

## CLASS, STATUS, AND COMMAND: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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Class is one of the central concepts in sociological analysis. Indeed, it has sometimes been seen as the defining characteristic of a sociological analysis.<sup>1</sup> Sociologists, popular critics have claimed, ‘reduce everything to class’. There is a degree of truth in this claim, though many sociologists have recently alleged the ‘death of class’ (Clark and Lipset 1991). Despite this fascination, however, class is a remarkably confused term, and at least two broad conceptions of class have characterised sociological work. On the one hand, class has been seen as referring to economic divisions and interests, while on the other hand it has been seen as referring to cultural distinctions. In this paper, I will examine these two traditions of research, tracing the complex relationship between economic relations and cultural relations in social stratification. I will argue that the work of Max Weber provides the essential starting point in this endeavour, and that the works of Karl Marx and Talcott Parsons offer complementary extensions to the Weberian framework. I will also show that there is a third dimension of stratification. This is not to be found in the concepts of ‘party’ or ‘power’, as is often argued, but in the concept of authority. I will show that the tradition of elite theory, rooted in the analysis of authority relations, must be placed alongside the traditions of Marx and Parsons to point in the correct direction for the development of a comprehensive theory of social stratification.

### *Class, Status, and Command Relations*

The claim of Marx and Engels (1848) that ‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’ provides the starting point for the foundation statements of class analysis. Despite the failure of Marx to set out a complete and systematic statement on the subject of class, a compelling picture of class relations can be derived from his work, and it was this picture that was the critical touchstone for Max Weber’s explanation of social stratification and for much subsequent theoretical and empirical work.

Weber recognised the power of Marx’s argument and saw it as a useful guide to historical change, but he rejected the determinism and inevitability with which it had come to be associated in the hands of Engels and Orthodox Marxism. Weber sought to transform the Marxian view into a historical hypothesis that could be tested for its relevance to particular historical circumstances. To this end, he sought to clarify the concepts from which Marx built his argument, attempting to distinguish analytically many things that

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on Scott (1996a) and on the General Commentary in Scott (1996b).

he felt Marx had combined into the single, all-encompassing concept of 'class'. Most particularly, he developed his famous delineation of 'class', 'status' and 'party', to which he added an analysis of authority relations within the state that defined ruling and subject social strata (Weber 1914 and 1920). Weber's own work, like that of Marx, was partial and incomplete, yet it has proved remarkably influential. 'Class' in Weber's usage, was to be narrowed down to the economic sphere of property and the market, taking it close to Marx's own core usage. 'Status', on the other hand, was to designate the differentiation of groups in the 'social' sphere of communal and ideological relations. His distinction between 'class' and 'status' helped to shape the whole structure of classical German sociology (see, for example, Tonnies 1931).

Central to Weber's conceptual efforts was a distinction between 'situations' and 'strata'. Class relations could be analysed in terms of the specific 'class situations' that formed the determinants of individual life chances, and the 'social classes' that were the actual social strata that were formed from these class situations. Similarly, status relations could be seen in terms of the 'status situations' that individuals occupied and the 'social estates' that arose as social strata from these status situations. Social 'estates' (*Stände*) are strata divided by their 'social honour' or 'social standing', and may diverge quite sharply from social classes. Concrete historical investigations into the relations of social strata (social classes and social estates) to one another had to relate their conflicts and struggles to the underlying class and status situations that defined their respective interests and life chances.

Weber can also be seen as making authority relations into the basis of a third 'dimension' of social stratification (see Scott 1996a). 'Command situations' in hierarchies of authority are independent determinants of life chances, and the social strata that I call 'social blocs' (such as 'elites') arise from these command situations. This dimension of social stratification is far less well explored than Weber's delineation of class and status, but its implications were thoroughly explored in the attempts of Mosca (1896 and 1923) and Pareto (1916) to develop a framework of elite analysis (see the readings in Scott 1990b and 1994a). These conclusions are summarised in Figure 1. In this diagram, the three types of power situation can be understood as analytical dimensions of social stratification. They point to causal components in life chances that operate, to a greater or lesser extent, in all societies. Their relative significance, of course, varies from one society to another. The three types of social strata, on the other hand, are the concrete social groupings that are formed around these mechanisms in particular societies. They are the actual, historically observable collectivities of which people are members.

FIG 1. CLASS, STATUS AND COMMAND

<i>Social Spheres</i>	<i>Power Situations</i>	<i>Social Strata</i>
<b><i>Economic</i></b>	Class situations	Social classes
<b><i>Communal</i></b>	Status situations	Social estates
<b><i>Authoritarian</i></b>	Command situations	Social blocs

### *Economic Divisions and Class Analysis*

Weber started out from a claim that 'property and lack of property' were the basis of class divisions. These property relations were, however, seen as having their greatest significance when they were expressed through those market relations that Weber equated closely with the 'economic' sphere of modern society. The class situation of a person, then, was seen by Weber as being their 'market situation': 'the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate' (Weber 1914: 928). The power that people are able to exercise in the labour, commodity and capital markets rests upon the kind of goods and labour services that they possess and that they are able to bring to the market and use in order to generate an income (Weber 1914: 927).<sup>2</sup> Property and the lack of property, then, generate specific power situations - 'class situations' - that comprise opportunities for the exercise of power in the market. These class situations constitute 'causal components' in the life chances of those who live in a political community. Power in the market generates specific kinds of opportunities, conditions of living and life experiences. People occupy similar class situations when they can be regarded as having a similar ability to secure market-mediated life chances. In these circumstances, they have equivalent power in the market as a result of the resources that they are able to mobilise in pursuit of their economic goals.

Relations of possession (*Besitz*) were identified by Weber as the fundamental and original sources of class division. Those who possess or acquire property (*Eigentum*) are positively advantaged in their transactions, and Weber saw classes as receiving their fullest expression when possession is linked with market-based opportunities for acquisition (*Erwerb*). Weber was very clear that possession was a de facto relation and not simply a de jure legal entitlement. Possession, he claimed, refers to the 'control' or 'effective disposition' over resources (1920: 67).<sup>3</sup> Legal relations of ownership are normally, in a modern society, an important element in this control, but control itself may not be directly reduced to legal ownership (1920: 72; 1914: 311-312, 333-334). What Weber recognised was that control relations may alter while legal relations remain unchanged, and vice versa: it is always necessary to identify control relations by taking account of what Renner (1904) called the 'social function' of the law.<sup>4</sup>

Marx's basic ideas on class are very similar to those of Weber, who, of course, had the advantage of writing after they had been further developed within orthodox Marxism. While it would be an obvious mistake to overstate the similarities between their views, the continuities in class analysis are far more striking than any differences. For this reason, it is useful to treat Marx and Weber as examining the same range of phenomena in their class analyses.

Marx's view was that the basic classes in a society were defined by the possession or

<sup>2</sup> Weber does not explicitly mention the capital market, but it is implied by his discussion and it is referred to indirectly through his comments on the significance of the 'capitalist enterprise'.

<sup>3</sup> The term that Weber uses is *Verfügungsgewalt*, or sometimes *Eigenverfügung*.

<sup>4</sup> For a development of the relationship between legal ownership and effective control see Scott (1990a and 1997. See also Scott 1988).

non-possession of the means of production and that these ownership relations were the basis of class relations in the property and labour markets. For Marx, 'class' had to be seen as referring both to the actual positions that exist in a social division of labour and to the people who currently occupy these positions. In his analysis of positions, then, Marx was concerned with what Weber was to call 'class situation', while his analysis of their occupants led him towards the idea of 'social classes'.

Class positions, or class situations, are not defined by mere similarities in life chances or revenues. They are understood as the causal determinants of these phenomena and are defined by the 'relations of production'. This latter term designates Marx's most general concept for describing the ways in which production is socially structured in particular societies. At the heart of the relations of production are the particular relations of possession (*Besitz*) through which access to and use of the means of production and human labour are regulated, and Marx saw relations of possession as defining a whole technical organisation of production through an occupational division of labour and immediate work relations. Relations of possession are the basis upon which people are able to acquire a particular type and level of share in the total wealth produced in their society.

Marx tended to describe these relations of possession in legal terms, as being relations of 'property' or of 'ownership', but it is clear that he did not mean to see these relations as exclusively legal in character. He was concerned with the actual social relations that structure production, and he recognised that these were only partly defined by institutionalised legal norms and their associated rights and obligations. Relations of possession are relations of effective control over the productive powers of a society. The virtue of using the word 'possession', rather than 'ownership', is that, despite its legal connotations, it strongly emphasises the factual, rather than the merely normative nature of these relations. Legal norms operate alongside political, economic and other social forms as necessary conditions for the actual 'underlying' relations of possession, which remain distinct from their 'surface' conditions (Sayer 1987: 56. See also Anderson 1974: 403-404; Cohen 1978). These underlying relations are, Marx holds, the 'real basis' of the various social forms that make up the institutions and practices of a society.<sup>5</sup>

Class positions are defined by the possession, or lack of possession, of specific means of production and by the consequent function that they imply in the social division of labour (Lenin 1914). Those who do not themselves possess the means of production must nevertheless obtain access to them if they are to acquire the income or the goods and services that they need in order to live. They can, therefore, produce only under conditions that are decided by those with possession of the means of production. The possessors, in turn, are able to require the non-possessors to work on their behalf, and so can become non-producers. They can secure their own livelihood without having to work for it; they can appropriate a portion of what is produced by those who actually do work. Possessors, then, 'exploit' non-possessors by imposing conditions under which the non-

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<sup>5</sup> There has been some controversy over Marx's use of the terms 'base' and 'superstructure', the ideas having most recently and most thoroughly been explored in Cohen (1978) and Sayer (1987). Both books are, in effect, extended commentaries on Marx's 'Preface' of 1859. My interpretation of Marx on this point is in general accord with that of Sayer, who recognises that the 'economic' forms are not to be equated with the relations of production per se. These points are developed below.

possessors receive only a part of what they produce. Under these conditions, a 'surplus product' - the difference between the total amount produced and the amount that is required by the producers - can be appropriated, in whole or in part, by the possessors of the means of production. Through this 'exploitation' of the producers, a class of possessors is, at the same time, a class of non-producers and a class of exploiters.

Classes exist, therefore, in all societies where there is a legal framework of property relations that allows the differentiation of possessors from non-possessors, and where there is also a division of labour that allows the producers to produce more than is needed for their own subsistence. Marx saw possession as necessarily a binary relation-people either possess the means of production or they do not - and so he saw the relations of possession in a society as defining two basic or fundamental class positions.<sup>6</sup> This division between the class of possessors and the class of non-possessors is fundamental to a society's mode of production, and the dichotomous class structure is reproduced so long as the mode of production is reproduced.

All systems of production must be seen as historically specific systems with specific forms of possession. The particular relations of production that structure capitalist society, for example, are not universal, eternal categories. They arise from the specific forms under which production takes place in modern society and are the result of a historical process of development. The forms that are taken by the relations of production vary considerably from one society to another, and Marx traced the process of structural differentiation through which these relations came to take a specifically 'economic' form in capitalist society. For much of human history, he held, 'economic' relations were not distinguished from other social relations, as they were thoroughly embedded in the wider social structure. In these societies, production took place in and through kinship and other communal relations, rather than being organised in a distinct and structurally separate sphere of activity. With the separation of a distinct public sphere of 'state' activity from these more diffuse communal relations, however, a larger process of structural differentiation was initiated. The 'political' relations of the state came to be distinguished not only from the structures of kinship and community, but also from the sphere of 'civil society', a sphere of activity that is regulated by 'private' rather than 'public' relations. This civil society was brought into being through the struggles of the bourgeoisie against feudal landlords, and is a sphere of action where the bourgeoisie are able to pursue their propertied and market-oriented interests without direct political interference. The bourgeoisie, then, bring into being a structurally autonomous sphere of market relations; production takes a specifically 'capitalist' form. Market relations and trading activities are, of course, long-standing features of human society, and they constitute what Marx termed 'simple commodity production', but it is only with their generalisation throughout a society that they form a capitalist mode of production. The generalisation of these relations between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries in England and other European societies gave them the kind of structural autonomy that makes it realistic to describe them as forming an 'economy', understood in the sense of a distinct sphere of social activity and social relations.

It was through relations of possession, then, that Marx identified the dichotomous

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<sup>6</sup> Marx uses the term 'fundamental classes' in the *Grundrisse* (1858), but I use the simpler term 'basic classes.'

structure of class situations in any society, and the basic class situations of capitalist societies were defined by relations of personal possession that divided bourgeois from proletarian class situations. Marx was also concerned, however, with the actual collectivities that are formed by the occupants of class situations. The word 'class', that is to say, had a dual meaning, referring both to class situations and to social classes. Social classes exist when the occupants of class positions form collectivities that are organised around their shared interests in enhancing the advantages and reducing the disadvantages that result from their particular class situation. A social class is a collectivity rather than a mere logical or statistical aggregate: the members of a social class form a system of individuals in 'constant mutual interaction' that is 'of long duration and constant, being present as long as the whole continues to exist' (Bukharin 1925: 85). Marx also, of course, looked at the whole question of the transformation of a 'class-in-itself' into a 'class-for-itself', and, in doing so, grappled with many of the issues that Weber later took up in his discussion of 'party' formation. Unfortunately, there is not the space to pursue these aspects of Marx's analysis here (See the powerful combination of Marxian and Weberian ideas in this area in Westergaard and Resler 1975 and Westergaard 1995).

This dichotomous imagery was initially qualified by the recognition of class 'fractions'. Marx held that the basic social classes of a society may not appear in their pure form and may, instead, appear as their constituent 'fractions'. These are based in narrower and more specific class situations than the basic class positions of which they are fractional parts. Although Marx gave little systematic attention to the lines of economic differentiation that might lead to the formation of class fractions, it seems clear that specific types of capital and specific forms of labour power constitute the most likely lines of fracture. Thus, the basic capitalist situation may be divided into industrial, banking, or commercial 'fractions', while the basic proletarian position may be divided along the lines of skill or labour market participation. These class situations comprise the varying 'endowments' or 'market capacities' that people are able to use and that define the specific 'optimisation strategies' that give them specific class interests (Elster 1985: Ch. 6).

Fractional class situations have sometimes been seen as bases for the formation of 'intermediate' social classes that lie 'between' the principal social classes of a society, but Marx's own discussion of intermediate social classes concentrates on those that can be defined as based on internally 'contradictory' class situations. These class situations combine elements of both of the basic class situations of a society. Those who are involved in running small businesses, for example, own their means of production and may employ other workers, but they also work directly on their own account. This is the case for many builders and decorators, shopkeepers and others that occupy what Marx called 'petty bourgeois' class situations. The petty bourgeoisie are, in a sense, both bourgeois and proletarian at the same time. This class situation is internally 'contradictory' by comparison with the basic class situations, and it may become the basis of the formation of intermediate social classes with distinctive social characteristics. While the term 'intermediate' should not be taken as indicating that these social classes necessarily occupy a strictly 'middle' class position, it does indicate their particular advantages and disadvantages and their irreducibility to either of the basic social classes.

A number of contemporary Marxists have made further attempts to conceptualise the positions of managerial and clerical workers as 'contradictory' class situations and to

see whether they might form a 'new middle class'. Many of these writers, however, have departed from the Marxist concept of class and have stressed the importance of authority relations. Marx had seen a direct link between personal possession and workplace authority in the person of the capitalist entrepreneur, but suggested that this direct link between class situation and command situation had altered in the large business enterprise. The contradictory class situations that Marx identified were those in which personal possession of small-scale property was combined with the performance of labour. The new class situations that recent Marxist writers have highlighted, however, are not defined by relations of personal possession but by the occupancy of command situations for which specific skills and credentials are required. This recognition that the command situations of managers and certain other occupations are a principal determinant of their life chances, operating alongside the effects of their class situations is very important. These command situations, involving the exercise of varying amounts of authority in the administrative bureaucracies of large business enterprises, are, however, conceptually quite distinct from their class situations. By assimilating command situation to class situation, however, Marxist discussions of bureaucracy and authority have lost sight of the very distinctiveness of the Marxist concept of class.

Of particular importance has been the debate surrounding the work of Wright (1976, 1978, 1980, 1985), which has highlighted many of the critical issues in class analysis (see also Abercrombie and Urry 1983). Wright has recently pulled together much of his theoretical work to present the results of an international comparative study of class in his book *Class Counts* (Wright 1997). One of the earliest statements of this new strand in Marxian class analysis was that of Nicolaus (1967), which set the terms of current debates by placing the 'new middle class' at the centre of attention and seeking to explain the position of the new middle class and the boundary between it and the working class by reconstituting Marx's economic theory around the idea of surplus value (See also Watanabe 1991). Capitalism had changed, he argued, since Marx completed his initial views on class relations. The model of class relations set out in the *Communist Manifesto*, therefore, has to be altered to take account of changed circumstances such as the rise of the joint stock company, mass production and imperialism. It was only in the unfinished volumes of *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value* that he began to explore the ways in which it was changing (See Carchedi 1975 and Poulantzas 1975. See also the discussion of this whole issue in Scott 1997).

### *Cultural Divisions and Status Analysis*

The explicit parallels that Weber drew between class situation and status situation make it very clear that he intended the latter concept to designate a specific causal component in life chances that is distinct from the economic component involved in the possession and acquisition of property. While class divisions arise in the economic sphere of instrumental action, status divisions are phenomena of the 'social sphere', understood as a sphere of non-instrumental, communicative action that establishes communal relations.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Weber asserts that 'In contrast to the purely economically determined "class situation", we wish to designate as status situation every typical component of the life

chances of people that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honor' (Weber 1914:932).<sup>8</sup>

Where class situations comprise the economic relations through which control over marketable resources is organised for the attainment of income, status situations are the more narrowly 'social' or communal relations through which the social honour that is attributed to a style of life becomes the basis of life chances. Where economic action involves an interest in the preservation or enhancement of utilities, status-oriented actions involve interests in the preservation or enhancement of social honour.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of social honour is not given a specific definition by Weber, but Burger (1985:31) has suggested that it can be seen as involving the communal conception of prestige that Durkheim (1912) saw as defining the 'sacred' aspects of social life (See also Milner 1994). It is the religious organisation of communities that must be looked to for the sources of status divisions. It is through such sacred conceptions that judgements of moral superiority and inferiority are made and that status situations arise. Religion here must be understood in its broadest sense, and not in the narrow sense of a specific church or sect. It is, rather, the whole moral and symbolic order that provides the cultural framework in which people live.

Status relations revolve around the identification with a specific 'reference group' and its distinctive style of life.<sup>10</sup> Identification as a 'member' of a particular reference group is the basis of exclusive networks of interaction within which social actions are geared to stressing the distinctiveness of its style of life. These actions involve attitudes of acceptance and rejection, recognition and denial, or approval and disapproval of others in terms of their conformity to the preferred style of life. In its purest form, this social estimation of honour expresses a conception of the prestige that is associated with a particular style of life. Status, then, 'is a quality of social honour or a lack of it, and is in the main conditioned as well as expressed through a specific style of life' (Weber 1916: 39; 1914: 932 ff.). Traditional religious world views and ideologies, along with the hereditary charisma of patrimonial kinship groups, are the most frequent sources of those social meanings that define one particular style of life as highly valued and that derogates others.

American sociology, by contrast with the main European traditions, developed with an almost complete rejection of the Marxian standpoint, and the arguments of Weber and Pareto were drawn into a theoretical framework of structural functionalism that minimised conflict and emphasised value consensus. In this theoretical approach, Weber's concept of status was seen as central to social stratification, and the economic aspects of 'class' were all-but ignored. While retaining the word 'class' to describe the social strata of contemporary American society, structural functionalists re-defined this in normative

<sup>7</sup> Barnes (1992: 265) calls this non-instrumental action 'social intercourse', while Parsons (1937) termed it 'ritual action'. See also Barnes (1993).

<sup>8</sup> The Roth and Wittich translation uses the term 'life' where I have used 'life chances'. Weber's term is *Lebenschicksals*, literally the life fate or life destiny. It seems clear that he is simply using a linguistic variation on his general concept of life chances.

<sup>9</sup> Burger (1985) has argued that both utility and social honour can be understood as 'transferables' that function as the rewards and sanctions towards which actions may be oriented.

<sup>10</sup> Although Weber did not use the term 'reference group', it seems a useful way of clarifying his argument.



terms and collapsed it into the concepts of 'status'. For Parsons and the mainstream of American sociology, social stratification was a matter of social ranking in relation to shared cultural values, and it was these normative relations that gave rise to 'class' relations (See Davis 1942).

The central figure in the American 'status' tradition was Talcott Parsons, who provided not only a model of social stratification but also a general framework of normative functionalism to underpin it. In addition to his review of the Marxian view of class and class conflict (Parsons 1949), Parsons has produced three principal essays on stratification (1940, 1953, 1970) that constitute successive reformulations of his central ideas. His original 'analytical approach' to social stratification set out the idea that 'differential ranking' is one of the fundamental analytical dimensions of the organisation of social systems. Individuals evaluate each other's roles in relation to their shared social values, and this is the basis of their ranking as superior or inferior to one another. The shared values define a normative pattern, an institutionalised scale of stratification, while the actual evaluations that individuals make in relation to this scale generates the actual system of stratification.

According to Parsons' general position, individuals are oriented towards the values that they share with the other members of their society. They will, then, be oriented, among other things, to the particular scale of stratification that is institutionalised in their society. One consequence of this is that systems of stratification will vary according to the particular values that underpin scales of stratification. There will, in any society, be a 'paramount value system', and it is this that shapes its scale of stratification. Some societies, for example, will stress personal qualities such as age, sex or intelligence, while others may stress 'achievements' or 'possessions'. These variations in the attributes of roles that are regarded as socially significant are the sources of the variation in systems of stratification that can be observed - differences, for example, between a 'caste' system and a modern system of 'class' relations. In the contemporary United States, for example, the achievements attached to occupational roles are the principal objects of evaluation, and it is the ranking of occupations that forms the backbone of the stratification system.

In the United States - which Parsons regarded as proto-typical of all modern 'industrial' societies - there is a strong cultural emphasis on role 'performance' in relation to standards of 'universalism' and 'achievement'. As a result, productive, 'adaptive' activities are seen as having a crucial significance, and it is occupational roles that are the principal sources of status. This ranking of occupations occurs within a framework of values that stress 'equality of opportunity', and the actual system of stratification, therefore, has a certain degree of 'openness', 'looseness' and 'mobility' by comparison with those found in traditional societies. Indeed, this gives it a particular 'classless' character, in so far as status and rewards are not sharply fixed or immutable and in so far as individuals are able to move relatively freely from one role to another.

In line with the work of Warner, Parsons sees ethnic differentiation as being one way in which actual systems of stratification may depart from the institutionalised scale: while the paramount value system may stress occupational achievement, subordinate value systems may stress racial or ethnic qualities and establish lines of division that cut across the relatively 'open' class system. Parsons has further explored these issues through considering Marshall's (1949) work on citizenship and equality.

In his later work, Parsons came to see the paramount values of societies as defining the particular 'functional' activities that are regarded as being of critical importance to their survival. It is through the ranking of roles in relation to their functional significance that effective mechanisms of recruitment and commitment to roles can be built up: individuals are motivated to enter and to perform in those roles that are especially important in terms of the paramount value system. This particular issue has been explored in a particularly systematic way in the long-lasting debate on a classic article by Davis and Moore (1945).

### *Authoritarian Divisions and Elites*

There is, implicit within Weber's work, a conception of a sphere of action that parallels the economic and social spheres. Recovering this implicit conception allows a proper understanding of the significance of Weber's own work, and demonstrates very clearly his intellectual connection with the works of his contemporaries, such as Michels, Mosca and Pareto. This sphere of action is that of 'authority', seen most clearly, though not exclusively, as the sphere of the state.

In order to understand Weber's 'missing' third dimension of stratification it is necessary to introduce the concept of 'command situations'. This refers to those causal components in individual life chances that result from the differentials of power that are inherent in structures of authority.<sup>11</sup> Command situations are defined by the distribution of the powers of command within the state and other authoritarian organisations, such as business enterprises or churches. In all of these organisations, there are those who command, those who are on the receiving end of commands, those who have delegated powers of command, and so on. Any structure of authority involves a distribution of its powers of command in more or less concentrated or dispersed forms, and the distribution of these powers of command generates structured differentials of power that exert an independent influence on the life chances of those in particular command situations.

What I call 'social blocs' are those clusters of command situations that form social strata within which mobility is 'easy and typical'. These ideas have been more widely discussed, though not by Weber himself, in the context of 'elites' and 'masses', seen as specific kinds of social bloc. An elite is a social grouping of individuals who occupy similar advantaged command situations in the social distribution of authority and are linked to one another through demographic processes of circulation and interaction. Occupants of leading positions in the state, an established church, or in capitalist enterprises and associations of capital, for example, may form a single 'elite' if there is an easy and frequent circulation among these various positions of command and if they are linked through social mobility, informal and intimate interaction, and household formation. In ideal typical terms, it is possible to envisage 'command societies' alongside status societies and class societies.

Weber did not himself set out these ideas in his discussions of authority, nor did he

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<sup>11</sup> Although he did not develop the idea in the way that I have done here, Burger (1985: 18) has referred to 'places of command' in his discussion of Weber's view of authority.

pursue the question of the demographic processes of circulation and interaction that can form the occupants of command situations into social blocs such as 'elites'. For all the rigour and sophistication of his analysis of authority, and despite the fact that he wrote of 'rulers' (*Herren*) and 'ruled' (*Beherrschte*), Weber failed to make the crucial theoretical breakthrough that can be found in the contemporary work of Mosca and other 'elite' theorists. As a result, Weber provided an account of class, status and party, rather than one of class, status and bloc. Had Weber made this crucial theoretical breakthrough, he might have seen that 'parties' - conflict or interest groups - may arise on the basis of economic, communal, or authoritarian interests and so may claim to represent social classes, social estates, or social blocs.

Weber's discussion of the state provides a paradigm for the analysis of authority and the formation of command situations. These structures are not, however, limited to the political sphere of the state, but occur in all authoritarian organisations. They arise wherever there is a structure of authority, and are particularly characteristic of the structures of bureaucracy that have developed in modern business enterprises. In his view that 'History is the graveyard of aristocracies', Pareto (1916: 1430) set out a view of command situations and social blocs that complements Weber. He and Mosca (1896, 1923) have provided a powerful theoretical understanding of these issues. They looked at how authority relations are involved in the formation of ruling minorities - 'elites' - and these are built from command relations of the kind that I have described.

Weber's analysis of domination and authority gave him an acute understanding of the formation of ruling minorities in the top command situations of political, economic and other hierarchies, but, for all his insights, the conceptualisation of ruling minorities was one of the least developed parts of his sociology. It is in the works of the Italian theorists Mosca and Pareto that can be found an analysis of command situations that can properly complement the analyses of class situation and status situation that I have set out. I will briefly illustrate this from the work of Mosca.

Mosca's work employs a number of terms to describe ruling minorities. In his earliest works on political struggle (1884; 1896) he had used the term *classe politica*, while in his mature work (1923) he preferred the term *classe dirigente*. This change in terminology reflected a growing awareness that the *classe politica*, which he saw as a specialised ruling minority concerned with government, formed a part of a larger *classe dirigente* that embraced all ruling minorities in the political, economic, religious, and other spheres. These terms have usually been translated as 'political class' and 'ruling class', respectively, but these are confusing terms in a comprehensive account of social stratification that employs 'class' in a Marxian sense. The word 'classe' was not used by Mosca in anything like the Marxian or Weberian sense of class, and it is preferable to avoid using the word 'class' to designate what are specifically authoritarian groups rather than economic groups. Pareto's terminological innovation should be followed, and the word 'elite' be used in place of Mosca's word 'classe' wherever he refers to a category of people that are organised around the exercise of authority.

While *classe politica*, then, can be translated as 'political elite', *classe dirigente* poses more difficulties. The Italian word *dirigente* is closest to the English word 'directing', with which it has a common root. It can be used in a number of ways that involve a sense of controlling, guiding, leading, or steering. To direct something is to determine its

movements, and this core idea has been extended to the idea of guiding through instructions or commands. A closely related word is 'rule', which means sway, government or dominion, a term that implies the existence of a framework of order or 'rules' in terms of which sway is exercised. By comparison with 'directing', 'rule' implies a more structured or institutionalised relationship. The word 'rule', then, seems to be the most appropriate way to translate Mosca's idea, and it also emphasises the connection with Weber's analysis of authority and command. The terms 'political elite' and 'ruling elite' are the best translations of Mosca's two key terms.

The nub of Mosca's position is that the holding and exercising of 'public power' is the basis on which rulers and ruled are to be identified, and the rulers will always form a minority, no matter how democratic may be the doctrines and ideals that they draw on to legitimate their power. The 'political elite' comprises the organised core of participants in the exercise of political authority. This elite 'performs all political functions, monopolises power and enjoys the advantages that power brings' (Mosca 1896: 50). Its power derives not from its communal or economic position but from its organisation in relation to the public power of the state. A division between the political elite and the subordinate majority is a universal feature of human history because it is an inevitable consequence of social organisation:

'the dominion of an organized minority, obeying a single impulse, over the unorganised majority is inevitable' (Mosca 1896: 53).

Michels added to Mosca's argument a view that the overall structure of authority in a society included three sections: the 'political' elite in its narrow sense of those in government and the state who are characterised by a 'will to power'; the 'economic' elites whose power is rooted in wealth from banking, insurance and industry; and the 'intellectual' elites who work with 'words, symbols and science' (Michels 1927: 106).<sup>12</sup> These three elites 'form circles which, though far from coinciding with one another, have points of intersection' (ibid.: 107).

Mosca himself anticipated that the political elite and the various elites that exist at the heads of other major structures of authority in a society could become clustered together through demographic processes of social circulation into a particular kind of social bloc that he termed a 'ruling elite'. A ruling elite is an advantaged and powerful social bloc that fuses various specialised elites together into a single structure and that is likely to exhibit what Meisel (1958: 4) called the three C's of 'group consciousness, coherence and conspiracy'. Through the holding and exercising of power in organised structures of authority, a variety of command situations are established. A ruling elite arises wherever the occupants of these top command situations are unified and show a high degree of communal solidarity. As a minority within its society, it has distinct advantages over other social blocs. There is, however, nothing inevitable about the demographic formation of a cohesive ruling elite from the formally constituted command situations:

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<sup>12</sup> Confusingly, Michels uses the phrase 'political class' in both the narrow sense of government or state elite and in the wider sense of an overarching elite. Although his meaning is generally clear from the context, his work reveals the same ambiguity over the scope of 'politics' as is found in Weber and Mosca.

It must be recognised that Mosca's model of the formation of a ruling elite conflated two quite distinct processes. On the one hand, he was clearly referring to the demographic circulation that could unite the occupants of command situations through social mobility, intermarriage, and other networks of informal social relations. On the other hand, however, he also referred to processes of 'party' formation through which specific associations could be established in order to defend and to promote the interests of elite members. Where Weber saw these processes as analytically separate from one another, Mosca conflated them into a single conceptualisation of what might be called, an 'elite-for-itself'. It is undoubtedly a major limitation of Mosca's work that he did not properly distinguish or conceptualise the 'party' relations in which elite members may, under appropriate circumstances, be involved.

### *Conclusion*

Social stratification is more than just social inequality. Structured social inequalities can occur around a variety of social differences, and they may involve a wide range of resources, capacities and possessions. Such inequalities include those associated with age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, language, region, and so on. Social stratification occurs when structured social inequalities are systematically interrelated in the way that they shape people's life chances and are involved in the formation of large-scale collectivities that stand in hierarchical relations to one another. The social stratification of a population, then, involves the formation of its members into a system of social strata that are distinguished from one another by their life chances and their life styles and by the particular causal mechanisms that are responsible for these.

Social strata reflect the complex processes through which the underlying power situations that people occupy operate, in both reinforcing and contradictory ways, to generate their life chances and life styles. I have identified these power situations as being class situations, status situations and command situations, each of which is to be understood as an aspect of the distribution of power within a society, and as arising from the structuring of power into relations of domination. Each type of power situation results from specific types of social relations. Class situations arise from the property and market relations that establish patterns of domination by virtue of constellations of interests and that result from the rational, calculative alignment of economic interests. Status situations, by contrast, result from the communal relations through which domination on the basis of prestige is established. Finally, command situations are a consequence of the relations of command that are built into structures of legitimate domination.

Social strata themselves result from the circulation, association, and interaction of the occupants of power situations. It is through these demographic processes of intra- and inter-generational mobility, informal interaction, intermarriage and household formation that different power situations come to be clustered together into the large-scale collectivities that are social strata. It is the 'natural breaks' in the structure of demographic relations that disclose the boundaries between social strata (Payne 1987: 13).

I have suggested that the specific character of a social stratum depends upon the relative salience of the various power situations in determining the life chances of its

members. Class situations, status situations and command situations are generic mechanisms that can appear in all societies, though their relative significance in the overall patterns of advantage and disadvantage that affect social strata will vary considerably. The predominance of class situation, status situation or command situation results, respectively, in the formation of social classes, social estates and social blocs, although various 'hybrid' forms are likely where two or more power situations are equally salient. In certain circumstances, when all the social strata of a society are decisively shaped by the operation of one specific mechanism of power, whole societies may be characterised as class, status or command societies.

Where class situations form the most salient causal component in the life chances of the members of a stratum, as is generally the case in capitalist societies, that stratum is a 'social class'. Where all the strata in a society are social classes, the society itself can be characterised as a 'class society'. Command situations and status situations operate alongside class situations and reinforce their effects in such a society. My argument is however, that a class society must be seen as one historically specific form of stratified society and that the general framework that I have developed must apply to all forms of stratification. Where status situations are the most salient elements in social stratification, and the operations of class situations and command situations are secondary, the strata can be described as 'social estates'. A society of estates is termed a 'status society'. Where command situations are the most salient elements in life chances, status and class being secondary, the strata take the form of 'social blocs', and a society of blocs can be termed a 'command society'. These various forms of stratified society are to be understood analytically, as ideal typical stratification systems. As Lockwood has argued for two of these dimensions, "Class" and "status" are not alternative but complementary viewpoints of the reality of any given stratification system' (1958: 202 n.1. See also Lockwood 1956 and Crompton 1993: 131 ff.)

There is, of course, nothing inevitable about the formation of social strata. Patterns of circulation and interaction may be such that no overarching social strata are formed: social relations may not establish lines of closure, and life chances may be shaped separately by specific power situations or their elements. Such 'fragmented' patterns are unusual, but many commentators have suggested that the stratification systems of the contemporary world have become increasingly fragmented and that, in consequence, 'class' is dead (Clark and Lipset 1991. See the debate in Lee and Turner 1996). A central task in any investigation of social stratification is to discover whether social strata have, in fact, been formed in a particular society and, if so, how they might have changed over time. In my Chapter on 'The Question of the Working Class' (Scott 1996a: ch8). I look at the issue of whether there still is a concrete social stratum that can sensibly be called the 'working class' in contemporary Britain. I argue that while class situation remains a fundamental determinant of the life chances of propertyless manual workers, patterns of social circulation and association are looser than in the past, and people no longer adopt a class conscious identity of themselves as 'working class'. The class structure persists, but class identities have weakened.

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