

century, with the aim of documenting the levels of poverty among urban dwellers. Charles Booth's survey of the London poor, conducted at the turn of the century, is the best known of these (Booth, 1892-7). It was followed by many more, which gradually became more technically sophisticated in both the use of sampling and inferential STATISTICS to generalize the results to the wider populations from which the samples were drawn, and the use of multivariate techniques to establish the magnitudes of relationships between the factors investigated, such as the influence of age and sex on voting. In Britain, the state too began to undertake wide-ranging social surveys, with what is now the Social Survey Division of OPCS emerging out of the Wartime Social Survey set up during World War II.

Criticisms of social statistics are of two sorts. First, there are technical criticisms of the quality of the data recorded and of the way in which it is presented. For example, should measures of people's incomes be based on their tax returns if there is a substantial black economy of undeclared earnings, and should average income be presented using the mean or the median?

Second, there are criticisms that spurious scientific or objective status is accorded to social statistics simply because they are numbers (Irvine, Miles and Evans, 1979). Such criticisms contend that just because social statistics are quantitative, it must not be forgotten that they are social products, influenced by the production methods and interests of their producers like any other social creation. Numerical information is no more neutral and free from political opinion than more qualitative accounts of the social world.

The lesson to be learned from these criticisms is that it is easy to lie with social statistics (Huff, 1954) and they must therefore be assessed carefully by asking how the features of the social world that they record were defined and measured.

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social stratification In all complex societies, the total stock of valued resources is distributed unequally, with the most privileged individuals or families enjoying a disproportionate amount of property, power or prestige. Although it might be possible to construct an exhaustive rank-ordering of individuals based on their control over these resources, the approach taken by most scholars is to identify a set of 'social classes' or 'strata' that reflect the major cleavages in the population. The task of stratification research is to specify the shape and contours of these social groupings, to describe the processes by which individuals are allocated into different social outcomes (see SOCIAL MOBILITY) and to uncover the institutional mechanisms by which social inequalities are generated and maintained.

Forms of stratification

It has been conventional among contemporary theorists to distinguish between modern 'class systems' and the 'estates' or 'castes' originally found in advanced agrarian societies (see Mayer and Buckley, 1970; Svalastoga, 1965). The table defines these forms of stratification in terms of their underlying assets (column 1), their most important social groupings (column 2) and the structure of their mobility opportunities (column 3). It should be kept in mind, of course, that the foregoing systems are best seen as 'ideal types' rather than descriptions of existing societies (Weber, 1921-2). Indeed, the stratification systems of human societies are complex and multidimensional, if only because the institutional forms of their past tend to 'live on' in conjunction with new and emerging forms (see Wright, 1985, for a related typology; also, see Lenski, 1966; Runciman, 1974).

The first line in the table lists some of the basic principles underlying ethnic castes (see CASTE). As indicated in column 1, the castes of India can be ranked on a continuum of ethnic purity, with the highest positions in the system reserved for those castes which prohibit activities or behaviours that are seen as 'polluting' (such as eating meat, scavenging). In its ideal-typical form, a caste system does *not* allow for individual mobility of any kind (see line 1, column 3); the newborn child is

Principal assets, major strata and mobility process for three forms of social stratification

Stratification system	Principal assets (1)	Major strata (2)	Mobility process (3)
1 Caste system	Ethnic purity	Castes	Hereditary
2 Feudal system	Land and labour power	Kings, lords and serfs	Hereditary
3 Class system	Means of production	Capitalists and workers	Competitive

permanently assigned to the caste affiliation of its parents. Although a caste system of this form is often seen as the 'limiting case' of stratification, it should be noted that feudal systems (see FEUDALISM) are also based on a rigid system of quasi-hereditary groups (see line 2, column 3). The distinctive feature of feudalism is the institution of personal bondage (Bloch, 1940); that is, serfs were obliged to live on a manor and pay rents of various kinds (for instance, 'corvée labour'), since the feudal lord held the legal rights to their labour power. If a serf took flight to the city, this was nothing less than a form of theft; the serf was stealing that portion of his labour power which was owned by his lord (Wright, 1985, p. 78). It might be said, then, that 'labour power' was one of the principal assets in a feudal system (see line 2, column 1).

The most striking development of the modern era has been the rise of egalitarian ideologies (see line 3). This can be seen, for example, in the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where the ideals of the Enlightenment were directed against the privileges of rank and the political power of the aristocracy. In the end, these struggles eliminated the last residues of feudal privilege, but they also made it possible for new forms of inequality and stratification to emerge. It is usually argued that a 'class system' developed in the early industrial period, with the major strata in this system being defined in largely economic terms. There is, of course, considerable controversy over the contours and boundaries of these economic classes (see below). As indicated in line 3, a simple Marxian model might focus on the cleavage between capitalists and workers, whereas other models represent the class structure as a continuous gradation of 'monetary wealth and income' (Mayer and Buckley, 1970, p. 15). The important point, however, is that these positions in a class system are allocated in a *formally* competi-

tive fashion (see line 3, column 3). Although the results from contemporary surveys indicate that occupations are frequently 'passed on' from parents to children (Goldthorpe, 1980), this reflects the operation of indirect mechanisms of inheritance (socialization, on-the-job training and so on) rather than legal sanctions that directly prohibit mobility.

Sources of stratification

The foregoing sketch makes it clear that a range of stratification systems has emerged over the course of human history. The question that naturally arises, then, is whether some form of stratification is an inevitable feature of human societies. In addressing this question, it is useful to begin with the functional analysis of Davis and Moore (1945), since here we find an explicit effort to understand 'the universal necessity which calls forth stratification in any social system' (p. 242; also see Davis, 1953; Moore, 1963). The starting point for their approach is the premise that all societies must devise some means of motivating their most competent workers to fill the important and difficult occupations. This 'motivational problem' might be addressed in a variety of ways, but the simplest solution is to fashion a hierarchy of rewards (such as prestige, property, power) that privileges the incumbents of functionally important positions. As noted by Davis and Moore (1945, p. 243), this amounts to setting up a system of institutionalized inequality (a 'stratification system'), with the occupational structure serving as a conduit through which unequal rewards and perquisites are disbursed. It follows that the stratification system might be seen as an 'unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons' (ibid.).

This approach has been criticized for neglecting the 'power element' in stratification systems (Wrong, 1959, p. 774; also see Huaco, 1966, for a

comprehensive review). It has long been argued that Davis and Moore failed 'to observe that . . . incumbents [of functionally important positions] have the power not only to insist on payment of expected rewards but to demand even larger ones' (Wrong, 1959, p. 774; also see Dahrendorf, 1957). In this regard, the stratification system might be seen as self-reproducing: the workers in important positions can use their power to influence the distribution of resources and to preserve or extend their own privileges. It would be difficult, for instance, to account fully for the advantages of feudal lords without referring to their ability to *enforce* their claims through moral, legal or economic sanctions. According to this line of reasoning, the distribution of rewards not only reflects the 'latent needs' of the larger society, but also the balance of power among competing groups and their members (Collins, 1975).

The structure of modern stratification

The recent history of stratification theorizing is in large part a history of debates about the contours of inequality in advanced industrial societies. Although these debates have been waged on a wide variety of fronts, it will suffice for our purposes to distinguish between 'Marxist' and 'Weberian' models of inequality. It is probably fair to say that most contemporary theorists can trace their intellectual roots to some combination of these two traditions.

Marxists and neo-Marxists The debates within the Marxist and neo-Marxist camps have been especially contentious, not only because they are frequently embedded in wider political disputes, but also because the discussion of class within *Capital* (Marx, 1894) turns out to be fragmentary and unsystematic. At the end of the third volume of *Capital*, we find the now-famous fragment on 'the classes' (Marx, 1894, pp. 885-6), but this breaks off at just that point where Marx appeared ready to advance a formal definition of the term. It is clear, nonetheless, that his abstract model of capitalism was resolutely dichotomous, with the conflict between capitalists and workers constituting the driving force behind further social development. This simple two-class model was designed to capture the 'developmental tendencies' of capitalism; however, whenever Marx carried out concrete analyses of existing capitalist systems, he recognized that the class structure was complicated by

the persistence of transitional classes (such as landowners), quasi-class groupings (peasants), and class fragments (the 'lumpenproletariat'). It was only with the progressive maturation of capitalism that Marx expected these complications to disappear as the 'centrifugal forces of class struggle and crisis flung all *dritte Personen* to one camp or the other' (Parkin, 1979, p. 16).

The recent history of modern capitalism suggests that the class structure will not evolve in such a precise and tidy fashion. Of course, the old middle class of artisans and shopkeepers has declined in relative size, but at the same time a 'new middle class' of managers, professionals and non-manual workers has expanded to occupy the newly vacated space. The last 50 years of neo-Marxist theorizing might be seen as the 'intellectual fall-out' from this development, with some commentators seeking to minimize its implications, and others putting forward a revised mapping of the class structure that accommodates the new middle class in explicit terms. Within the former camp, the principal tendency is to claim that the lower sectors of the new middle class are in the process of being proletarianized, since 'capital subjects [non-manual labour] . . . to the forms of rationalization characteristic of the capitalist mode of production' (Braverman 1974, p. 408). This line of reasoning suggests that the working class may gradually expand in numerical size and thereby regain its earlier power. At the other end of the continuum, Poulantzas (1974) has argued that most members of the new intermediate stratum fall *outside* the working class proper, since they are engaged in 'unproductive labour' of various kinds (see Wright, 1985, for a comprehensive review of these positions).

Weberians and neo-Weberians The rise of the 'new middle class' turns out to be less problematic for scholars working within a Weberian framework. In fact, the class model advanced by Weber suggests a *multiplicity* of class cleavages, because it equates the economic class of workers with their 'market situation' (Weber, 1921-2, pp. 926-40). This model implies that wealthy property-owners are in a privileged class situation; indeed, members of this class can outbid workers for valued goods in the commodity market, and they can also convert their wealth to capital and thereby monopolize entrepreneurial opportunities. However, Weber emphasized that skilled workers are also privileged under modern capitalism, since the services that they

provide are in high demand on the labour market. The end result, then, is that a new middle class of skilled workers intervenes between the 'positively privileged' capitalist class and the 'negatively privileged' mass of unskilled labourers (*ibid.*, pp. 927–8). At the same time, the stratification system is further complicated by the existence of *status groupings*, which Weber saw as forms of social affiliation that often competed with class-based forms of organization. Although an economic class is merely an aggregate of individuals in a similar market situation, Weber defined a status grouping as a community of individuals who share a 'style of life' and interact as status equals (the nobility, an ethnic caste, and so on). Under some circumstances, the boundaries of a status grouping might be determined by purely economic criteria, yet Weber notes that 'status honor need not necessarily be linked with a class situation' (*ibid.*, p. 932). The *nouveaux riches*, for example, are never immediately accepted into 'high society', even when their wealth clearly places them in the uppermost economic class (pp. 936–7). The implication, then, is that the class and status systems are potentially independent forms of stratification.

This approach was elaborated and extended by sociologists seeking to understand the 'American form' of stratification. During the postwar decades, the Marxist model of class was typically dismissed by American sociologists as overly simplistic and one-dimensional, whereas the Weberian model was seen as properly distinguishing between the numerous variables which Marx had conflated in his definition of class (see, for instance, Barber, 1968). In the most extreme versions of this approach, the dimensions identified by Weber were disaggregated into a multiplicity of stratification variables (such as income, education, ethnicity), and it was then shown that the correlations between these variables were weak enough to generate various forms of 'status inconsistency' (that is, a poorly-educated millionaire, a black doctor, and so on). The overall picture that emerged suggested a 'pluralistic model' of stratification; that is, the class system was represented as intrinsically multidimensional, with a host of cross-cutting affiliations producing a complex patchwork of internal class cleavages. It should be noted that the competing forces of ETHNICITY and GENDER appear to be especially important in undermining class-based forms of solidarity (see Hechter, 1975; Firestone, 1970). Indeed, given the rise of feminist and

nationalist movements throughout the modern world, it could well be argued that ethnic and gender-based groups have become *more* effective than economic classes in mobilizing their members to pursue collective goals.

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social structure Although this is one of the most important concepts in the social sciences, since most social scientists do not define terms precisely it is often difficult to distinguish it in its use from such alternative terms as social organization and social system. The first explicit use of the term social structure was probably made by Herbert Spencer (1858). However, the concept of social structure dates to a much earlier period and is central to Ibn Khaldun in his book *Muqadimah* written in the late fourteenth century.

Structure may be defined as an organized body of mutually connected parts. In social structure the parts are relationships among persons and the organized body of the parts may be considered to be coincident with the society as a whole. Also implicit in the concept of social structure is that there is some degree of permanence over time. Here, emphasis will be placed on theorists whose professional careers began or ended in the twentieth century. However, twentieth-century thought is indebted to the thinking of persons who lived in previous centuries. Their contributions cannot be ignored. In what follows I shall focus on two basic questions about the nature of social structure that have been of paramount importance to social