

# Karl Marx

- 1818–1883
- sociologist, economist, political philosopher
- Lived during the social upheaval and extreme inequality of the early industrialization period
- Strongly criticized capitalism and promoted an alternative vision of socialism that he said would eventually lead to a utopian communist society (as described in his Communist Manifesto)

# Karl Marx

- Marx argued that social classes are characterized by their relationship to the means of production.
- Marx identified two classes:
  - ① The bourgeoisie, or the capitalist class, who own the means of production (e.g., factories).
  - ② The proletariat, or the working class, composed of those individuals who must sell their labor to members of the bourgeoisie for a wage in order to survive.
- Marx argued that differences within the bourgeoisie and the proletariat would eventually fade, and the differences between these two classes would take primacy as they became increasingly polarized due to the forces of competition and the advent of mechanization.

# Karl Marx

- According to Marx, individuals lives are intricately and inextricably tied to production. Because of this our outlook on life must necessarily be a function of our relationship to the means of production.
- Members of the proletariat work for a wage that is less than the value of what they produce. This difference, or surplus value, is expropriated by the bourgeoisie in the form of profit.

## Karl Marx: Exploitation

- Marx viewed capitalists accumulation of profit in this manner as inherently exploitative and led to conflict because capitalists are opposed to anything that might operate to lessen the amount of surplus value they can expropriate (e.g., increased wages and union activity).
- **Exploitation**: the extraction of a portion of the value created by the subordinate class which does not receive the full economic value that they created; leads to economic inequality for the benefit of the dominant class which aggrandizes its wealth at the expense of the subordinate class
- Exploitation is based on **the labor theory of value** which assumes that economic value is ultimately only caused by human labor activity (and that the value of capital is represented by how much labor time was required to create and maintain it)

# Karl Marx: Modes of Production

- The constellation of class and property relationships originating from production are fundamental to all societies and, together, are referred to by Marx as the mode of production.
- Informed by his analysis of European history, Marx identified three modes of production through which he believed societies would progress:
  - ① Feudalism: agrarian; landed aristocracy; peasant majority
  - ② Capitalism: industrial; characterized by the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat
  - ③ Communism: “the technologically advanced, classless society of the future, in which all productive property would be held in common”

# Karl Marx: Relations of Production; Forces of Production

- According to Marx, the modes of production is determined by forces of production and relation of production.
- **Productive Forces:** The combination of the means of labor (tools, machinery, land, infrastructure and so on) with human labour power. In short, it usually means technological level when the technology includes how to organize workers.
- **Relations of Production:** The sum total of social relationships which people necessarily have to enter into, in order to survive, to produce and reproduce their means of life. Nonetheless, the fundamental relation is between those who own the means of production and those who do not own them.

## Karl Marx: Ideology

- “[T]he pervasive ideas that uphold the status quo and sustain the ruling class.”
- Marx argued that members of social classes share similar experiences which shape their outlook on life. Individuals experiences, ideas, and interests are conditioned by their class membership. People tend to believe their particular interests are shared by all members of society.
- Marx believed those who controlled the means of production were those who were able to see that their class interests were advanced. “[T]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx).
- Religion is an ideology of the ruling class. (Religion is opium of the people)

# Karl Marx: Base and Superstructure

- Superstructure: the social and political institutions and ideas in society.
- Marx introduced the concept of superstructure to explain how “privileged minorities” are able to maintain their dominance in societies and contain the potential resistance of exploited majorities.
- He reasoned that privileged classes tended to control the superstructure through compulsion or persuasion.



## Karl Marx: Social Changes

- The advancement of the capitalist classes interests generally resulted in the perpetuation of the status quo, which Marx viewed as unstable.
- Economic changes can operate to produce rising classes whose interests are at odds with the those of the established ruling class. This resulted in class conflict .
- Social change comes about through class struggle.
- The continued exploitation of the proletariat would result in the formation of a class consciousness whereby members of the working class would realize their shared fate and unite collectively to effect social change that would reflect their interests.

# Karl Marx: Historical Materialism

- Historical materialism: economic deterministic view of societies and social change; people and individuals are shaped by their economic needs, activities and interests which ultimately shape the course of history.
- It assumes that historical change is mainly due to class conflict within the mode of production.
- The latter leads to periodic civil wars, revolutions or major political transformations which represent an inevitable historical process that leads to higher societal development.

# Karl Marx: Class Consciousness

- Some of the preconditions for the development of a class consciousness include:
  - ① Growing class order
  - ② Geographic concentration of large masses of industrial workers
  - ③ Living conditions of members of the working class
  - ④ Increased participation in political organizations such as unions dedicated to the interests of the working class

# Karl Marx: Communism

- Communism: the final stage of history and the most advanced societal form in which exploitation, alienation, political conflict and the oppressive division of labor that characterizes capitalism will disappear
- **Eschatology**: history is moving towards a final stage which will be a utopian communist society during which selfish human nature will be replaced by “socialist man” who works for the good of society.
- Communist society evolves out of its precursor stage (i.e., socialism) and will be characterized by super-abundance because human labor will be intrinsically self-rewarding and people will be more motivated to work for the common good of humanity.

## Karl Marx: Communism (continued)

- “from each according to his ability, and to each according to his needs”
- “In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.” (German Ideology)

# Max Weber

- 1864–1920
- While Marx articulated a theory of social stratification based strictly on individuals relationships to the means of production, Weber distinguished between class and status.
- Webers views are an example of the “subjectivist” approach (i.e., anti-positivism)
- According to Weber, social reality is infinitely complex and too vastly complicated for the human mind to fully comprehend. Although the real world does indeed exist out there, the way in which we perceive reality is very much affected by the concepts that we use to observe it

# Max Weber: Methods

- For Weber, there is no such thing as a presupposition-less social science
- Sociology is launched and structured in the context of the researcher's moral values:
  - ① the selection of the topic of study reflects the values, interests, presuppositions or cultural assumptions of the researcher
  - ② the concepts that we choose to use in our study of some topic also reflect the values, interests and presuppositions of the researcher

## Max Weber: Methods

- Sociology should try to provide an “analytical ordering of empirical reality” or a coherent, analytical, and relatively concise way of looking at the social world that we find to be somehow explanatory for social science or useful for public policy.
- To do so we need to be clear about what our terms and concepts mean (e.g., what is meant by “capitalism,” “socialism,” or “Neo-liberalism”)
- Weber’s writings are full of long definitions of many various concepts, but no broad or general theories.



## Max Weber: Methods

- For Weber, concepts and the world out there are strikingly separated
- “General laws” are a means to an end and are not themselves the end or primary objective of social science; “general laws” don’t capture the complexity of individual events which are often set in the context of a specific historical era and culture that may never again be exactly repeated.
- Webers research interests were often historical: why did the scientific revolution occur in Western Europe? other cultures earlier had made various technological achievements (e.g., China and the Middle East)
- Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* argues that culture affected economic development in the West; the religious ideas of Calvinism were one important factor that facilitated the breakthrough to the creation of the scientific revolution and then the industrial revolution

# Max Weber: Methods

- **fact/value distinction:** facts need to be distinguished from values; facts and values are different and separate
- Knowledge of facts may help us to make more informed judgments about relevant ethical issues, but values are not simply derivative of facts (e.g., pro-life versus pro-choice)
- Sociology can establish what the facts are but it cannot tell us what are our values should be.

## Max Weber: Methods

- Marx generally followed the tradition of 18th century Enlightenment philosophers for whom truth leads to virtue which leads to happiness
- They believed that as we advance our factual knowledge of the world, then we will also accordingly come to understand more about appropriate morality and ethics
- By contrast, Weber distinguishes sharply between facts and values as being distinct
- Webers fact/value distinction has generally had a major impact on modern sociology especially in the U.S.
- **Objectivity**: given some concept as defined by a researcher, the facts about the world may be scientifically obtained

## Max Weber: Methods

- The facts are always dependent upon on how one chooses to define ones concepts, but given some definition, scientific measurement provides a clear answer to the extent that the information is available (e.g., poverty as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau),
- In principle, people with different values should be able to agree upon what the facts are because scientific procedures of inquiry and the universal canons of logic that underlie the validation of facts provide the same results regardless of the values of the investigator.

## Max Weber vs. Karl Marx: Methods

- For Weber, sociological concepts are ultimately just tools; what matters most is how the researcher uses them to understand some particular social phenomenon or social problem.
- Unlike Weber, Marx said “The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself.”

## Max Weber: Multidimensionality

- Webers multidimensional view of inequality:
- Marx emphasized the importance of class in understanding inequality; particularly ownership and control of the means of production.
- By contrast, Weber's view is that class, status, and party may each be independently important in shaping inequality and stratification in society; class, status, and party (=politics) are separate dimensions of inequality and stratification.

## Max Weber: Class

- According to Weber, class referred to economic position and its attendant effect on individuals **life chances**.
- Life chances: “The fundamental aspects of an individuals future possibilities that are shaped by class membership.”
- For Weber, class is not simply a matter of ownership versus non-ownership of capital or the means of production, but can involve any sort of “market situation.” Thus, class is ultimately “market situation.”
- One’s market situation may be complex and class is ultimately influenced by one’s definition as there many different kinds of markets (e.g., labor, land, stocks, etc.)

## Max Weber: Class

- In contrast to Marx, Weber allowed for more than two distinct social classes and even suggested that “the proletariat were really a highly differentiated group.”
- An individual's class position may sometimes be complicated because a worker is a laborer but she may also own capital (e.g., a pension, a savings account, a home, or even an inherited fortune)
- Social class: “group who share the same economically shaped life chances,” An objective economic fact.



# Max Weber: Class

- Persons may sometimes gain market advantage by engaging in social processes that limit the competition
- For example, educational credentials may sometimes serve as a means of a “market closure” (i.e., reducing the competition for certain jobs or occupations)
- Racist, sexist, and elitist attitudes may also serve as a means of reducing the competition for the benefit of some privileged groups

# Max Weber: Status

- Status: ranking based on social prestige
  - ▶ It is subjective; a sentiment in peoples minds.
  - ▶ Individuals, in particular status groups, tend to view themselves as a social community due to their similar lifestyles.
  - ▶ Status groups tend to be restrictive in an attempt to preserve their advantages in society.

## Max Weber: Politics

- Weber, like Marx, was interested in the relationship between stratification and political power.
- Weber, unlike Marx, argued that not all political phenomena or institutional outcomes in modern bureaucratic societies can be reduced to the control of a single class.
- Weber argued there were multiple classes in societies, and individuals also have multiple identities (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender, etc.) making his understanding of social stratification more flexible than Marx's.
- Status differences often undermine the development of class consciousness and class struggle.

## Max Weber: Final Remarks

- Class, status, and party tend to overlap; a person ranked favorably on one dimension will tend to be ranked favorably on the other dimensions as well
- However, status inconsistency refers to the extent to which a persons ranking on one dimension of inequality (class, status, and party) differs from her ranking on the other dimensions
- Persons in status incongruent positions may experience more stress and be more socially and politically active
- Class, status, and party can be rewards in themselves as well as resources to obtain more rewards