

Structured Social Inequality



A READER IN
COMPARATIVE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
Second Edition

Celia S. Heller

SECOND EDITION

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COMPARATIVE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Edited and with Introductions by

Celia S. Heller

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Preface

This volume is intended to serve as a textbook for both undergraduate and graduate levels. The introductions to the eight parts of the book together aim to cover the major areas of stratification. Each introduction places the articles of that section in the larger context of the particular area to which they pertain. Thus an instructor can rely entirely on this book as the textbook for his or her course. Or, if preferred, the instructor can use it as a supplement to a standard textbook, selecting from among the readings those that correspond to the topics in that textbook. To conserve space and to make possible the inclusion of more readings, I have slightly abridged the selections from scholarly journals; in these selections, the abridgment of material has also facilitated a wider coverage of ideas from each author. (Where passages have been omitted, the conventional ellipsis sign appears.) In a number of readings, I have added editorial footnotes; these carry my initials to distinguish them from the author's original footnotes.

Before I close, I would like to acknowledge my debts. The comments by Dennis Wrong on the introductions to and choices of selections—a number of which led to revisions—are much appreciated. I am very grateful to Kenneth A. MacLeod for his patience and editorial help. To him and to Esther Davis go my special thanks for helping me to put the final touches on the manuscript.

CSH

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General Introduction

The first edition of this book appeared in 1969. It was very well received and reprinted twelve times: the first appeared in 1969 and the twelfth in 1978. This second edition is planned to update the first edition.

The study of social stratification is one of the most flourishing areas of American sociology today. Hardly an issue of the leading sociological journals appears that does not contain one or more articles on this topic. However, this field, now well developed and thriving as a basic branch of sociology, was long neglected as a subject of systematic investigation in the United States. The systematic study of social stratification is a phenomenon of the last four decades. It is reflected in the fact that in 1929 the authors of the book, *Trends in American Sociology*, much acclaimed in its day, found no materials on social stratification worthy of a chapter.¹ Another indicator of the neglect is the late appearance of textbooks on this subject. The first general work suitable for university students was the collection of readings by Bendix and Lipset that was issued in 1953.² Then, in 1955, came the short but succinct paperback, *Class and Society* by Kurt B. Mayer.³ But the first textbooks in the traditional sense of the word did not appear until 1957.⁴

The growth of empirical studies of social stratification can be traced to the Great Depression and to the influence of Marxist thought on the intellectual of that epoch. But even if the systematic study of stratification in the United States goes back only that far, the interest in this phenomenon is as old as sociology itself.

¹G.A. Lundberg, et al., *Trends in American Sociology*, New York: Harper, 1929, as reported by Charles H. Page, *Class in American Sociology*, New York: Dial Press, 1940.

²Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Class, Status and Power*, Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1953.

³Kurt B. Mayer, *Class and Society*, New York: Random House, 1955.

⁴Bernard Barber, *Social Stratification*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957; Joseph A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957.

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Auguste Comte touched on it in his discussion of division of labor and social solidarity. It was at the heart of Saint-Simon's preoccupation with how industrial society is to be organized to bring about a moral regeneration. Herbert Spencer gave it some attention, particularly in his *Study of Sociology* when he wrote about *class bias* as a serious obstacle to sociological thought. He made the "modern" sounding observation that the ideas and sentiments of the class to which the sociologist himself belongs "affect alike his conceptions of the past, his interpretations of present, and his anticipations of the future."⁵ The same could be said about early American sociologists—Lester F. Ward, William Graham Sumner, Charles H. Cooley—for, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Charles Page, they too were concerned with the subject of social stratification.⁶ And it was at the very center of the thought of those theorists from whose writings constitute the first readings of this book: Marx, Weber, Pareto, and Schumpeter.

It is not enough to indicate that interest in social stratification is as old as sociology itself, for, as a matter of fact, it preceded the nineteenth-century beginnings of sociology.

Among the earliest written thoughts and judgments about social inequality were those of the Hebrew prophets who denounced the excesses of the rich and mighty. And as could easily be guessed—because there is hardly a subject that cannot be traced to them—Plato and Aristotle paid attention to this phenomenon. Plato was preoccupied with the conception of a society in which social inequality would correspond perfectly to the inherent inequality of men. Thus, his republic is a utopian society where each man assumes the occupation for which he is best fitted. Aristotle, the great classifier, gave us the scheme of three classes present in all states: "One class is very rich, another very poor, and a third is a mean."⁷ Knowing his preference for the mean in all things, it is not surprising that he thought the middle class the best of the three and those states possessing a large middle class the best administered. In his *Politics* we also find differing dichotomous schemes: One is the basic division of people everywhere into free and slave; and the other is the division of every population into those who work and those who do not.

From his selection of written materials on social inequality spanning several thousand years, the Polish sociologist Stanislaw Ossowski isolated two major perspectives:

1. Those who approve of the existing social order: They see social inequality as basically just, for it consists of everyone getting his due. In this view, social inequality is a natural scheme of things in which one gets what he deserves. Approval of the existing order, says Ossowski, has somehow always developed into apologetics for it.
2. Those who question the existing social order: They see inequality as unjust, measuring it against the ideal of equality: "...an ideal which over the centuries has been extinguished and reborn, aroused people to action, taken the form of unrealizable dreams or glimmered in the mists of an afterworld, but which has always managed to emerge from the recesses of the social consciousness to disturb the existing state of affairs."⁸

⁵ Herbert Spencer, "The Class Bias," in C. Wright Mills, ed., *Images of Man*, New York: George Braziller, 1960, p. 64.

⁶ Page, *op. cit.*

⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, New York: Modern Library, 1943, p. 190.

⁸ Stanislaw Ossowski, *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, New York: Free Press, 1963, p. 179.

In both instances, Ossowski shows, it is not merely a question of perspective: each suggests "different practical policies." If so, then the increasingly frequent argument that the above two contrasting perspectives also run through the contemporary sociological theories of stratification assume special significance. According to them, the *functionalist* theory stems from the first, the *conservative tradition* and its competitor, *conflict theory*, grows out of the latter, the *radical tradition*.⁹ To oversimplify for the sake of brevity, functional theory holds that stratification is a necessary requirement for the existence of society. According to conflict theory, *power*, not functional necessity, is the key to stratification. The differential distribution of power accounts for the inequality in valued goods and services. (Expositions of these competing theories appear in the final part of this book.) What makes these theories different from all the conservative and radical formulations that preceded them—say some sociologists in the role of critics—is that they are phrased in morally neutral terms. But beyond that facade, as it were, are premises no different from those inherent in the other formulations.

In light of such assertions, it would seem only proper for the editor of a volume such as this to make explicit to which "camp" she belongs. But a third alternative emerged: Voices began to be raised about the need for a synthesis of functionalist and conflict theories and some even claim that much has already been achieved toward developing such a synthesis. These voices reflect an explicit or implicit adherence to the Hegelian dialectic, to the concept that the historical process is characterized by the principle of the struggle of opposites (*thesis* and *antithesis*) and their continual resolution (*synthesis*). Convinced of the dialectical principle in intellectual development—that ideas give rise to opposite ideas and that the struggle between them results in an eventual synthesis, a new and different entity containing elements of both within it—I am confident that ultimately such a synthesis will emerge in stratification theory. Clearly, however, it would be foolish at this point to attempt a premature collection of readings in stratification to represent such a synthesis. This book after all is intended primarily as a textbook for course on social stratification. That is why it is eclectic (hopefully in the better sense of the word) in its selections: It espouses no one sociological position to the exclusion of others. The reader will find both major theoretical viewpoints and the attempts at synthesis represented here.

What consciously guided me in the selection of articles was first of all a concern for excellence. A second concern was to cover the major aspects of the field of stratification as it has so far developed. And a third consideration was to represent the comparative orientation in its coverage. To accomplish these aims, I have not confined myself to the work of sociologists, but have drawn on that of anthropologists, economists, historians, and political scientists. I have also included a few readings that appeared in print for the first time in the old edition. To these, insofar as this is its first appearance in English, belongs the portion from Theodor Geiger's *Die Klassengesellschaft im Schmelztiegel*, which has exercised a profound influence on European sociological thought, but is little known in the United States.

⁹See Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966, pp. 14–17; Also Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959, p. 158. For an earlier statement to the same effect, see S.M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, "Social Status and Social Structure," *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. II, 1952, p. 150.

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The book consists of eight parts. It begins with classical theory and finishes with contemporary theory. The logic behind it is, first, that classical theory—represented in this book by Weber, Marx, and Pareto—has exercised a profound influence on the empirical studies in stratification. And such studies heavily dominate the next six parts of the book. Secondly, the reason contemporary theory is placed at the end of the book rather than together with classical theory is, as has already been indicated, that it is dominated by controversy. The reader should be able to judge the merits of each position better, armed with the knowledge of the empirical studies.

Social stratification is too often treated as if it were synonymous with social differentiation, which it is not. Social differentiation is a universal phenomenon: In all societies we have a separation of positions and roles, some division of functions and labor. But social differentiation alone does not constitute stratification. First of all, social differentiation does not always involve differential evaluation or ranking of positions, whereas stratification does. Positions may be differentiated from one another and yet not ranked relative to each other. For example, in our society the position of the adolescent is generally not considered superior to that of infant, merely different.

Social stratification, however, can be considered a certain type of social differentiation. To put it differently, whenever you have stratification you have social differentiation, but not the other way around. Although the universality of social differentiation is undisputed, there is some controversy about whether stratification is universal. Scattered throughout this book, the reader will find statements declaring that it is. Those making the statements generally also consider stratification necessary in all social systems. But others point to some primitive societies without stratification. There is, however, general agreement among sociologists that stratification has been present in all complex societies to date. Although many deduce from this and argue that stratification is a necessary condition for complex society, the proposition is a bit shaky. It could just as well be that stratification is a consequence of complexity and that therefore mechanisms might evolve or consciously be introduced that could counteract this consequence. What I am suggesting is that it is a logical fallacy to deduce, as many do, inevitability from universality.

To this writer the crucial question in examining a society at a given time is not whether it is stratified or not but the degree to and way in which it is stratified. Minimally stratified systems must be distinguished from highly stratified ones, because they involve social relations that are qualitatively different and because they have qualitatively different consequences for their members. Despite the manifold variations in the phenomenon of stratification, through time and space, the following ideal types can be distinguished: slave, caste, estate, class and stratification in advanced industrial society. The readings in Part II of this book deal with principal types of stratification systems.

Although we have specified that stratification is not synonymous with social differentiation and that it involves differential ranking, we have not yet made clear what stratification means. To say that this is the subject of this book is not to beg the question but rather to point to the great complexity of the phenomenon known as stratification. As the reader will gather from the following selections, and especially those in the first part, there is no uniform definition of social stratification. Perhaps the most common meaning that runs through the numerous

contemporary definitions is that it refers to an arrangement of positions in a graded hierarchy of socially superior and inferior ranks.¹⁰ As suggested by the title of this book I find it convenient to think of stratification as a *system of structured inequality in the things that count in a given society, that is, both tangible and symbolic goods of the society*. The term *structured* indicates an arrangement of elements: the inequality is not random but follows a pattern, displays relative constancy and stability, and is backed by ideas that legitimize and justify it. The various forms of patterning, the degree of stability, and the extent of institutionalization vary from one system to another.

But stratification “also presents us with a case of system formation on the basis of equality.” Stratification permits and facilitates communication among equals in a system of structured inequality. Stratification is “equality wedged into inequality.” The Greek term is *isonomia*: equality of citizens within one stratum and inequality with respect to other strata.¹¹

Several principal types of structure, as has already been said, can be distinguished. They are the subject of the readings in Part II of this book. The nature of things that count and how unequal is their distribution in modern society is treated in Part III, “Major Dimensions of Stratification.” The readings deal with actual inequalities—in wealth, power, prestige—as well as how the members of society perceive, interpret, and evaluate these inequalities.

When we say that the preceding—wealth, power, prestige—are things that count we have in mind the consequences for the people who have or lack them, who possess more or less of these goods. The consequences manifest themselves in almost every aspect of life: how strata differ in the basic chance to stay alive, in value orientations, family organization, type of home socialization, the quality of formal education, and so on.

Although we conceptualize these differential patterns of social behavior as consequences of stratification, we are nevertheless fully aware that they in turn affect the stratification system. The pattern of mutual dependence is operating here as in social phenomena in general.¹² Effects of conditions react on the conditions themselves or, as Homans expressed it, “they wax and wane together.”¹³ Where this manifests itself dramatically is in the realm of social mobility. The same pattern of behavior that may represent a positive adjustment to one’s situation in the stratification system may be dysfunctional for social mobility. For example, the low aspiration levels of youths in the lower strata helps to avoid inevitable frustrations, because there is not enough room “on top” for many of them. At the same time, however, such low aspirations eliminate from the race, individuals who might be able to achieve the positions that are open.

Social mobility—the transition from one social position to another in the stratification system—is the subject of Part IV of this book. The readings deal with extent of social mobility, its types, factors that affect it, and modes of mobility. They lead rather easily to the selections in Part V on ethnicity (including race) and

¹⁰Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹¹Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 263–64; Juergen Mau and Ernst G. Schmidt, eds., *Isonomia: Studien zu Gleichatvorstellung im Griechischen Denken*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964.

¹²For the classic criticism of the concept of one-sided causation in the study of social phenomena, see Vilfredo Pareto: *The Mind and Society*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., pp. 68–74; 254–256.

¹³George C. Homans, *The Human Group*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950, p. 7.

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social stratification. Ethnicity and social stratification are two major and related features of a number of contemporary societies and it is therefore important to explore the connection between them. Part VI—"Sex Inequality"—has been added to this edition. What we omitted, because of the shortage in space, is age inequality.

To reiterate then, this book aims to be comparative in its approach, a perspective that is gaining ground in contemporary American sociology. Perhaps in no other area of sociology have we moved as far away from parochialism as in the study of stratification. Hopefully these selections will reflect it. In so far as it was possible, an attempt was made to include, in all those parts of the book that deal with modern stratification, readings about the various aspects of the Soviet type of stratification as well as the Western type.

The comparative approach manifests itself perhaps most fully in Part VII, "Change in Stratification Systems." It begins with a general article about change in preindustrial stratification systems and concludes with one dealing with change in the stratification systems of advanced industrial societies.

The last part of this book, "Unresolved Issues in Stratification Theory," consists of articles concerning the two major issues: (1) the old, and as yet unresolved, question of the nature of stratification in general; and (2) the new question of the nature of the now emerging stratification system in advanced industrial society. We already referred to the readings dealing with the first in explaining why this book begins and ends with theoretical statements. As for the selections regarding the latter issue, they struggle to grasp the outline of the new system of structured inequality that is now shaping. Perhaps it is only fitting that the readings on both of these issues constitute our final readings, for they help us to pinpoint what we know and what we do not yet know about structured social inequality.

PART I

Theories of Stratification—The Classic Tradition

The readings in the first part of this book are not the only theoretical ones included. Such statements are to some extent dispersed through and are concentrated again in Part VIII. What distinguishes the first readings in theory from the rest is that they are, to borrow C. Wright Mills' designation, in the "classic tradition"¹ and as such are indispensable to the student of stratification. They have served in the past and continue to serve even today as points of orientation for the work of others. The extent to which the theorists represented here have influenced research and thought will become clear when one encounters the numerous references to them in the rest of the readings on the many aspects of stratification.

The two giants of stratification theory are Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Max Weber (1864–1920). We began with Marx not only because his work chronologically preceded Weber's but also because it was part of Weber's intellectual tradition. To Weber, Marxism in general seemed an "untenable monocausal theory": It reduced the multiplicity of causal factors to a single-factor theorem.² Yet Weber's theory of stratification could not be well understood by one ignorant of Marx's ideas on class. In a sense all Weber's work (and particularly that on stratification) was shaped by his *intellectual dialogue* with Marx.

In contrast to Weber's concise statement on stratification—the second selection here—Marx's extensive writings do not contain an explicit exposition of his class theory.³ (He undertook this task for the last chapter of *Capital*, entitled "The

¹C. Wright Mills, *Images of Man*, New York: George Braziller, 1960, p. 2.

²H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, "Intellectual Orientation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 46–47.

³Among the best known essays written by sociologists on Marx's theory of class are Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Karl Marx's Theory of Social Classes," in *Class, Status and Power*, Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1953, pp. 26–35; Ralf Dahrendorf, "Karl Marx's Model of the Class

Classes," but he had written only a little more than a page when death interrupted him.) He died a century ago; in March of 1983 the centennial of his death was celebrated, especially in the Soviet Union.⁴

There is hardly a work by Marx in which he did not make generalizations about class or analyze concrete social structures or historical events in terms of his class theory. Often the distinction is made between the writings of the young Marx and the older one. Included here are excerpts from four of his writings that convey the essential elements of his thought on class. The first is the beginning of the systematic and scholarly exposition that he never finished (p. 14). Right here we become aware that Marx did not always employ a two-class model (capitalists, alternately termed the "bourgeoisie," and the proletarians) for which he is often accused. He speaks of the "three big classes" in the modern society of his day. In this brief beginning he did pose the question "What constitutes a class?" but the manuscript broke off just when he was about to provide the answer. His collaborator Engels did not take up the unanswered question.⁵

It is hoped that the reader will find at least a partial answer in the portion of the *Communist Manifesto* reprinted here (pp. 14–21), although this is an early work by Marx. His thoughts on class gained in precision in later writings. Despite this and despite its propagandistic rather than scholarly tone, the *Manifesto* possesses a historical importance on which there is no need to elaborate. Furthermore, it contains almost all the elements of Marx's concept of class developed in his later works—even if often in less precise form. Wrestling the theory from the propaganda is not easy, for the text is full of ambiguous generalizations. Take, for example, the opening sentence: What does it really mean that the "... history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle?" It is clearly fallacious if it signifies that there has not been cooperation among classes. If it means that the class struggle is the only factor in social change, it is again wrong.⁶ We may set it aside as expressing in the categorical rhetoric of propaganda Marx's theory of class, which is to be discovered from the rest of the selection.

Marx uses the term *class* in a generic sense, in the modern sense of stratum in general rather than type of stratum characteristic of capitalism. Thus he speaks of "classes" under slavery and feudalism as well as capitalism. He sees these classes not as monolithic structures but as containing distinct subdivisions whose interests often diverge. For the latter he sometimes uses the term *gradations* and other times *fractions* so that, for example, "the lower middle class" is such a fraction of the middle class (p. 20). He also designates these subdivisions as *strata* and thus speaks of the "lower strata of the middle class" (p. 18).

In the excerpt here from *Manifesto*, the dichotomous conception of class appears to contradict the fragment of *Capital* where Marx referred to three classes.

Society," in *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959, pp. 3–36; Stanislaw Ossowski, "The Marxian Synthesis," in *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, New York: Free Press, 1963, pp. 69–88; Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Class*, 1973; Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, New York: Harper and Row, 1973; Leszek Kolakowski, *Toward a Marxist Humanism—Essays on the Left Today*, New York, Grove Press, 1968.

⁴"Marx Celebration is Held," *New York Times*, March 31, 1983, p. A4.

⁵Dahrendorf, *op. cit.*, made an effort to reconstruct this answer by stringing together quotations from the various writings by Marx.

⁶Pitirim Sorokin, *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, New York: Harper Brothers, 1928, pp. 540–543.

Marx employs the term class in two different ways, depending on context: (1) as a designation of concrete entities—strata at a given time—for example, wage laborers, capitalists, and landowners as the three “big classes” of his day (p. 14) and (2) as an analytic concept. In the latter sense, class is presented as a dichotomous scheme used to explain change from one social system to another, as well as to project the direction in which capitalist society would develop. Throughout history two dominant classes are in conflict with each other and this generates change. Capitalist society, according to Marx, was moving in the direction of the elimination of all other classes but the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The other classes would “decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry” (p. 20). He predicted that capitalist society would achieve “this dichotomy in full in the penultimate act of the drama,” in the period that precedes the collapse of capitalism.⁷

Because Marx’s dichotomous conception of class has been subject to much criticism, it may be interesting to note that such formulations have long preceded him. As Ossowski demonstrates, throughout cultural history there has been a tendency to conceive of hierarchical divisions of society in dichotomous terms. Aristotle, for example, saw the basic division in the social structure as the distinction between free men and slaves. In the writings of the Fathers of the Church society was divided into two strata: the rich and the poor. As we think of the history of the United States, the words of Alexander Hamilton come to mind: “All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well-born and the other the mass of the people who seldom judge or determine right.”⁸ This last example could also serve to illustrate the proposition that dichotomous conceptions of stratification are not necessarily the products of radical thought. Hamilton was supporting his argument for an aristocratic Senate elected for life.

By reading the section from the *Manifesto*, the discerning will also discover that Marx did not disregard other aspects of stratification by emphasizing the economic one. On the contrary, the essential feature of social inequality, according to him, is power. Society is divided into those who have it, the oppressors and those who do not have it, the oppressed. Marx’s “economic interpretation” is an explanation of what accounts for this inequality in power. He maintains that the relation to the means of production is the determining factor. Those who own the means of production have the power to rule and oppress those who do not own it. The idea of the ruling class encountered in the *Manifesto* is elaborated in the pages here reprinted from *The German Ideology*, especially the thesis on how this class controls the prevailing ideas in a given society.

In the *Manifesto* one also finds Marx’s important concept of class consciousness. Although he does spell out in this pamphlet the conditions under which such consciousness arises, also included here are some pages from his *Poverty of Philosophy*, where additional subjective aspects of class are delineated. Here also the two separate concepts that the sociologist of today would designate as objective class and subjective class are found. Individuals in the same economic situation constitute a class (objective) even when no awareness of its distinctive interests exists among them. To this Marx elsewhere refers as “class in itself,” *Klasse an sich*. When such a class develops consciousness of its distinct interests it

⁷Ossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁸Quoted in Arthur Schlessinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson*, Boston: Little Brown, 1945, p. 10.