

Power and Privilege

A Theory of Social Stratification

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1/The Problem: Who Gets What and Why?

"Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Alice.
Lewis Carroll

SOON AFTER PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S ELECTION in the fall of 1960, Americans were again reminded of one of the curious features of their national life. When the President selected Robert S. McNamara for the post of Secretary of Defense, the press reported the substantial financial sacrifice the nominee would be forced to make. While still only a vice-president of the Ford Motor Company, McNamara received salary and other compensation in excess of \$400,000 a year.¹ With his promotion to the presidency of the company (just prior to his appointment as Secretary of Defense) he was certain to make substantially more. By contrast, as Secretary of Defense for the nation he received a salary of only \$25,000, or roughly 5 per cent of what he would have received as president of the Ford Motor Company.

¹ This figure was cited both by *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report* in their issues of December 26, 1960.

Few Americans seem to have been greatly surprised by these facts, and fewer still were shocked or disturbed. Like the natives of Lewis Carroll's remarkable Wonderland, they saw nothing strange or incongruous in their surroundings.

Yet if one reflects on this matter, one cannot help being impressed by its curious quality. The same man with the same skills and talents moves to a post of far greater importance, and undoubtedly a more trying one, and finds his compensation reduced 95 per cent. In his new position, where he bears much of the burden of the defense of the nation, he receives a salary no greater than that of thousands of minor executives in industry.

If this were but an isolated instance, we might regard it as an interesting oddity, a curious exception to the rule, and think no more about it. But such is not the case. Even a superficial examination of American life reveals innumerable instances in which the rewards men receive bear little or no relation to the value of the services they render or the sacrifices they make in their performance. Many substantial fortunes have been built in a few short years by speculation in stocks and real estate, often with borrowed funds, but the public record reveals no instance in which a great fortune was ever established by a lifetime of skilled and conscientious labor in the foundries, shops, or mills of this country. Entertainers who reach the top in their field often receive several hundred thousand dollars a year. By contrast, the top pay for public school teachers, regardless of ability, is not greatly in excess of \$10,000 a year. Playboys like John Jacob Astor III live lives of ease and indolence, while the vast majority of those who do the work which makes this way of life possible struggle to make ends meet.

What is the explanation of this situation which, like Wonderland, grows curiousest and curiousest the more we examine it? What principles govern the distribution of rewards in our society and in others? What determines the magnitude of the rewards each man receives?

These questions have long been argued and debated. In modern times they have become the heart and core of a special field of study within sociology known as "social stratification." This label has been unfortunate for it encourages a seriously oversimplified view of modern social structure. Even worse, it fosters an excessive concern with questions of structure at the expense of more basic problems concerning the processes which generate these structures.

This field might better be identified as the study of the "distributive process." Virtually all the major theorists in the field, regardless of their theoretical and ideological biases, have sought to answer one basic ques-

tion: *Who gets what and why?*² This is the question which underlies all the discussions of classes and strata and their structural relationships, though in some recent empirical research it seems to have been almost forgotten.

The chief aim of this book is to answer this basic question and the host of secondary questions to which it gives rise. Since this is not the first attempt to do this, we shall begin by reviewing the various theories already propounded to see what light they shed on the problem. In doing this, we shall attempt to see whether there is not some basic pattern to the development of thought in this field—a pattern which, once identified, can provide a foundation for our entire inquiry.

Early Pre-Christian Views

Where and when men first began to reflect on the nature of the distributive process and the causes of inequality is anybody's guess. The fact of inequality is almost surely as old as the human species. No known society has ever had a completely egalitarian social system. From primitive Stone Age communities to complex industrial societies, inequality has always been present, though its forms and degree vary considerably.

In the simplest societies in the world today, the fact of inequality is taken for granted, as are other familiar features of existence. Undoubtedly this was true in prehistoric societies. The belief that conditions need not be as they are is characteristic of socially and technologically more advanced societies.

Some of the earliest records of thought on this subject are found in the writings of the early Hebrew prophets who lived approximately 800 years before Christ. In the writings of such men as Amos, Micah, and Isaiah we find repeated denunciations of the rich and powerful members of society. They were concerned not merely with the use of wealth and power, but, more significantly, with the means by which they had been acquired. A good example of this was Micah's vigorous indictment of the leading citizens of his day:

² Some years ago Harold Lasswell suggested that *politics* was the study of "who gets what, when, how." While politics and the distributive problem are so closely inter-related that one can never completely separate them, it is a serious mistake to equate them. Lasswell, himself, has come to recognize this, as indicated in his more recent book, coauthored with Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950). In their discussion of class, caste, status, and skill groups, they write, "It is a description of the social structure which answers the question 'who gets what, when, and how'" (pp. 67-68). They then go on to say, "It follows from the definition that the social structure is analyzable into relationships among classes." In short, it seems that Lasswell no longer equates politics with the distributive process.

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Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel,
who abhor justice
and pervert all equity,
who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with wrong . . .
Woe to those who devise wickedness
and work evil upon their beds!
When the morning dawns they perform it,
because it is in the power of their hand.
They covet fields and seize them;
and houses, and take them away;
they oppress a man and his house,
a man and his inheritance.
Therefore thus says the Lord:
Behold, against this family I am devising evil. . . .³

Elsewhere the prophet describes the rich men of Israel as "full of violence," the princes and judges as asking for bribes, and the merchants as using a "bag of deceitful weights." All these practices are described as contrary to the will of the Lord, and as perversions which will lead to the nation's destruction.

In India, also, men gave thought to the basis of social inequality long before the Christian era. However, the dominant point of view was very different from that expressed by Micah, though here, too, the matter was viewed in a religious perspective. In the introduction to *The Laws of Manu*, compiled by Hindu priests about 200 B.C., we find an account of the creation of the world. In contrast to the Biblical account, it states that social inequalities were divinely ordained for the good of the world. In words ascribed to Manu, the great lawgiver:

For the sake of the prosperity of the worlds, he [the Lord, the divine Self-existent] caused the Brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya, the Sudra to proceed [in turn] from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet. . . . But in order to protect this universe, He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate [duties and] occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet.
To Brahmana he assigned teaching and studying [the Veda], sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting [of alms]. The Kshatriya he commanded to protect the people . . . The Vaisya to tend cattle . . . One occupation only the Lord prescribed to the Sudra, to serve meekly even these [other] three castes.⁴

³ Excerpts from the second and third chapters of Micah, according to the Revised Standard Version Bible (New York: Nelson, 1953), copyrighted 1946 and 1952, by permission.

⁴ *The Laws of Manu*, translated by G. Bühler, in the series, *Sacred Books of the East*, edited by Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), vol. 25, excerpts from pp. 13-14 and 24, by permission. Similar accounts may be found elsewhere in Hindu writings.

In these strikingly divergent views of Micah and the priestly compilers of *The Laws of Manu*, we find the essential elements of two points of view concerning social inequality which have dominated men's thinking from ancient times to the present. One is essentially supportive of the *status quo*, viewing the existing distribution of rewards as just, equitable, and frequently also inevitable. The other is highly critical, denouncing the distributive system as basically unjust and unnecessary.

In the pages which follow, I shall refer to the first of these viewpoints as the "conservative thesis" and the second as the "radical antithesis." These terms seem fitting since historically the major controversies over social inequality have been essentially dialogues between proponents of these two schools of thought. One may question the wisdom of labeling the conservative position the thesis and the radical the antithesis, since this suggests that one predates the other. Actually, logic and what evidence there is suggest that neither viewpoint is significantly older than the other. Apparently both have developed side by side with each expression of either point of view stimulating the development of the other.

Over the centuries these two views of inequality have been stated again and again by scholars and laymen alike. Though the form of the argument changes somewhat, the essential elements remain, as social inequality is condemned as unjust, unwarranted, and unnecessary, and defended as just, equitable, and essential. Neither view has ever achieved a monopoly over the minds of men in any society. In ancient Israel it is clear that large numbers of the prophets' contemporaries did not agree with them. A substantial proportion of the people continued to think of the monarchy as a divinely ordained institution, and probably had no difficulty in extending this view to other institutions which fostered inequality. In India the thesis of the orthodox Brahmin priests was under continuing attack for centuries from heretical religious movements such as Jainism and Buddhism, both of which contained distinct egalitarian tendencies.

The Greek philosophers of the classical period provide us with our first glimpses of the dialectic in action. In his famous work on politics, Aristotle deliberately sought to refute the radical proposals of men such as Plato and Phaleas of Chalcedon, both of whom advocated the communal ownership of property. Although Aristotle did not defend all aspects of the existing social order as ideal or even as just, he was a vigorous supporter of the basic institutions undergirding the system of social inequality. He defended not only the institution of private property, but also the institution of slavery. In speaking of the latter, Aristotle asserted:

It is clear that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.⁵

While he did not deny that some men who should be free have been enslaved by force and violence, this had no bearing on the justice and propriety of the institution itself.

Phaleas and Plato, by contrast, did not hesitate to attack the basic institutional structure of society. Phaleas advocated the redistribution of land on an egalitarian basis. Plato's proposals were even more radical, especially in *The Republic*. Here he advocated the communal ownership of *all* forms of property, and the establishment of a ruling class which would have even wives and children in common. This class would be selected on the basis of moral virtue, intellect, and love of knowledge. The central thesis of *The Republic* is summed up in one short passage:

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils. . . .⁶

Plato serves as a useful reminder that egalitarianism is not an essential feature of the radical antithesis. Some radicals, like Phaleas, have been egalitarians; perhaps the majority have been. Others, like Plato, have not objected to social inequality *per se*, but rather to the specific institutional bases on which the existing system of inequality rested. In Plato's Republic, equality would extend only to *material* possessions and presumably also to opportunity for advancement (though on this latter point, Plato's treatment tends to be self-contradictory).⁷ Honor and power would be reserved for the ruling class of guardians.⁸ Basically, Plato exemplifies the elitist position within the radical camp. Radical elitists, like egalitarians, are critical of the existing system of allocating rewards but, unlike the egalitarians, find nothing objectionable in social

⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 1943), p. 60.

⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p. 203, quoted by permission of the Oxford University Press.

⁷ At times he speaks of "degrading the offspring of the guardians when inferior, and . . . elevating into the rank of guardians the offspring of the lower classes, when naturally superior," but in his description of the educational system of the Republic he seems to envisage a special educational system limited to the children of the guardians, with the completion of this system a prerequisite for admission to the ranks of the guardians. Hence it is not clear how the children of the lower classes in his Republic would have equal opportunity to become guardians, unless one imagines their superior potential visible in infancy.

⁸ Plato argues that the guardians can be trained not to value power except as a means to the end of serving the entire community.

inequality per se. In general, this elitist branch of the radical tradition has attracted scholars and intellectuals; egalitarianism, by contrast, has had a greater appeal for the masses of common people, the workers, farmers, and peasants.

Christian Views from Paul to Winstanley

It is not our purpose here to trace each and every expression of thesis and antithesis from ancient times to the present. This would require an entire book in itself and would provide only a limited understanding of the problem of who gets what and why. Instead, our aim is to direct attention to a few of the more important expressions of these two points of view so as to provide the necessary background for the analysis which follows.

In its earliest phases, Christianity represented an interesting mixture of both radical and conservative elements, undoubtedly a reflection of the fact that social inequality per se was not of major concern to Jesus and his early followers. Nevertheless, their teachings and actions are by no means wholly irrelevant.

The goals which Jesus set before men, and his criticisms of the popular goals of his day, reflect a clear rejection of the latter. The communism of the early Church in Jerusalem clearly constituted an implicit criticism of the inequalities present in society. So, too, does the letter of James, thought by many to be a brother of Jesus and the first bishop of the Church in Jerusalem. In it he criticizes the early Christians for showing greater deference to the "man with gold rings and fine clothing" than to the poor man in shabby clothing.

But in the writings of St. Paul, who was destined to have such a profound influence on later Christian thought, a much more conservative spirit is evident. In at least four different places in his letters to the early churches he specifically enjoined slaves to obey their masters on the grounds that this is a legitimate expectation of their masters and presumably one sanctioned by God.⁹ St. Peter expressed the same thought in one of his letters. The frequency of these statements suggests that primitive Christianity tended to foster radical notions among many of the converts from the depressed classes of the Roman world— notions which Paul and Peter felt obliged to combat. Both men, like Aristotle, regarded slavery as a part of the natural order and compared the obedience which slaves owe to their masters to the obedience which children owe their

⁹ Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; I Tim. 6:1; and Titus 2:9.

parents. Both linked their injunctions to obedience with parallel injunctions to those in authority to show respect to their subordinates and treat them in a kind and fatherly way.

As the Church gained in power and influence, the more radical tendencies in Christianity gradually lost ground, at least among church leaders. The conservative viewpoint came in time to be regarded as virtually a matter of doctrine, and as such was developed and elaborated to a high degree.

The conservative thesis achieved one of its most perfect expressions in the work of John of Salisbury, an English bishop of the twelfth century. In the *Polycraticus*, he developed in great detail the organismic analogy, first suggested centuries before in the works of Aristotle and the priestly compilers of *The Laws of Manu*. However, John developed this line of thought more fully than earlier writers and made it the foundation of his entire social philosophy.

According to John, society is like the human body. The prince is the head, and the judges and governors of provinces are the eyes, ears, and tongue. The senate is the heart, and those who wait on the prince are the sides. Soldiers and officials are the hands, while the tax collectors and other financial officers are the stomach and intestines. The common people are the feet. The clergy are the soul.

John argued that the prince is subject only to God and those who represent Him on earth—the clergy. All others must obey and serve the prince, especially the common people who, because they are the feet of society,

always cleave to the soil and need the more especially the care and foresight of the head, since while they walk upon the earth doing service with their bodies, they meet the more often with stones of stumbling. . . .¹⁰

John, like all conservative intellectuals, saw society as a system of parts which, though differentiated in function, are united by ties of mutual dependence. The principle of *noblesse oblige* was also important. In his chapter entitled, "Of Those Who Are the Feet of the Commonwealth," he concluded that the commonwealth will be sound and flourishing only when,

the higher members shield the lower, and the lower respond faithfully and fully in like measure to the just demands of their superiors, so that each and all are as it were members one of another by a sort of reciprocity, and

¹⁰ John of Salisbury, *The Statesman's Book*, translated by John Dickinson (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 65, by permission. For a startlingly similar view, see David Malo's discussion of the traditional Hawaiian theory of government, *Hawaiian Antiquities*, translated from the Hawaiian by N. B. Emerson in 1898 (written about 1840), Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Special Publication No. 2, 1951, p. 187.

each regards his own interest as best served by that which he knows to be most advantageous for the others.¹¹

In brief, far from being a hindrance to the well-being of society, social inequality is a necessary prerequisite. This has been a central affirmation of proponents of the conservative thesis from the earliest times to the present and the organismic analogy has always proven one of the most effective vehicles for communicating it to the widest possible audience.

But if the leaders and scholars of the medieval Church were convinced of the virtues of social inequality, all of the common people were not. From the twelfth century on, a succession of religious movements flourished which criticized wealth and commended poverty. Some, like the Franciscan movement, concentrated more on the latter theme and were incorporated into the structure of the Church without too much difficulty. Others, like the Waldensian movement, which criticized the wealth and power of the Church, became persecuted heretical sects. But both evoked support because of their marked egalitarian tendencies and both relied heavily on the radical elements in Scripture.

This succession of radical Christian movements which began during the Middle Ages continued long after the Reformation and did not finally die out until the Marxist movement in the nineteenth century gave radicalism a new direction and a new hope. In many of these movements there was only a limited development of ideology; in others, talented leaders gave clear and vigorous expression to the radical antithesis in its egalitarian form.

Prominent among the latter was the Englishman, Gerrard Winstanley, seventeenth-century leader of the Leveller sect known as the Diggers (because of their practice of cultivating, without consent, lands of the wealthy which were lying idle). Winstanley's views on social inequality were diametrically opposed to those of John of Salisbury, as the following excerpts from his writings reveal:

In the beginning of time the great creator Reason made the earth to be a common treasury, to preserve beasts, birds, fishes, and man, the lord that was to govern this creation; for man had domination given to him over the beasts, birds, and fishes. But not one word was spoken in the beginning that one branch of mankind should rule over another. . . .¹²

Elsewhere he wrote:

I tell you Jesus Christ, who is that powerful spirit of love, is the head Leveller. . . .¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

¹² Gerrard Winstanley *Selections from His Works*, edited by Leonard Hamilton (London: Cresset Press, 1944), p. 37, by permission.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

How then had social inequality come about? Winstanley had no doubts about that:

So selfish imaginations taking possession of the five senses . . . and working with covetousness, did set up one man to teach and rule over another. And thereby the spirit was killed, and man was brought into bondage and became a greater slave to such of his own kind than the beasts of the field were to him.¹⁴

Force was also involved. Repeatedly throughout his writings he argued that social inequality in England had its origin in the Norman Conquest by William the Conqueror, who forcibly expropriated the lands of the English and distributed them among his officers and men. Winstanley argued that their descendants still controlled the wealth of England and "the power of the sword was and is [still] the seal of their title" to their estates.

Winstanley was especially critical of the legal system and developed a theme which was destined to be repeated later by other proponents of the radical antithesis:

For what are all those binding and restraining laws that have been made from one age to another since that Conquest, and are still upheld by fury over the people? I say, what are they, but the cords, bands, manacles, and yokes that enslaved English, like Newgate prisoners, wears [sic] upon their hands and legs as they walk the streets; by which those Norman oppressors and these their successors from age to age have enslaved the poor people, killed their younger brother, and would not suffer Jacob to arise?¹⁵

Early Modern Views from Locke to Mosca

Since the English revolution of 1648, the forces of radical egalitarianism have made tremendous advances both politically and intellectually. On the political front, two major revolutions have been successfully fought in the name of egalitarianism, and a massive international political movement, socialism, has been organized, profoundly affecting the life of most of the nations of the world. In fact, roughly half of the people in the world today live in nations in which Socialist or Communist Parties hold power.

On the intellectual front, the changes have not been quite so dramatic. Nevertheless, in the period since 1648 the radical antithesis has achieved a degree of intellectual sophistication, maturity, and respect-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

ability comparable to that achieved earlier by the conservative thesis. A big step in this direction was taken in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Locke and Rousseau, who popularized the theory that sovereignty ultimately resides in the people as a whole, not the king. Their writings laid the foundation for the modern understanding of natural rights and did much to undermine the older theory of the divine right of kings. Though Locke and Rousseau were not the first to propound the theory that the powers of governments derive from the consent of the governed, it was not until the eighteenth century that this theory came to be the basis for successful political action.

If the major egalitarian movements of the eighteenth century were directed at the destruction of *legal* inequality, those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been aimed at the eradication of *economic* inequality. In this era socialism ceased to be merely a form of idle speculation for philosophers given to utopian fantasies and became a political movement embracing millions of people. The radical antithesis came of age intellectually with the writing of *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. Here was presented in brief form a penetrating analysis of the causes of social inequality combined with a political program of action designed to speed the birth of a new and more equitable social order. In later writings Marx and Engels enlarged upon and modified to some degree the ideas set forth in the *Manifesto* but their basic tenets changed little.

As is well known, the basic postulate of their theory of distribution is that the nature of distributive systems is essentially a function of productive systems. In the earliest and simplest societies communism was inevitable since the economy did not lend itself to the private ownership of the means of production. Later, as agriculture became established, the means of production fell into private hands leading to the division of society into classes. As the productive system changed in other ways, the distributive system responded and, since productive systems continually change, societies passed through a series of evolutionary stages, soon to culminate in the establishment of a new era of equality and freedom, when private ownership of the means of production is finally eliminated.

Another of Marx's basic postulates is that social evolution and economic progress occur as a result of the operation of a modified Hegelian dialectic in which the basic units are classes. Thus classes are the vital forces in history and their struggles the necessary prerequisites to all progress.

A third postulate in Marxian theory, and one of the most important is that of determinism. For Marx the main course of history was inevitable.

The most that men could do was speed or slow the course of its movement; they could not reverse it or alter its direction. This element, when viewed in combination with certain of Marx's more accurate specific predictions, has made his theory *sometimes* appear to be not merely true, but Truth.¹⁶

Many of the specific elements of Marxian theory were borrowed from earlier sources, as Marx himself admitted.¹⁷ For example, the principle that rewards should be distributed "to each according to his needs," is almost a direct quotation from Acts of the Apostles in which the practice of the early Christian community in Jerusalem is described.¹⁸ Similarly, the important Marxian thesis that laws are nothing but instruments of oppression used by the ruling class to exploit the masses is no more than a restatement of Winstanley's view. In some instances Marx even borrowed from the conservatives, as in his concept of the inevitability of inequality under present conditions. However, while many individual elements were borrowed, the theory *as a whole* represented a unique and unusually persuasive statement of the radical antithesis.

The power of Marxian theory is not merely a function of the political strength of the Marxian movement, as some imagine. It is capable of *commanding* respect in its own right, as evidenced by the large number of scholars and intellectuals who have borrowed from it in greater or lesser degree despite their lack of sympathy for the political movements which act in Marx's name.

While the radical view of social inequality has made great progress in modern times, the conservative view has also found able proponents. Probably the most important of these was Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations* and founder of modern economics. Smith's great contribution to knowledge lay in his analysis of markets and formulation of the laws which govern their operation. His great contribution to conservative thought lay in his development of the concept of "the invisible hand," whereby "the private interests and passions of men" are led in the direction "which is most agreeable to the interests of the whole society." According to Smith, a free and unrestrained market system motivates men to engage in precisely those activities which their fellows most desire, by pricing products directly in proportion to the demand and inversely in

¹⁶ This tendency has been fostered also by the ambiguity and even by the internal contradictions in much of Marx's writings. These permit a constant reinterpretation when events fail to conform to predicted patterns, a practice the value of which can hardly be exaggerated.

¹⁷ See, for example, Marx's letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, quoted in part by Lewis Feuer (ed.), *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), p. 457.

¹⁸ See Acts, 4:35.

proportion to the supply. Though no one plans for the common good, and every man pursues his own private interests in a selfish fashion, the good of the whole is obtained. Men produce what is desired and profit from it. Thus when market systems are allowed to function without political interference, it is as though an invisible hand guided and directed the actions of men in those ways which are most beneficial to them and to their fellows.

In the following century the rise of Darwinian theory provided a striking new argument for conservative theorists. The Social Darwinians argued, by analogy, that individual men are sifted and sorted like plant and animal species. Because of this process of selection, those with greater natural talents fare better than their less talented fellows. The former rise to positions of prominence in society; the latter form the working masses.

This view was set forth vigorously early in the twentieth century by William Graham Sumner in his widely read book, *Folkways*.¹⁹ Sumner described the class system of society as being essentially a measure of the social worth of men, which in turn was basically a measure of native ability. He was prepared to concede that there would be some inequities in any system of stratification because of chance or luck. However, these would always be of minor importance.

Because he saw class systems as resting on the foundation of genetic differences, Sumner argued that classes are not true social groups. Rather they are heuristic categories which the social scientist creates for analytical purposes. In the empirical world there are no real divisions between the classes, since with respect to both ability and rewards men are ranked in a continuous series from top to bottom, with only minute differences between each man and those just above and below him.

While Social Darwinians like Sumner were developing their important reformulation of the conservative thesis, an Italian scholar, Gaetano Mosca, was developing yet another. In his important volume, *Elementi di scienza politica*, published in English as *The Ruling Class*, Mosca reacted vigorously against the theories of socialism which were becoming increasingly popular. His argument is summed up in two basic postulates:

Human societies can never function without political organization.
Political organization necessarily involves inequalities in power.

Given these postulates, Mosca concluded that there will always be two classes of people—"a class that rules and a class that is ruled." Further-

¹⁹ See also his pamphlet, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1903).

more, since most men are self-seeking, the ruling class will also be a privileged class from the economic standpoint.

According to Mosca, the ruling class is always a minority of the population. It maintains itself in several ways. In the first place, it is always highly organized and thus enjoys a great advantage in its relations with the unorganized majority. Second, to some degree most ruling classes drain off the potential leadership of the inferior classes by accepting the most talented members of these classes into their own ranks. Third, through the use of what Mosca calls "political formulas," or theories justifying social inequality, the masses are led to accept their lot as rightful and, usually, as inevitable. Finally, sheer habit leads the great majority of those in the lower classes to go about their daily work without even questioning the justice or inevitability of their position in society. In short, even though the ruling class is only a minority, and in large societies a rather small one, many factors undergird and stabilize its position of advantage.

In one of the most interesting and insightful parts of Mosca's work he attacked Marxian theory as hopelessly utopian and unrealistic in its vision of a classless society. Writing more than two decades before the Russian Revolution, Mosca predicted that if the Communists ever came to power, and if they destroyed the private ownership of the means of production, their Communist or collectivist societies would still require officials, and these would come to form a new ruling class.²⁰

Functionalists and Conflict Theorists

Since World War I the social sciences have undergone many changes. Above all, they have become very research-oriented and the research techniques of today bear little resemblance to those of the pre-World War I era. Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of the elements of continuity with the past.

This element of continuity is especially evident in modern theories of social inequality. Most of these theories stem directly from either the conservative or radical tradition. This is a source of both strength and weakness. It is a source of strength because it incorporates and preserves many valid insights of the past. It is a source of weakness because it preserves the tendency to make social analysis subservient to moral judgments and political interests and because it often leads to formulations of hypotheses which do not lend themselves to empirical proof or disproof.

²⁰ Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, translated by Hannah Kahn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), especially pp. 281-286.

Most modern theories of inequality fall into one or the other of two major categories. Those which stem from the conservative tradition are usually referred to as "functionalist" theories. Those which have their roots in the radical tradition are commonly labeled "conflict" theories.

Among the leading functionalist theorists of the present day, at least two have spelled out their views on inequality and stratification in some detail. These are Talcott Parsons and his former student, Kingsley Davis. Both approach the problem of inequality from the perspective of society at large, seeing it as a necessary feature of any properly functioning human society. Davis summed up the functionalist approach in a single sentence when he wrote:

Social inequality is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons.²¹

This is the essence of the functionalist position: stratification arises basically out of the needs of societies, not out of the needs or desires of individuals.

Neither Parsons nor Davis says that all of the characteristics of any given system of stratification arise in response to societal needs. Both concede that other factors operate in the real world to modify systems of inequality to some degree. However, judging from their failure to pursue this aspect of the problem, neither considers such factors to be of major importance.

Davis argues that systems of stratification arise in response to two specific needs common to every human society. First, there is the need to instill in the abler members the motivation to occupy important and difficult positions which require greater than average ability. Second, society must motivate such men, once they are in these positions, to perform the duties attached to them. Hence, it must provide them with greater rewards.

Davis cites two factors as the major determinants of the magnitude of the rewards attached to positions: (1) their functional importance for the society and (2) the relative scarcity of qualified personnel. Positions which are extremely important and which suffer from a shortage of qualified personnel receive the highest rewards. Those which are unimportant and for which there is an abundance of qualified personnel receive minimal rewards. Since all positions can never be of equal importance, nor all men equally qualified for the more responsible positions, inequality is inevitable. Not only is it inevitable, it is necessarily beneficial to everyone,

²¹ Kingsley Davis, *Human Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 367.

since the survival and well-being of every individual is contingent on the survival and well-being of society.

Parsons' approach to the subject differs more in form than in substance. He starts from the assumption that in every human society there are certain shared values. Since values arise out of the needs of society and since the basic needs of all societies are more or less similar, these values tend to be similar the world over. What differs from one society to the next is the relative ranking of these values. One society may value efficiency more highly than stability, while another may reverse the order, but every society is obliged to value both efficiency and stability to some degree.

The system of stratification in any society is essentially an expression of the value system of that society. The rewards which men and positions enjoy are a function of the degree to which their qualities, performances, and possessions measure up to the standards set by their society. Since men necessarily differ in these respects, inequality is inevitable.²²

By contrast with the functionalists, conflict theorists approach the problem of social inequality from the standpoint of the various individuals and subgroups within society.²³ Their needs and desires, rather than the needs of society as a whole, provide the basic postulates for this school of theorists. The difference between the two schools can be seen most clearly in their members' approach to the phenomenon of power. In reviewing C. Wright Mills's book, *The Power Elite*, Parsons charged:

The essential point is that, to Mills, power is not a facility for the performance of function in and on behalf of the society as a system, but is interpreted exclusively as a facility for getting what one group, the holders of power, wants by preventing another group, the "outs" from getting what it wants.²⁴

Conflict theorists, as their name suggests, see social inequality as arising out of the struggle for valued goods and services in short supply. Where the functionalists emphasize the common interests shared by the members of a society, conflict theorists emphasize the interests which

²² For the chief statement of Parsons' views on stratification, see "A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," in Reinhard Bendix and S. M. Lipset, *Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification* (New York: Free Press, 1953), pp. 92-128.

²³ Labels can sometimes be misleading when applied to groups of scholars, and this one is no exception. I do not include under the heading of conflict theorists writers such as Lewis Coser, author of *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956). Though this volume is focused on conflict, its basic purpose is to show how conflict serves society as a whole. In short, the underlying theoretical orientation is functionalist.

²⁴ Talcott Parsons, "The Distribution of Power in American Society," *World Politics*, 10 (October, 1957), p. 139.

divide. Where functionalists stress the common advantages which accrue from social relationships, conflict theorists emphasize the element of domination and exploitation. Where functionalists emphasize consensus as the basis of social unity, conflict theorists emphasize coercion. Where functionalists see human societies as social systems, conflict theorists see them as stages on which struggles for power and privilege take place.

This is not to say that all conflict theorists totally deny the validity of the functionalists' approach. One, Ralf Dahrendorf, even concedes that society is basically "Janus-headed," and that functionalists and conflict theorists are simply studying two aspects of the same reality. He, however, like Davis, Parsons, Mills, and other theorists of these two schools, is content to limit his own analysis to one facet of reality, ignoring the crucial question of how the two are tied together.

The Emerging Synthesis

Yet must the matter be left there? Can there not be a synthesis of the valid insights of both the conservative and radical traditions, of modern functionalism and conflict theory, and the development of a single integrated theory of social inequality?

The central thesis of this volume is that this is not only possible, but the process is already under way. A third approach to the subject of social inequality is already becoming evident, an approach which slowly but surely is laying the foundation of what in Hegelian terms would be called the "synthesis." Like the Hegelian synthesis it integrates the valid insights of thesis and antithesis by approaching the problem on a different level. Whereas both thesis and antithesis are essentially *normative* theories of inequality, i.e., primarily concerned with moral evaluation and the question of justice, the synthesis is essentially *analytical*, i.e., concerned with empirical relationships and their causes. Whereas both thesis and antithesis rely on logic and isolated illustrations as methods of validating propositions, the synthesis relies on the systematic mobilization of empirical data. In short, *the synthesis is largely the result of the modern application of the scientific method to the study of the age-old problem of human inequality.*

A definite movement toward the synthesis is evident even in the writings of the functionalists and conflict theorists mentioned above. In the writings of most of these men the moralistic element is clearly subordinated to the analytical and, although they rely heavily on logic and isolated illustration, it is clear that they concede the superiority of systematic evidence in determining the validity of general statements. Func-

tionalists and conflict theorists are linked to the older conservative and radical traditions chiefly by virtue of their choice of basic postulates. Functionalists rely chiefly on postulates borrowed from the conservative tradition and thus are led to a view of inequality which emphasizes its necessary and socially beneficial aspects. Conflict theorists, by contrast, build on postulates drawn from the radical tradition and hence arrive at a very different view of society. While recognizing these links between modern social theorists and the older philosophical traditions, it is equally important to recognize the differences which set them apart. Scholars such as Davis, Parsons, Dahrendorf, and even Mills in his earlier years, have already taken a substantial step in the direction of the synthesis.

There are others, however, who have gone even further, and these scholars deserve special attention since their work represents the closest approximation yet to the emerging synthesis. One of the pioneers in this movement was the great German scholar, Max Weber. Though he never developed a systematic theory of stratification, he often dealt with various aspects of the distributive process. In his treatment of the subject the analytical approach was clearly dominant, and he incorporated in his work valid insights from both historic traditions.²⁵ The same can be said of his distinguished Italian contemporary, Vilfredo Pareto.²⁶

Another pioneer in the synthesizing movement has been Pitirim Sorokin. His early work, *Social Mobility*, is probably the first extensive and systematic treatment of social stratification in which the synthetic perspective is dominant.²⁷ Here one can see a judicious combination and blending of elements out of both traditions. This manifests itself especially in the utilization of a multidimensional view of stratification, a common tendency in synthetic work, one evident also in the work of Weber.²⁸

In the last decade, an important new stage has been achieved in the emergence and development of the synthesis. For the first time in history, some scholars have come to view the problem clearly and consciously in dialectical terms. The first to achieve this was the able Polish sociologist, Stanislaw Ossowski. In his book, *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, published initially in 1957, the year following the Polish and Hun-

²⁵ Among those writings translated into English, see especially Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947), especially parts 3-5, or *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Fair Lawn, N.J.: Oxford University Press, 1946), especially parts 7 and 14-17.

²⁶ *The Mind and Society*, translated by A. Bongiorno and Arthur Livingston and edited by Livingston (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1935), especially vols. III and IV.

²⁷ New York: Harper & Row, 1927.

²⁸ For a more recent statement of Sorokin's views on stratification see *Society, Culture and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1947), chaps. 14 and 15.

garian uprisings, Ossowski again confronted the issues dividing Marxists and functionalists in their views and interpretations of class structure.²⁹ However, unlike those who have dealt with this problem before, Ossowski did not ask, "Which view is correct?" Rather, he sought to demonstrate that *both views are fundamentally correct*. He argued that this is possible because human societies are far more complex than either theoretical system has ever acknowledged and both have presented only a partial view, or one which emphasizes certain aspects of reality to the neglect of others. For example, he declared that there are certain facts consistent with both Soviet and American claims that their own societies are classless societies, just as there are others which support their charges that the other's is a class-stratified society. Similarly, he shows how the same society can be analyzed as a two-class society in Marxian terms and as a three- or more class society in functionalist terms.

More recently a young Belgian-American sociologist, Pierre van den Berghe, published a paper along similar lines. In it he sought to show that Marxian and functionalist theory, "the two major approaches which have dominated much of social science, present partial but complementary views of reality."³⁰ To do this, he examined four important areas of convergence and overlap, showing that even on points of apparent disagreement synthesis can be achieved. While his treatment of the problem was much less detailed than Ossowski's, and much less focused on the subject of stratification, it shares the same point of view.

It is interesting to note that neither Ossowski nor van den Berghe seem to have been aware of the work of the other, and the present writer became aware of their work only in the closing stages of the preparation of this volume. Each reacted independently to the same basic stimuli and the nature of the response seems to have been shaped largely by the nature of these stimuli. This suggests that the synthetic view of social stratification is not so much the product of the efforts or insights of any single individual or group of individuals as it is a spontaneous working out of a complex sociointellectual process and the reflection of basic trends and developments in the work of many widely scattered scholars.

Until recently movement toward the synthesis has been more by drift than by design. A basic aim of this book is to speed the process by calling attention to the dialectical pattern in the development of thought

²⁹ Translated by Sheila Patterson (New York: Free Press, 1963). See also Ossowski's paper, "Old Notions and New Problems: Interpretations of Social Structure in Modern Society," *Transactions of the Third World Congress of Sociology* (London: International Sociological Association, 1956), vol. 3, pp. 18-25.

³⁰ "Dialectic and Functionalism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis," *American Sociological Review*, 28 (1963), pp. 695-705.

in the field, and by outlining the basic nature of the synthesis toward which we seem to be moving. To do this, elements have been drawn from both of the older theoretical traditions together with others which are found in neither.

The process of synthesis takes different forms in different fields of inquiry, but there are certain common tendencies which deserve recognition. Above all, the process of synthesis normally involves *the reformulation of problems and concepts*. Many of the impasses into which proponents of thesis and antithesis have got have developed because both parties have asked the same wrong question or utilized the same faulty concepts. Too often we fail to recognize that the questions we ask and the concepts we use have assumptions built into them—assumptions which often prove to be faulty when subjected to critical scrutiny, and which therefore preclude any adequate solution of the problem at issue. Just as there may be no true answer to the question, “When did you stop beating your wife?” there may be none to the question, “Will totalitarianism or democracy prevail in the future?” Each contains hidden assumptions which force answers into a *limited range of categories*, none of which may represent a reasonable approximation of the truth. Similarly, as Ossowski has shown, the traditional concepts we use often prejudice the mode of our thought.³¹ As the limitations of traditional concepts and questions come to be recognized, and as new and better concepts and questions are formulated, a process of synthesis occurs spontaneously. This process can be speeded up, however, by a conscious recognition of the nature of the problem and by deliberate efforts to search out inadequate concepts and questions.

There are two ways of reformulating problems and concepts that have proven of such general utility that they deserve special recognition. The first is the technique of *transforming categorical concepts into variable concepts*. Categorical concepts, by their very nature, force one to think in limiting “either-or” terms. For example, either a caste system is present in a society or it is not. When categorical concepts are transformed into variable concepts, one is no longer faced with the task of choosing between what are often two (or three or more) faulty views. Instead, he is invited to ask *to what degree* a given phenomenon is present. Thus, we cease to ask whether a caste system exists in American society, and ask instead to what degree it is present.

The second technique involves *breaking down compound concepts into their constituent elements*. Many of the traditional concepts used to describe systems of stratification subsume a variety of loosely related

³¹ *Op. cit.*, chap. 11.

variables. The concept "vertical mobility" is a good example of this. Recent research has made sociologists increasingly aware of the need to differentiate between inter- and intragenerational mobility, and between occupational, educational, and other forms of mobility. Generalizations which may apply to one of these types of mobility may be utterly false if applied to vertical mobility generally. As is evident, the shift from categorical to variable concepts, together with the breaking down of compound concepts, encourages the asking of more fruitful questions, and this in turn usually leads to increasing agreement in areas of controversy. In the chapters which follow, a deliberate effort has been made to reformulate many traditional problems and concepts in these ways.

In every field of study there are three basic questions which must be answered. First, what is the *nature* of the phenomenon in question? Second, what are the *causes* of its uniformities and variations? Third, what are the *consequences* of its existence or action? The present volume is concerned chiefly with the first two problems. The third is discussed only when the element of feedback is present, i.e., when the consequences of a given pattern of distribution affect the distributive pattern itself. The decision to limit the analysis in this way was based chiefly on the recognition of the complexity of the first two problems and the desire to do justice to them, and secondarily on the belief that the third problem has been more thoroughly investigated and involves fewer difficulties.

There is one other "peculiarity" of this volume which deserves comment. In recent decades many American sociologists have come to equate theory building with the use of purely deductive logic.³² This is a serious error since successful theory building requires *both inductive and deductive logic*. To limit oneself to pure deductive reasoning in a field such as sociology is impossible, at least if one desires to be relevant; to attempt it and to claim it is only to deceive oneself and others and to inhibit the normal development of theory.

In the early stages of this volume the primary emphasis is on deductive logic. Later, as the analysis shifts from the most general level to the level involving a specific type of society, the emphasis shifts increasingly to inductive logic. At this later stage one could pretend that all the generalizations presented were derived by a rigorous and inexorable logic from the basic premises set forth in the earlier chapters, but this would be untrue. Despite the shift in emphasis, there is a remarkable compatibility between these two sets of generalizations—so much so, in fact, that

³² This seems to be due in large measure to the influence of Talcott Parsons. There is a subtle irony here since the deductive element in Parsons' work has never been very prominent or rewarding but, despite this, the image remains.

together they form a reasonably well integrated body of theory. To expect more at this stage is to be utopian.

Basic Issues

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to review and summarize the basic issues which have emerged out of the historic controversy between conservatives and radicals. Any truly synthetic theory must address itself to these issues. Hence, this summary will serve not only as the conclusion to this historical review but also as the point of departure and foundation for all that follows.

In summarizing a controversy as extensive and protracted as this one has been, some degree of oversimplification is inevitable. Conservatives have not always agreed among themselves, nor have radicals. The only belief common to all conservatives has been their belief that the existing system of distribution was basically just; the only belief common to all radicals has been their belief that it was basically unjust. On other matters there has been no single conservative or radical position to which each and every adherent subscribed. Nevertheless, given the basic assumption about the justice or injustice of the system, other views tend to follow, with the result that most conservatives have lined up on one side of the key issues and most radicals on the other. It is these dominant tendencies with which we are concerned here.

One of the most basic issues dividing radicals and conservatives over the centuries has been that concerning the nature of man himself. Historically, conservatives have been distrustful of man's basic nature and have emphasized the need for restraining social institutions. By contrast, radicals have been distrustful of these restraining institutions and have taken an optimistic view of man's nature. This difference can be seen quite clearly in the French Revolution, where the conservatives put their trust in the monarchy and the Church and the radicals in man himself, emancipated from the restraints of these "corrupting" institutions.

A second basic issue has been that concerning the nature of society. As noted before, conservatives have traditionally viewed society as a social system with various needs of its own which must be met if the needs and desires of its constituent members are to be met. Radicals, by contrast, have tended to view society more as the setting within which various struggles take place; it is significant chiefly because its peculiar properties affect the outcome of the struggles.

Third, radicals and conservatives have also differed on the question of the degree to which systems of inequality are maintained by coercion.

Radicals have generally emphasized coercion as the chief factor undergirding and maintaining private property, slavery, and other institutions which give rise to unequal rights and privileges. Conservatives, on the other hand, have argued that coercion plays only a minor role and inequality arises as a necessary consequence of consensus (i.e., because of values which are shared widely throughout society, even by the less privileged elements) and/or innate differences among men.

Fourth, proponents of the two traditions have differed concerning the degree to which inequality in society generates conflict. Radicals have seen this as one of the chief consequences of inequality; conservatives have generally minimized it.

Fifth, a genuine disagreement exists concerning the means by which rights and privileges are acquired. Radicals have laid great emphasis on force, fraud, and inheritance as the chief avenues. Conservatives, by contrast, have stressed more justifiable methods such as hard work, delegation by others, and so forth.

Sixth, conservatives have always regarded inequality as inevitable. Radicals, or at least those in the egalitarian tradition, have taken the opposite view, though in the case of Marxian theory they concede its inevitability at certain stages of societal development.

Seventh, a major disagreement has always existed with respect to the nature of the state and of law. Radicals have commonly regarded both as instruments of oppression employed by the ruling classes for their own benefit. Conservatives have seen them as organs of the total society, acting basically to promote the common good.

Eighth, and finally, conservatives have tended to regard the concept of class as essentially a heuristic device calling attention to aggregations of people with certain common characteristics. Radicals, however, have been much more inclined to view classes as social groups with distinctive interests which inevitably bring them into conflict with other groups with opposed interests. Perhaps we might summarize much of the foregoing by saying that conservatives have tended to be realists with respect to the concept "society" and nominalists with respect to the concept "class," while radicals have generally taken the opposite position.

These, then, are the basic issues. In the chapters which follow we shall return to them repeatedly since the synthesis must either take a position with respect to each of them or reformulate them. It may not be inappropriate to say at this point that we shall adopt the latter course as often as the former.