverty.

Today, social mobility has been constrained for many reasons. The small percentage of wealthy, mostly White, families has continued to hold on to their wealth over the generations, leaving waves of non-Whites out. Though education has always played an important role in social mobility by contributing to high occupational prestige, a good education has increasingly become dependent on class. Class itself is dependent on the amount of wealth a family has accumulated. This wealth, when inherited by the next generation, greatly increases that generation's chances of upward social mobility. Any capital associated with inherited wealth, such as social connections or cultural knowledge, also contributes to social mobility. Nevertheless, the United States is a highly stratified society with few people who have access to most resources. This is especially true for

the non-White population. As a result, the "rags-to-riches" fable has become less of a reality for most U.S. residents who seek to strike it big in the land of opportunity.

Bhoomi Thakore and David G. Embrick

Further Readings

Bourdieu, Pierre. [1980] 1990. *The Logic of Practice.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Davis, James A, Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden. 2005. *General Social Surveys, 1972–2004: Cumulative Codebook.* Chicago, IL: NORC.

Conley, Dalton. 1999. *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth and Social Policy in America.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Keister, Lisa. 2005. *Wealth in America: Trends in Wealth Inequality.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, Amanda. 2003. *Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the Color Line in Classrooms and Communities.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Macionis, John. 2002. *Society: The Basics.* 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. 1999. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Schaefer, Richard. 2008. *Sociology Matters.* 3rd. ed. New York: McGraw Hill.

Scott, Janny and David Leonhardt. 2005. "Class Matters: Shadowy Lines That Still Divide." *New York Times,* May 15. Available from http://www.nytimes.com.gate.lib.buffalo.edu

U.S. Census Bureau. 2004. "We the People: Asians in the United States (Census 2000 Special Reports)." Available from http://www.census.gov.gate.lib.buffalo.edu/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf

U.S. Census Bureau. 2007. "The American Community—American Indians and Alaskan Natives." Available from http://www.census.gov.gate.lib.buffalo.edu/prod/2007pubs/acs-07.pdf

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
"Social Mobility." *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, edited by Richard T. Schaefer, vol. 3, SAGE Publications, 2008, pp. 1253-1256. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*,

---

SECTION NINE

SOURCE:
Encyclopedia of Social Theory. Ed. George Ritzer. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2005. p802-804.

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

Although it was once the dominant sociological theory, structural functionalism is now more of a relic. Recent decades have seen this theoretical orientation slip into the background as more contemporary theories (including neofunctionalism) have taken its place.

Structural functionalism is one type of consensus theory—it posits that society is based on mutual agreements, sees the creation and maintenance of shared values and norms as crucial to society, and views social change as a slow, orderly process. Examples of prominent consensus theorists include Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. These theories stand in contrast to conflict theories, such as those of Karl Marx, that view the world as based on a system of oppressive hierarchies, social order at the whim of dominant groups, and social change as rapid and disorderly resulting from struggles between groups.

The term *structural functionalism* can be broken down into its constituent parts. An analysis can be made of structures without reference to functions, and conversely, an analysis can be made of functions without reference to structures. Generally, however, these two are used in conjunction with one another. Furthermore, most theorists in this field were particularly interested in societal functionalism, or the specific structures and functions of society as a whole.

Parsons (1937, 1970) was the founder of, and perhaps the most prominent contributor to, structural functionalism. He was concerned with the question of how society was able to maintain order and not fall into utter chaos. He answered this question from the viewpoint of structural functionalism and outlined what he believed are its major tenets: (1) Systems are ordered and their parts are all interdependent; (2) systems tend toward a goal of equilibrium or self-maintenance; (3) systems may be either inert or change in an ordered manner; (4) each part of the system has an effect on the forms the other parts can take; (5) systems create and maintain boundaries separating them from their environments; (6) allocation and integration are necessary for a system to reach a certain state of equilibrium; and (7) systems will tend toward self-maintenance by maintaining their boundaries, the interdependent relationship among parts, and the relationship between parts and the whole; by controlling variations in the environment; and by controlling tendencies of the system to change from within.

In addition to structures, Parsons was also concerned with functions. Parsons saw functions as those activities that had the goal of fulfilling a need of the system. He believed that there were four necessary functional imperatives of all systems: [A] adaptation (how a system copes with its outside environment by both adapting to it and by adapting the environment to meet the needs of the system), [G] goal attainment (the definition and achievement of the primary goals of the system), [I] integration (how the system regulates the relationship of its various parts as well as the relationship among the other three functional imperatives), and [L] latency, or pattern maintenance (how the system provides, maintains, and rejuvenates the motivation of individuals and the cultural patterns that stimulate and maintain that motivation). These functional imperatives are known as Parsons's AGIL scheme.

Functions become integrated with systems in Parsons's theory as each component of the AGIL scheme is handled by a different system. Most generally, adaptation is handled by the behavioral organism that adjusts to and transforms the outside world. Goal attainment is handled by the personality system that defines the goals of the system and mobilizes the necessary resources to reach outlined goals. Integration is done by the social system that controls the various components of the system. Latency is performed by the cultural system that provides individuals with norms and values to motivate them to action.

Merton (1968), a student of Parsons, continued and enriched the tradition of structural functionalism. He argued that traditional postulates in functionalism, as outlined mainly by anthropologists such as Malinowski, were grounded too heavily in abstract theory and lacked the empirical evidence needed to give them credence. He believed that to conduct proper functional analyses, theory must be coupled with empirical research. Merton helped define his viewpoint by criticizing several postulates of functional analysis. First, he criticized the postulate of functional unity by arguing that in complex societies not all components had to be integrated to a high degree. Second, he criticized the postulate of universal functionalism by contending that not all forms and structures in society have positive consequences or functions. Finally, he criticized the postulate of indispensability and rejected the idea that every aspect of society served a necessary and vital purpose; there are components that the society could function without.

Merton defined functions as those consequences that lead to the adjustment or adaptation of a system. In addition, he argued that not all functions had positive consequences and that some, in fact, were better described as dysfunctions. In addition, nonfunctions are those consequences that have no effect at all on the system.

The development of dysfunctions and nonfunctions to complement the existing theory of functions led Merton to develop the idea of a net balance. A net balance is an understanding of the relative weight of functions and dysfunctions in a given system. It is more of a theoretical orientation then an empirical tool because the magnitude and evaluation of what constitutes functions and dysfunctions are highly subjective.

The issue of how to study a net balance led Merton to the idea of levels of functional analysis. He argued that society did not have to be studied as a whole but that organizations, groups, and other subcomponents of society were also valid as research topics. Merton, in fact, was a proponent of "middle-range" theories. Thus, what is the net balance of those functions, and dysfunctions, at one level may well be different at another level.

Another valuable contribution of Merton to the field of structural functionalism was the idea of manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are those that are intended, whereas latent functions are those that are unintended yet still functional for the system. Closely related to the idea of latent functions is that of unanticipated consequences, although this term encompasses not only those unintended consequences that are functional for the system but also those that are dysfunctional and nonfunctional as well.

Merton defined culture as a system of norms and values that is present in society and is common to, and governs the behavior of, its members. He defined social structure as the ordered system of social interactions in which the members of a given society are occupied. In addition, Merton was interested in the relationship between culturally defined ends and the structurally possible means of achieving those ends. *Anomie*, or a state of normlessness, occurs when the available means make it difficult, if not impossible, for members of a society to achieve the culturally defined goals. The reaction of individuals to this discrepancy can involve deviant behavior because they are forced to attempt alternate (sometimes illegal) means to achieve their desired (as prescribed by society) ends. Anomie, for Merton, represents the disjuncture between social structures and cultural goals and hence can be dysfunctional for society.

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) wrote what is perhaps the best-known piece of structural functional literature on the topic of social stratification. They argued that a system of stratification is not only functional but also necessary for societies to persist and remain healthy. This idea led them to argue that a classless society had never existed because the need for a system of stratification had always created such a system. They did not, however, believe that the creation of such a stratified system was always a conscious undertaking on the part of society but, rather, that it could be, and often was, an "unconsciously evolved device."

Following their structural functional orientation, Davis and Moore saw stratification in society not in terms of people but in terms of positions. This meant that they were primarily interested in how certain positions came to be ranked higher or lower than other positions, not in how certain individuals came to fill those ranked positions. They did believe, however, that one of the biggest problems faced by society was how to get the right people to fill the right positions and then, more important, how to keep them there.

Their argument was that some positions in society are more pleasant to occupy, some are more crucial for the health and continuity of the society as a whole, and different types of positions require different types of knowledge and skills. Those positions that are generally attributed with a higher social ranking (e.g., politicians, bankers, lawyers) are not as pleasant to occupy, are more important to the overall health of society, and require the highest level of skill and education. Consequently, it is these positions that must also carry the highest level of social prestige, monetary compensation, and available leisure time.

Davis and Moore's structural functional explanation of stratification has been criticized by many for a number of reasons. First, it assumes that a system of stratification has always existed in every society and that such a system will exist in all societies in the future. Second, it provides a theoretical rationale for perpetuating the privileges of the elite. Third, many find it difficult to accept that any position in society is more or less important than any other position. Garbage collectors, for example, are arguably as important as politicians. Fourth, the stratified system makes it difficult for those in lower rankings to obtain the education and training necessary to achieve a higher ranking. Finally, there is no consideration of individuals being motivated to accept a higher (or lower) position based solely on intrinsic rewards.

Given that it was the dominant theory in sociology for such a long time, structural functionalism has also been critiqued by many in the field. A number of the more noteworthy critiques include (1) that it is ahistorical (it did in fact develop in reaction to the historical evolutionary approach of many anthropologists at that time); (2) it is unable to deal with contemporary processes of social change; (3) it cannot adequately deal with conflict (it is generally viewed as a consensus theory and hence in contradiction to conflict theory); (4) it has a conservative bias that maintains the status quo and the dominating power of the elite class; (5) it is generally too abstract, vague, and ambiguous to bear much relationship to the real world; (6) the theories are too grand and ambitious when more historically and situation relevant theories might be more appropriate; (7) there are inadequate methods to research the questions of interest; and (8) comparative analysis is virtually impossible.

Turner and Maryanski (1979) also saw the problems of teleology and tautology plaguing structural functionalism. More specifically, they saw illegitimate teleology as a problem. It is legitimate to assume that society has certain goals and that it brings certain structures and functions into creation to achieve these goals. What many structural functionalists do, however, that is illegitimate is to assume that the current structures and functions in society are the only ones that could have been created to achieve these goals. In addition, tautology is a problem because both the whole and its parts are defined in terms of the other. The whole is defined in terms of its parts and the various parts are then defined in terms of the whole. Hence, neither is truly defined at all.

At the barrage of such critiques as those outlined above, structural functionalism eventually fell out of the limelight of sociology. Jeffrey Alexander and Paul Colomy (1985), however, made an attempt to revive interest in the topic by developing neofunctionalism in the mid-1980s. The term itself, *neofunctionalism*, implies both a strong relationship to "functionalism" as well as the implications of a new, "neo," direction. This is exactly what Alexander and Colomy had in mind; they saw neofunctionalism as broader and more integrative than traditional structural functionalism.

Although neofunctionalism is not considered so much a fully developed theory as a "tendency," Alexander (1985) has outlined some of its basic tenets: (1) It sees society as composed of interacting elements (that are not controlled by an overarching force) that form a pattern that allows it to be differentiated from the outside environment; (2) approximately equal attention is given to action and order; (3) integration is seen as a possibility rather than an accomplishment; (4) there is still an emphasis on personality, culture, and social systems, although the tension between these systems is seen as a source of control as well as change; (5) there is a focus on social change found in the differentiation within the personality, culture, and social systems; and (6) it implies a promise to the autonomy of conceptualization and theorizing from additional levels of sociological investigation.

Although it did succeed in its goal of reviving interest in the work of structural functionalists, and particularly Parsons, neofunctionalism seems to have gone the way of its predecessor and fallen out of style. This is even acknowledged by Alexander (1998) who has abandoned this orientation in lieu of pursuing what he believes will be a new wave in the creation of theory that is able to go beyond even the advances made by neofunctionalism.

—Michael Ryan

See also Alexander, Jeffrey ; Anomie ; Comte, Auguste ; Durkheim, Émile ; Merton, Robert ; Parsons, Talcott

REFERENCES

Alexander, Jeffrey C., ed. 1985. *Neofunctionalism.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

——. 1998. *Neofunctionalism and After.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. and Paul Colomy. 1985. "Toward Neo-Functionalism." *Sociological Theory* 3:11–23.

Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert Moore. 1945. "Some Principles of Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 10:242–49.

Merton, Robert K. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure.* New York: Free Press.

Parsons, Talcott. 1937. *The Structure of Social Action.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

——. 1970. *Social Structure and Personality.* New York: Free Press.

Turner, Jonathan H. and A. Z. Maryanski. 1979. *Functionalism.* Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings.

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
Ryan, Michael. "Structural Functionalism." *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, edited by George Ritzer, vol. 2, SAGE Reference, 2005, pp. 802-804. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*