**CLASSICAL THEORIES AND BEYOND**

MARXISM AND NEO-MARXISM

**Marxism** is a grand social theory offering transcultural and transhistorical explanations which place class at the center of all social change (historical materialism). **Neo-Marxism** steps away from this grandiosity, but still centers class as a category of analysis.

**Development of Classes**

Marx presents class relations as a fundamentally antagonistic dyadic relationship between the Proletariat (property-less laborers) and Bourgeoisie (owners of labor-power or land).

*The Bourgeoisie*Modern industry, made possible following a revolution by the bourgeois over feudalism, has created an ever-expanding global market based in self-interest (“cash payment”) and free trade (exploitation) which turns “personal worth into exchange value” (37). Rights and ownership of the means of production has been concentrated in the hands of the few and the means of production and exchange have massively expanded. This results in continual crises of overproduction requiring further market expansion, resulting in wage fluctuations and increased precarity for the working class.

*The Proletariat*Under a capitalist system, wage-labor turns labor-power (and thus, laborers themselves) into a commodity necessary for and developed in proportion to capital. Machinery and the forced division of labor alienated the worker from the fruits of his labor. The advancement of industry (a necessity for the existence of the bourgeoisie) increases the numbers/proportion of the proletariat (recruited from all other classes) while bringing them out of competition and into association: capitalism is inherently self-destructive.

**Exploitation**Distinctive feature of Marxist understanding of class is exploitation, an interdependence of material interests that is *antagonistic, exclusive, and appropriative.* The welfare of the exploiters depends on the material deprivation of the exploited and the realization of the former’s interests harms the latter. This inverse interdependence depends on the exclusion of the exploited from access to productive resources. This exclusion enables the exploiters to appropriate the labor effort of the exploited.

Nonexploitive economic oppression is a result of antagonistic and exclusive, but not appropriative, relations. This means the privileged category does not need the excluded category, which can result in genocidal repression. In an exploitive relation, the exploiters are dependent upon the exploited for their own welfare. The extraction of effort from the exploited is thus always precarious, requiring the manufacture of consent and pressuring the oppressive group to incorporate the interests of the exploited.

**Radical Egalitarian Agenda**“Marxist tradition is rooted in a set of normative commitments to a form of radical egalitarianism” (6). Marx did not argue out of a sense of justice per se, but that socialism was in the interest of the working class and the logical endpoint of capitalism. Today, there is still a focus on exploitation and harm, not just inequality that attends to the *moral* implications of class analysis.

*Radical Egalitarianism thesis:* Human flourishing would be broadly enhanced by a radically egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life. “To each according to need, from each according to ability.”

*Historical Possibility thesis:* Under conditions of a highly productive economy, it becomes materially possible to organize society in such a way that there is a sustainable radically egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life.

*Anti-capitalism thesis:* Capitalism blocks the possibility of achieving this radical egalitarianism… paradox: capitalism develops the potential for material flourishing, but simultaneously thwarts the achievement of egalitarianism.

**Marxist Analysis**Marxist analysis is “about the conditions and process of social change.” It understands conflict as generated by the inherent properties of class relations and recognizes the agency within subordinate class locations and the capacity of the exploited to resist exploitation. It requires categories to understand how people reproduce and transform social relations.

**Class Relations**Dependent upon the unequal distribution of rights and powers over productive resources, as well as unequal appropriation over the results of the use of resources.

*Variations*Under slavery, slave owners have almost absolute property rights over enslaved people; under capitalism, people own land and capital but “labor power” is equally distributed (you cannot own people). These different forms of class relations can be combined in a single society (Wright, 12).

Rights and powers are rarely one-dimensional. They are mediated by various restrictions, including government regulations on workplace practices, delegations of power to middle-management, employee stock ownership, etc. Total ownership is rare, rights and powers are bundles which can be broken down, distributed, and recombined (13).

*Locations*Rather than nominally classifying class categories, class “location” should be thought of as a way to “situate individuals within structured patterns of interaction” (14). “A class ‘location’ is not a ‘class’; it is a location-within-relations” (19).

The two-class model is insufficient for sociological inquiry. Locations are complicated by a variety of factors: variations in working conditions (i.e., degree of autonomy, cognitive complexity of tasks, etc.); contradictions based on complexity of rights and powers (i.e., a manger within a corporation who exercises some of the powers of capital but does not have rights over the resources); simultaneous occupation of multiple locations; change in location over time; scope of activates subjected to rights and powers (i.e. small shop-owner versus vast industrial capitalist); and mediation of location by family relation (i.e. spouses with different locations).

*Agency*Class location tells us about the structure in which people live and act, but not about the actions themselves.   
*Class interests:* the opportunities and trade-offs people face in pursuing interests (i.e. standards of living, working conditions) are structured by class location *Class consciousness:* subjective awareness of class interests and conditions for advancing them *Class practices:* activities in pursuit of class interests (individual or collective) *Class struggle:* conflicts between the practices in the pursuit of opposing class interests

**Metathesis**“The distribution of rights and powers over the basic productive resources of a society have significant, systematic consequences at both the micro- and macro-levels of social analysis” (21-22).

Macro-level = class structure (i.e., of the nation-state)  
Micro-level = impact of class on individuals

Dual propositions  
1. What you have determines what you get (i.e., income).  
 Distribution of R&P determines standards of living  
2. What you have determines what you have to do to get what you get.   
 …determines strategies and practices people engage in to acquire income

WEBERISM AND NEO-WEBERISM

**Defining Social Class**Members of a class share common life chances and are placed in these positions because the market distributes life chances according to the resources that individuals bring to it. Property and lack of property are the basic distinctions of class, but they are further differentiated by the kind of property usable for returns and the kinds of services able to be offered in the market: they only have value in the context of the market. *Classes* are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods.

The rights and powers of individuals over productive assets define the basis of class relations, but are consequential because of the ways they shape *life chances* most notably within market exchanges: control over resources affects bargaining capacity and, in turn, the results of exchanges (i.e., income). Exploitation and domination are not necessarily considered.

*Collective Action  
Status groups* are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by certain lifestyles (every economic transformation threatens stratification by status and can result in class primacy). *Parties* arise from classes or status groups with the goal of influencing communal action in a planned manner.

These three types of groups are “the major phenomena of the distribution of power in society” (Breen, 33).

Each can be the basis for collective action, but it is more likely among status groups (given the effect on individual identity/consciousness) and parties (it is their reason for existing). Class action can only occur when the results of the class situation are distinctly recognizable: the contrast of life chances must be felt as a result of the distribution of property or structure of the economic order.

There is no assumption that class relations will explain historical change (different from Marx… much smaller scope).

**Class Analysis**Goal of examining the relationship between class position and life chances, and potentially explain a wide range of outcomes (i.e., action, behavior, attitudes, values, etc.).

*Categorization*Class positions are relational “empty places” within the economic structure. A class schema is a tool used in analysis, not a definitive mapping of transhistorical or cross-cultural class structure.

The *Goldthorpe schema* distinguishes between those who own the means of production and those who do not while differentiating the latter according to the nature of their relationship with their employer. The dimensions of this differentiation are *asset-specificity*, or the extent that a job requires special skills, and *monitoring*, or the in/ability of the employer to asses the extent to which an employee is working in the interests of the firm.

Labor contracts occur when there is neither asset-specificity (potential employees are readily available) and no monitoring difficulty.

Service relationships occur when there is asset-specificity and monitoring difficulties: there is an impetus to both retain employees and encourage them to pursue employer goals.

Critics argue that this neglects the balance of power between employees and employers.

Relationship to occupation: some data has suggested that aspects of the employment relationship mainly occur in four different combinations (Evans and Mills, 1984). However, occupational titles have become potentially poor indicators of the employment relationship so it is important to measure aspects of the relationship directly.

*Unit of class analysis*Intra-familial relationships mediate between the market and an individual’s life chances  
Three approaches to how to analyze the family: single class position (combination of both spouses); fate of family as a function of both spouses’ positions; “dominance” approach privileges whichever spouse has more enduring attachment to labor market.

*Summary*The neo-Weberian approach “rests on the construction of a schema based on principles that capture the major dimensions of positional differentiation in labor markets and production units that are important for the distribution of life chances.”

Lines of empirical inquiry include: how important is class in explaining variation in life chances (in relationship to ethnicity, gender, etc.)? What is the relationship between class and other outcomes?

NEO-DURKHEIMISM

Moves away from a “big class” perspective to focus on “micro-classes.” This is different from nominalist traditions which rely on hypotheticals (forces generate classes which are removed from a realist understanding and may or may not become widely institutionalized) and rests on a technical division of labor (what workers are actually doing). Traditionally, a micro-level focus has been dismissed as irrelevant, but these smaller classes can be shown to take on the properties previously ascribed to big classes.

**Fate of Conflict**Durkheim argued that class conflict would dissipate because state and occupational regulations would impose moral control (institutionalization), and that a meritocracy would arise and legitimate inequalities of outcome (equal opportunity).

The institutionalization of conflict has led to a shift from macro-level theories (i.e. historical materialism) towards explanations of micro-level behaviors (i.e. Weberian scope of analysis).

**Occupationalization**Note: Durkheim does not offer an explanation for *how* occupational associations will emerge, just that they will.

Durkheim argued that local organization of classes based on occupational activity (similar to medieval guilds) would create both informal ties and take on more formal functions: establishing and administering occupational ethics; resolving conflict between members and groups; serving as political representation.

The institutionalization of occupations legitimates inequality, undermining the working class and convincing workers to regard differences in remuneration as appropriate and acceptable.

*Occupation-specific sentiments and mechanical solidarity*  
Detailed occupations are the main site where distinctive attitudes and lifestyles are generated: specialized cultures arise because self-selection brings similar workers into the same occupation, social interactions between coworkers reinforces shared sentiments, and the incumbents have common interests that are pursued by occupational affiliation.

*Occupational interdependency and organic solidarity*Durkheim argued that alienation (resulting from routine or repetitive work) would be countered when there is contact between “neighboring functions:” that is, when workers are able to see themselves as part of a larger whole wherein their actions have an aim beyond themselves. This infusion of individual work with greater meaning undermines aggregate class formation.

Normative expression of organic solidarity through the institutionalization of industrial conflict: codes of conduct devised by occupational associations will undermine the appeal of revolutionary ideologies (the division of labor is no longer forced).

We have seen an occupationalization of the labor market and true class-wide organization was very brief and has not re-emerged. Postmodern forms have reverted to localism.

Durkheim was not entirely correct in how the containment of conflict would be carried out: large unions have been institutionalized, not just replaced by smaller assocations.

There is incomplete occupationalization due to competing forms of associaton (unions) and due to low skill levels, limited investments in training, and rapid changes in manufacturing processes.

Occupationalization has also been suppressed in some countries.

*Local organization*

Identification and awareness: “big classes” have a weak hold over workers and individual identities/self-definitions are strongly affected by occupational affiliation. There is a “language of occupation” in everyday interaction, not a language of class.

Social closure: class membership is restricted to qualified eligibles at the local level, not the aggregate level (i.e., licensing, credentialing, apprenticeships).

Collective action: Marxists argue that social closure promotes class-wide interests. However, collective action already flows out of structurally defined disaggreage groupings at the level of the unit occupation: 1) closure strategies directed downwards to restrict access; 2) lateral competition over functional niches in division labor; 3) action to secure occupation-specific benefits from the state and employers.

The supposed weakness of class effects is due to the aggregate operationalization of class in conventional analyses.

*Skill-based exploitation*In a perfectly competitive market, labor should flow to the most rewarding occupations and equalize lifetime earnings of workers while eliminating exploitative returns. However, there are barriers to mobility which preclude workers from freely choosing the most highly remunerative positions. Rent-extraction: artificial restriction of the supply of qualified labor (i.e. occupational closure, such as in the case of limited opportunities for training of doctors)

Durkheim argues for equalization of market opportunities by removing restrictions on the free flow of labor and prohibiting parents from transmitting wealth and assets that indirectly advantage their children in the competition for desirable jobs. This recognizes that workers’ bargaining power is a function of the supply and demand for labor within occupations.

*Scope of disaggregation*If you get too granular, explanatory returns diminish. If you ignore the social organization of occupations, there may be explanatory losses.