

projects. In social capital, they found a concept that focuses like a laser on precisely that idea.

— Christopher Prendergast

*See also* Cultural Capital

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## SOCIAL CLASS

Few concepts are more contested in sociological theory than the concept of "class." In contemporary sociology, there are scholars who assert that class is ceasing to be useful (Pahl 1989) or even more stridently proclaim the death of class. Yet at the same time, there are also sociologists who write books with titles such as *Bringing Class Back In* (McNall, Levine, and Fantasia 1991), *Reworking Class* (Hall 1997), *Repositioning Class* (Marshall 1997), and *Class Counts* (Wright 1997). In some theoretical traditions in sociology, most notably Marxism, class figures at the very core of the theoretical structure; in others, especially the tradition identified with Durkheim, only pale shadows of class appear.

In what follows, there is first an examination, in broad strokes, the different ways in which the word *class* is used

in sociological theory. This is followed by a more fine-grained exploration of the differences in the concept of class in the two most important traditions of class analysis, the Weberian and the Marxist.

## VARIETIES OF CLASS CONCEPTS

Many discussions of the concept of class confuse the terminological problem of how the *word* class is used within social theory with theoretical disputes about the proper definition and elaboration of the *concept* of class. While all uses of the word class in social theory invoke in one way or another the problem of understanding systems of economic inequality, different uses of the word are imbedded in very different theoretical agendas involving different kinds of questions and thus different sorts of concepts. One way of sorting out these alternative meanings is to examine what might be termed the anchoring questions within different agendas of class analysis. These are the questions that define the theoretical work the concept of class attempts to do. Five such anchoring questions in which the word *class* figures centrally in the answers are particularly important.

1. *Class as subjective location.* First, the word class sometimes figures in the answer to the question: "How do people, individually and collectively, *locate themselves and others* within a social structure of inequality?" Class is one of the possible answers to this question. In this case, the concept would be defined something like this: "Classes are social categories sharing subjectively salient attributes used by people to rank those categories within a system of economic stratification." With this definition of class, the actual content of these evaluative attributes will vary considerably across time and place. In some contexts, class-as-subjective-classification revolves around lifestyles, in others around occupations, and in still others around income levels. Sometimes the economic content of the subjective classification system is quite direct, as in income levels; in other contexts, it is more indirect, as in expressions such as "the respectable classes," the "dangerous classes." The number of classes also varies contextually depending on how the actors in a social situation themselves define class distinctions. Class is not defined by a set of objective properties of a person's social situation but by the shared subjective understandings of people about rankings within social inequality (e.g., Warner [1949]1960). Class, in this sense of the word, is contrasted to other forms of salient evaluation—religion, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and so on—that may have economic dimensions but that are not centrally defined in economic terms.

2. *Class as objective position within distributions.* Second, class is often central to the question, "How are people *objectively located* in distributions of material inequality." In this case, class is defined in terms of material

standards of living, usually indexed by income or, possibly, wealth. Class, in this agenda, is a *gradational* concept; the standard image is of rungs on a ladder, and the names for locations are accordingly such things as upper class, upper middle class, middle class, lower middle class, lower class, underclass. This is the concept of class that figures most prominently in popular discourse, at least in countries like the United States without a strong working-class political tradition. When American politicians call for “middle-class tax cuts” what they characteristically mean is tax cuts for people in the middle of the income distribution. Subjective aspects of the location of people within systems of stratification may still be important in sociological investigations using this concept of class, but the word class itself is being used to capture objective properties of economic inequality, not simply the subjective classifications. Class, in this context, is contrasted with other ways that people are objectively located within social structures—for example, by their citizenship status, their power, or their subjection to institutionalized forms of ascriptive discrimination.

3. *Class as the relational explanation of economic life chance.* Third, class may be offered as part of the answer to the question, “What *explains* inequalities in economically defined life chances and material standards of living of individuals and families?” This is a more complex and demanding question than the first two, for here the issue is not simply descriptively locating people within some kind of system of stratification—either subjectively or objectively—but identifying certain causal mechanisms that help determine salient features of that system. When class is used to explain inequality, typically, the concept is not defined primarily by subjectively salient attributes of a social location but, rather, by *the relationship of people to income-generating resources* or assets of various sorts. Class thus becomes a *relational* rather than simply *gradational* concept. This concept of class is characteristic of both the Weberian and Marxist traditions of social theory. Class, in this usage, is contrasted to the many other determinants of a person’s life chances—for example, geographical location, forms of discrimination anchored in ascriptive characteristics like race or gender, or genetic endowments. Location, discrimination, and genetic endowments may, of course, still figure in the analysis of class—they may, for example, play an important role in explaining why different sorts of people end up in different classes—but the definition of class as such centers on how people are linked to those income-generating assets.

4. *Class as a dimension of historical variation in systems of inequality.* Fourth, class figures in answers to the question, “How should we characterize and explain the variations across history in the social organization of inequalities?” This question implies the need for a

macrolevel concept rather than simply a microlevel concept capturing the causal processes of individual lives, and it requires a concept that allows for macrolevel variations across time and place. This question is also important in both the Marxist and Weberian traditions, but as we will see later, here the two traditions have quite different answers. Within the Marxist tradition, the most salient aspect of historical variation in inequality is the ways in which economic systems vary in the manner in which an economic surplus is produced and appropriated, and classes are therefore defined with respect to the mechanisms of surplus extraction. For Weber, in contrast, the central problem of historical variation is the degree of rationalization (in this context, the extent to which inequalities are organized in such a way that the actors within those inequalities can act in precise, calculable ways) of different dimensions of inequality. This underwrites a conceptual space in which, on one hand, class and status are contrasted as distinct forms of inequality and, on the other hand, class is contrasted with nonrationalized ways through which individual life chances are shaped.

5. *Class as a foundation of economic oppression and exploitation.* Finally, class plays a central role in answering the question, “What sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate economic oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies?” This is the most contentious question, for it implies not simply an explanatory agenda about the mechanisms that generate economic inequalities but a normative judgment about those inequalities—they are forms of oppression and exploitation—and a normative vision of the transformation of those inequalities. This is the distinctively Marxist question, and it suggests a concept of class laden with normative content. It supports a concept of class that is not simply defined in terms of the social relations to economic resources but that also figures centrally in a political project of emancipatory social change.

Different theoretical approaches to class analysis build their concepts of class to help answer different clusters of these questions. Figure 1 indicates the array of central questions linked to different approaches to class analysis. Weber’s work revolves around the third and fourth questions, with the fourth question concerning forms of historical variation in social organization of inequalities providing the anchor for his understanding of class. The narrower question about explaining individual life chances gets its specific meaning from its relationship to this broader historical question. Michael Mann’s work on class, especially in his multivolume study of *The Sources of Social Power* (1993) is, like Weber’s, also centered on the fourth question. John Goldthorpe’s (1980) class analysis centers firmly on the third question. While his work is often characterized as having a Weberian inflection, his categories are elaborated strictly in terms of the requirements of describing and explaining economic life chances, not long-term historical

variations in systems of inequality. For Pierre Bourdieu, class analysis is anchored in a more open-ended version of the third question. Where he differs from Weber and other Weber-inspired class analysts is in expanding the idea of life chances to include a variety of noneconomic aspects of opportunity (e.g., cultural opportunities of various sorts) and expanding the kinds of resources relevant to explaining those life chances from narrowly economic resources to a range of cultural and social resources (called “cultural capital” and “social capital”). “Class” for Bourdieu (1984), therefore, is a much more expansive concept, covering all inequalities in opportunities (life chances) that can be attributed to socially determined inequalities of resources of whatever sort. Finally, class analysis in the Marxist tradition is anchored in the fifth question concerning the challenge to systems of economic oppression and exploitation. The questions about historical variation and individual life chances

are also important, but they are posed within the parameters of the problem of emancipatory transformations.

The rest of this essay examines in some detail how these questions are played out in the Weberian and Marxist traditions, the two most important traditions of class analysis in sociological theory. The concepts of class in these two theoretical traditions share much in common: They both reject simple gradational definitions of class; they are both anchored in the social relations that link people to economic resources of various sorts; they both see these social relations as affecting the material interests of actors; and, accordingly, they see class relations as the potential basis for solidarities and conflict. Yet they also differ in certain fundamental ways. The core of the difference is captured by the favorite buzzwords of each theoretical tradition: *life chances* for Weberians, and *exploitation* for Marxists. This difference, in turn, reflects

#### Anchoring questions

	1. subjective location	2. distributional location	3. life chances	4. historical variation	5. emancipation
Karl Marx	*	*	**	**	***
Max Weber	*	*	**	***	
Michael Mann	*	*	*	***	
John Goldthorpe	*	*	***		
Pierre Bourdieu	*	*	***		
popular usage	*	***	*		
Lloyd Warner	***	*	*		

\*\*\* primary anchoring question for concept of class

\*\* secondary anchoring question

\* additional questions engaged with concept of class, but not central to the definition

The questions:

1. “How do people, individually and collectively, *locate themselves and others* within a social structure of inequality?”
2. “How are people *objectively located* in distributions of material inequality?”
3. “What *explains* inequalities in economically defined life chances and material standards of living?”
4. “How should we characterize and explain the variations across history in the social organization of inequalities?”
5. “What sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate economic oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies?”

**Figure 1** Anchoring Questions in Different Traditions of Class Analysis

the location of class analysis within their broader theoretical agendas.

### THE WEBERIAN CONCEPT: CLASS AS MARKET-DETERMINED LIFE CHANCES

What has become the Weber-inspired tradition of class analysis is largely based on Weber's few explicit, but fragmentary, conceptual analyses of class. In *Economy and Society* ([1924]1978), Weber writes:

We may speak of a "class" when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets. This is "class situation."

It is the most elemental economic fact that the way in which the disposition over material property is distributed among a plurality of people, meeting competitively in the market for the purpose of exchange, in itself creates specific life chances. . . .

But always this is the generic connotation of the concept of class: that the kind of chance in the *market* is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate. Class situation is, in this sense, ultimately market situation. (pp. 927–28)

In short, the kind and quantity of resources you own affects your opportunities for income in market exchanges. "Opportunity" is a description of the feasible set individuals face, the trade-offs they encounter in deciding what to do. Owning means of production (the capitalist class) gives a person different alternatives from owning skills and credentials (the "middle" class), and both are different from simply owning unskilled labor power (the working class). Furthermore, in a market economy, access to market-derived income affects the broader array of life experiences and opportunities for oneself and one's children. The study of the life chances of children based on parent's market capacity is thus an integral part of the Weberian agenda of class analysis.

This definition of class in terms of market-determined life chances is clearly linked to the third question posed above: "What *explains* inequalities in economically defined life chances and material standards of living?" Weber's answer is, In capitalist societies, the material resources one brings to market exchanges explain such inequalities in life chances. But even more deeply, Weber's conceptualization of class is anchored in the fourth question, the question of how to characterize and explain historical variation in the social organization of inequality. Two issues are especially salient here: first, the historical variation in the articulation

of class and status and, second, the broad historical problem in understanding the rationalization of social processes.

Class is part of a broader multidimensional schema of stratification in Weber in which the most central contrast is between "class" and "status" (as well as "party"). Status groups are defined within the sphere of communal interaction (or what Weber calls the "social order") and always imply some level of identity in the sense of some recognized estimation of *honor*, either positive or negative. A status group cannot exist without its members being in some way conscious of being members of the group.

This conceptual contrast between class and status for Weber is not primarily a question of the *motives* of actors: It is not that status groups are derived from purely symbolic motives and class categories are derived from material interests. Although people care about status categories in part because of their importance for symbolic ideal interests, class positions also entail such symbolic interests, and both status and class are implicated in the pursuit of material interests. Rather than motives, the central contrast between class and status is the nature of the mechanisms through which class and status shape inequalities of the material and symbolic conditions of people's lives. Class affects material well-being directly through the kinds of economic assets people bring to market exchanges. Status affects material well-being indirectly, through the ways that categories of social honor underwrite various coercive mechanisms that are in accord with the degree of monopolization of ideal and material goods or opportunities to obtain them.

The contrast between class and status provides one of the axes of Weber's analysis of historical variation in systems of inequality. One of the central reasons that capitalist societies are societies within which class becomes the predominant basis of stratification is precisely because capitalism fosters continual technical and economic transformation.

Weber's concept of class is also closely linked to his theoretical preoccupation with the problem of historical variation in the process of rationalization of social life. The problem of class for Weber is primarily situated within one particular form of rationalization: the *objective instrumental* rationalization of social order. In all societies, the ways people gain access to and use material resources is governed by rules that are objectively embodied in the institutional settings within which they live. When the rules allocate resources to people on the basis of ascriptive characteristics and when the use of those material resources is governed by tradition rather than by the result of a calculative weighing of alternatives, then economic interactions take place under *nonrationalized* conditions. When those rules enable people to make precise calculations about alternative uses of those resources and discipline people to use those resources in more rather than less efficient ways

on the basis of those calculations, those rules can be described as “rationalized.” This occurs, in Weber’s analysis, when market relations have the most pervasive influence on economic interactions (i.e., in fully developed capitalism). His definition of classes in terms of the economic opportunities people face *in the market*, then, is simultaneously a definition of classes in terms of rationalized economic interactions. Class, in these terms, assumes its central sociological meaning to Weber as a description of the way people are related to the material conditions of life under conditions in which their economic interactions are regulated in a maximally rationalized manner. Weber is, fundamentally, less interested in the problem of the material deprivations and advantages of different categories of people as such, or in the collective struggles that might spring from those advantages and disadvantages, than he is in the underlying normative order and cognitive practices—instrumental rationality—embodied in the social interactions that generates these life chances. “Class,” in these terms, is part of the answer to a broad question about historical variations in the degree and forms of rationalization of social life in general, and the social organization of inequality in particular.

### THE MARXIST CONCEPT: CLASS AS EXPLOITATION

The pivotal question that anchors the Marxist conceptualization of class is the question of human emancipation: “What sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate economic oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies?” The starting point for Marxist class analysis is a stark observation: The world in which we live involves a juxtaposition of extraordinary prosperity and enhanced potentials for human creativity and fulfillment along with continuing human misery and thwarted lives. The central task of the theory is to demonstrate first, that poverty in the midst of plenty is not somehow an inevitable consequence of the laws of nature but, rather, the result of the specific design of our social institutions and, second, that these institutions can be transformed in such a way as to eliminate such socially unnecessary suffering. The concept of class, then, in the first instance is meant to help answer this normatively laden question.

The specific strategy in the Marxist tradition for answering the normative question leads directly to the question about historical variation. The normative question asks what needs transforming for human emancipation to occur. The theory of history in Marx—generally called “historical materialism”—lays out an account of the historical dynamics that make such transformations possible and, in the more deterministic version of the theory, inevitable. Again, the concept of class figures centrally in this theory of historical development.

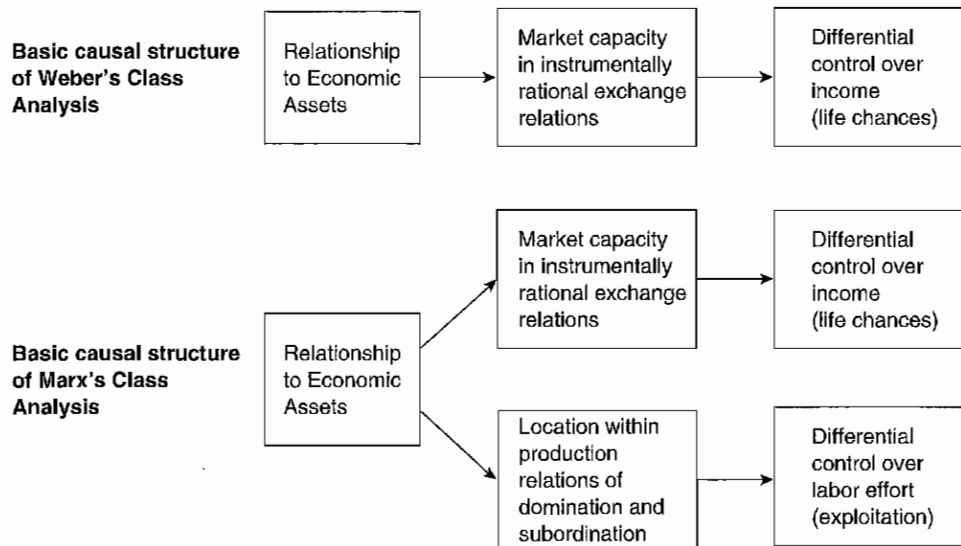
The most distinctive feature of the concept of class elaborated within Marxism to contribute to the answer of these two questions is the idea of *exploitation*. Marx shares with Weber the central idea that classes should be defined in terms of the social relations that link people to the central resources that are economically relevant to production. And like Weber, Marx sees these relations as having a systematic impact on the material well-being of people; both “exploitation” and “life chances” identify inequalities in material well-being generated by inequalities in access to resources of various sorts. Thus, both concepts point to conflicts of interest over the *distribution* of the assets themselves. What exploitation adds to this is a claim that conflicts of interest between classes are generated not simply by what people *have* but also by what people *do with what they have*. The concept of exploitation, therefore, points our attention to conflicts within *production*, not simply conflicts in the *market*.

Exploitation is a complex and challenging concept. In classical Marxism, this concept was elaborated in terms of a specific conceptual framework for understanding capitalist economies, the “labor theory of value.” In terms of sociological theory and research, however, the labor theory of value has never figured very prominently, even among sociologists working in the Marxist tradition. And in any case, the concept of exploitation and its relevance for class analysis does not depend on the labor theory of value.

The concept of exploitation designates a particular form of interdependence of the material interests of people—namely, a situation that satisfies three criteria:

1. *The inverse interdependent welfare principle:* The material welfare of exploiters causally depends on the material deprivations of the exploited.
2. *The exclusion principle:* This inverse interdependence of welfares of exploiters and exploited depends on the exclusion of the exploited from access to certain productive resources.
3. *The appropriation principle:* Exclusion generates material advantage to exploiters because it enables them to appropriate the labor effort of the exploited.

Exploitation is thus a diagnosis of the process through which the inequalities in incomes are generated by inequalities in rights and powers over productive resources: The inequalities occur, in part at least, through the ways in which exploiters, by virtue of their exclusionary rights and powers over resources, are able to appropriate surplus generated by the effort of the exploited. If the first two of these principles are present, but not the third, economic oppression may exist, but not exploitation. The crucial difference is that in *nonexploitative* economic oppression, the privileged social category does not itself *need* the excluded category. While their welfare does depend on exclusion, there



**Figure 2** Core Elements in Weber's and Marx's Class Analysis

Source: Adapted and simplified from Wright (1997:34).

is no ongoing interdependence of their activities. In the case of exploitation, the exploiters actively need the exploited: Exploiters depend on the effort of the exploited for their own welfare.

This conceptualization of exploitation underwrites an essentially polarized conception of class relations in which, in capitalist societies, the two fundamental classes are capitalists and workers. Capitalists, by virtue of their ownership and control of the means of production, are able to appropriate the laboring effort of workers embodied in the surplus produced through the use of those means of production. The Marxist tradition of class analysis, however, also contains a variety of strategies for elaborating more concrete class concepts that allow for much more complex maps of class structures in which managers, professionals, and the self-employed are structurally differentiated from capitalists and workers. For example, Wright (1985, 1997) argues that managers in capitalist firms constitute a type of "contradictory location within class relations" in the sense of having the relational properties of both capitalists and workers.

The exploitation-centered concept of class provides a framework for linking the microlevel question about explaining individual material conditions and interests with the macrolevel question about historical variation and the normative question about emancipatory transformation. What needs changing in capitalism is a system of property relations that confers power on capitalists and enables them to exploit and oppress others. This social organization of class relations is not an expression of a natural law but is one form in a systematic pattern of historical variation. And

the life experiences and interests of individuals living within these relations generate patterns of conflict that have the potential of pushing these historical variations in ways that accomplish the emancipatory transformation.

## THE TWO TRADITIONS COMPARED

The contrast between Marxist and Weberian frameworks of class analysis is illustrated in Figure 2. Both Marxist and Weberian class analysis differ sharply from simple gradational accounts of class in which class is itself directly identified within inequalities in income since both begin with the problem of the social relations that determine the access of people to economic resources. In a sense, therefore, Marxist and Weberian definitions of class in capitalist society share much the same *operational* criteria for class structure within capitalist societies. Where they differ is in the theoretical elaboration and specification of the implications of this common set of criteria: The Marxist model sees two causal paths being systematically generated by these relations—one operating through market exchanges and the other through the process of production itself—the Weberian model traces only one causal path, and the Marxist model elaborates the mechanisms of these causal paths in terms of exploitation as well as bargaining capacity within exchange; the Weberian model only deals with the latter of these. In a sense, then, the Weberian strategy of class analysis is contained within the Marxist model.

While the Marxist concept of class may be particularly suited to the distinctively Marxist question about potential

emancipatory transformations, is it still sociologically useful if one rejects that question? There are a number of reasons why elaborating the concept of class in terms of exploitation has theoretical payoffs beyond the specific normative agenda of Marxist class analysis itself:

1. *Linking exchange and production.* The Marxist logic of class analysis affirms the intimate link between the way in which social relations are organized within exchange and within production. This is a substantive, not definitional, point: The social relations that organize the rights and powers of individuals with respect to productive resources systematically shapes their location both within exchange relations and within the process of production itself.

2. *Conflict.* One of the standard claims about Marxist class analysis is that it foregrounds conflict within class relations. Indeed, a conventional way of describing Marxism in sociological textbooks is to see it as a variety of "conflict theory." This characterization, however, is not quite precise enough, for conflict is certainly a prominent feature of Weberian views of class as well. The distinctive feature of the Marxist account of class relations in these terms is not simply that it gives prominence to class conflict but that it understands conflict as generated by *inherent properties* of those relations rather than simply contingent factors.

3. *Power.* At the very core of the Marxist construction of class analysis is not simply the claim that class relations generate deeply antagonistic interests but that they also give people in subordinate class locations forms of power with which to struggle for their interests. Since exploitation rests on the extraction of labor effort and since people always retain some measure of control over their own effort, they always confront their exploiters with capacities to resist exploitation. This is a crucial form of power reflected in the complex counterstrategies exploiting classes are forced to adopt through the elaboration of instruments of supervision, surveillance, monitoring, and sanctioning.

4. *Coercion and consent.* Marxist class analysis contains the rudiments of what might be termed an *endogenous* theory of the formation of consent. The argument is basically this: The extraction of labor effort in systems of exploitation is costly for exploiting classes because of the inherent capacity of people to resist their own exploitation. Purely coercively backed systems of exploitation will often tend to be suboptimal since under many conditions it is too easy for workers to withhold diligent performance of labor effort. Exploiting classes will therefore have a tendency to seek ways of reducing those costs. One of the ways of reducing the overhead costs of extracting labor effort is to do things that elicit the active consent of the exploited. These range from the development of internal labor markets that strengthen the identification and loyalty of workers to the firms in which they work

to the support for ideological positions that proclaim the practical and moral desirability of capitalist institutions. Such consent-producing practices, however, also have costs attached to them, and thus systems of exploitation can be seen as always involving trade-offs between coercion and consent as mechanisms for extracting labor effort.

5. *Historical/comparative analysis.* As originally conceived, Marxist class analysis was an integral part of a sweeping theory of the epochal structure and historical trajectory of social change. But even if one rejects historical materialism, the Marxist exploitation-centered strategy of class analysis still provides a rich menu of concepts for historical and comparative analysis. Different kinds of class relations are defined by the specific mechanisms through which exploitation is accomplished, and these differences in turn imply different problems faced by exploiting classes for the reproduction of their class advantage and different opportunities for exploited classes to resist. Variations in these mechanisms and in the specific ways in which they are combined in concrete societies provide an analytically powerful road map for comparative research. Weber's class concept also figures in an account of historical variation, and one of its strengths is the way in which his conceptual menu draws attention to the interplay of class and status and to historical variations in the forms of rationality governing life chances. These are not issues brought into focus by the Marxist concept of class. On the other hand, the Weberian concept, by marginalizing the problem of exploitation, fails to bring to center stage the historical variability in forms of conflict linked to the central mechanisms of extraction and control over the social surplus.

— Erik Olin Wright

*See also* Bourdieu, Pierre; Capitalism; Conflict Theory; Dahrendorf, Ralf; Marx, Karl; Political Economy; Status Relations; Stratification; Weber, Max; Wright, Erik Olin

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## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

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The argument that *social constructionism* proposes, with more or less insistence, about objects of social and cultural inquiry is in some sense the "other" to essentialisms of all sorts. To wit: Things—including even nature—are not simply given, revealed, fully determined, and as such, unalterable. Rather, things are made, and made up, in and through diverse social and cultural processes, practices, and actions. Much of the force of social constructionist argument is in this irony—its proposal that some assumedly taken-for-granted phenomenon not only could be otherwise but that its "local" form has a history that can be written to show a collection of interests, actions, and flows of power that have created and that sustain it. It seeks typically to show how some arguably social or cultural thing came about, how it is maintained, and, often by implication, how it might be changed. Social constructionist argument offers critique as a resource against all analyses that say, in effect, "This simply is the way things are and/or always have been." This emphasis on critique becomes particularly pronounced

in work where the line between constructionism and *deconstruction* blurs.

## BERGER AND LUCKMANN'S SOCIOLOGY

In *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) build their argument on "classic roots" of Western sociology: the work of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Schütz, and Mead. But classic roots for some are minor literatures for others, and Berger and Luckmann intended their book as a corrective to what they saw as an overemphasis on "purely structural" argument in the then-popular versions of structural-functionalism in U.S. sociology. They "correct" by forefronting acting and interacting human(ist) beings as the primary agents in the constitution, maintenance, and change of the social.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) contend that "reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which this occurs" (p. 1). They treat this project as one equally relevant to academic philosophy and to everyday life, but their constructionism is distinct from philosophical argument and analysis. Rather than asking ontological and epistemological questions such as "What is real?" and "How is one to know?," Berger and Luckmann shift attention to more specifically pragmatic considerations appropriate to an empirical, by which they mean "scientific," sociology. Central among these are the following: What does a collection of people located at a particular time and in a particular place take to be "real," and how is this construction to be understood as something they do? How are their conceptions linked to relevant social and historical contexts? How are differences in social realities/constructions/worlds across different collections of people understood as implicating those varying contexts? The very existence of difference in such social realities and contexts, they argue, underwrites the need for studying the *social processes* through which such difference has come about and by which it is maintained as well as changed. They assert that the sociology of knowledge "must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'" (p. 3).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) credit Marx with the clearest statement of the social construction of reality argument in that "man's consciousness is determined by his social being," specifically through the human activity of laboring together and the social relationships that emerge and are inextricable from that labor. For them, Marx's famous concepts of substructure and superstructure are seen most accurately "as, respectively, human activity and the world produced by that activity" (p. 6).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) propose their theory as a major redefinition of the sociology of knowledge, making