



The Emergence of Sociological Theory

Third Edition

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The Sociology of Karl Marx

The nineteenth century was filled with revolutionaries and revolutions, mainly because industrialization and capitalism heaved the feudal world out of joint, destroying social relationships that had existed for a millennium. Marx believed that these changes had produced a paradoxical result. Although industrialization meant that sustenance and amenities could be available for everyone, only a few people actually benefited—the very rich who owned capital (income-producing assets). The capitalists exploited the masses, who lived in great misery and depravity. In order to remedy this situation, Marx tried to stimulate people to reorganize social arrangements so that everyone's needs could be met. He argued that such a change was inevitable, the only question being when it would occur. Throughout his life he served as a participant, organizer, and leader of revolutionary groups dedicated to ending the exploitation of the masses.

Of all the classical sociologists, Marx was unique in that he acted as both revolutionary and social scientist, a combination that constitutes the greatest weakness in his sociology. His orientation can be summarized in the following way: As a revolutionary, he sought to overthrow the existing order and substitute collective control of society by the people so that, in a cooperative context, they could be free to develop their potential as human beings. As a social scientist, he tried to show that such collective control was historically inevitable.

According to Marx, history has a direction that can be observed. This direction, he and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, will lead inevitably to a communist society in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." In such a context, Marx believed, the few will no longer exploit the many.

Before proceeding to an explication of Marx's writings, it is important to recognize that his works are often difficult to understand, partly because of their revolutionary intent and partly because his theoretical methodology is unclear.

As a literary genre, revolutionary writings are polemical and argumentative, because they are designed to stimulate action. They also tend to deal with historical events in a jargon-laden manner. These characteristics mean that readers who are unfamiliar with the historical situation in which the revolutionaries lived, with the disagreements separating various political factions, and with the names of the various protagonists frequently find the arguments obscure. For example, portions of the long third section of *The Communist Manifesto*, titled "Socialist and Communist Literature," are difficult for those unfamiliar with the disagreements between Marx and such figures as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, and the Young Hegelians. Most of the people Marx fought with go unread today. Hence, many of the references in his writings are difficult to comprehend.

More important, Marx's writings are hard to understand because his theoretical methodology is unclear and he never really explained it. He had no predecessors, for he belonged to the first generation of social scientists. As a whole their works mark the end of social philosophy and the beginning of a science of society. This situation means, however, that Marx had to make his own way in establishing a social science where none existed. So he developed an interpretation of the nature of capitalist society and, more than the other classical theorists dealt with in this book, left it to subsequent scholars to explain his methodology. But this strategy leads to major problems of explanation. For example, as noted in the last chapter, in the opening pages of *Capital* Marx asserted that Hegel had been standing on his head and that he, Marx, had stood him right side up. Unfortunately, what this phrase means is not at all obvious to those unfamiliar with Hegel's philosophy and the arguments surrounding it. Similarly, in *The German Ideology* and other places, Marx said production was simultaneously consumption and that the proletariat, or working class, was identical to the bourgeoisie, or capitalist class. Again, what these

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Birth of the Communist Manifesto*, ed. Dirk Struik (New York: International, 1971), p. 112.

phrases mean is unclear. How can one thing be “identical” to or “simultaneously” another? Marx used such language often, especially in his early works. His use of words in this way reflects a specific (and unique) theoretical methodology.

In this chapter we explain the major themes in Marx’s writings and his theoretical methodology by examining his three most important works: *The German Ideology*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *Capital*.

THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY

The German Ideology was completed in 1846, when Marx was twenty-eight years old and Engels twenty-six. Much of the rather lengthy book is given over to heavy-handed and satirical polemics against various Young Hegelians. The publisher declined to accept the manuscript at the time, perhaps for political reasons, because Marx was already well known as a radical and had been expelled from both Germany and France, or perhaps because of the arcane writing style. In any case, Marx later recalled, the manuscript was “abandoned to the gnawing criticism of the mice . . . since we had achieved our main purpose—self-clarification.”²

Marx opened *The German Ideology* with a bitter attack on the Young Hegelians, whom he described at one point as engaging in “theoretical bubble blowing.”³ For the Young Hegelians, Marx observed, great conflicts and revolutions take place only in the realm of thought, because no buildings are destroyed and no one is injured or dies. Thus, despite their excessive verbiage, Marx believed, Young Hegelians merely criticized the essentially religious nature of Hegel’s work and substituted their own negative religious canons. “It is an interesting event we are dealing with,” he said caustically, “the putrescence of the absolute spirit.”⁴ But in the process of debunking the Young Hegelians’ writings, Marx developed an understanding of social theory, a description of the characteristics of all societies, and a theoretical methodology for understanding those characteristics.

2. Karl Marx, “Preface,” *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International, 1970), p. 22.

3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International, 1947), p. 3. Only part 1 of the text is translated, and it is generally assumed that Engels’s contribution to this portion of the book was minimal. This is mainly because the text appears to be an elaboration of Marx’s “Theses on Feuerbach,” which he outlined for himself in 1845; see pp. 43–45 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978). In addition, Engels stated repeatedly that Marx had already developed his conception of history prior to the beginning of their collaboration. Therefore, in what follows we will generally refer only to Marx.

4. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*.

The Nature of Social Theory

As an alternative to the “idealistic humbug” of the Young Hegelians, Marx argued that theoretical analyses should be empirically based. Social theory, he said, should be grounded on the “existence of living human individuals” who must survive, often in a relatively hostile environment.⁵ This orientation is necessary because human beings are unlike other animals in that they manipulate the environment in order to satisfy needs. They “begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical [i.e., social] organization.”⁶ This idea implies that people are “conscious”—that is, self-reflective. Thus, human beings are also unlike other animals in that they can look at themselves and their environment and then act rationally in terms of their own interests. This fact means that consciousness arises out of experience, an argument directly opposed to Hegel’s idealism, in which notions of morality, religion, and all other forms of awareness are considered to exist independently of human beings. Put in modern language, Marx was asserting that people produced their ideas about the world in light of the social structures in which they lived. Further, as social structures change, the content of people’s ideas (their consciousness) changes as well. In breaking with the idealists in this way, however, Marx did not imply a simple-minded materialist orientation. He did not see the human mind as a passive receptacle; rather, it is active, both responding to and changing the material world.

According to Marx, then, social theory should focus on how people influence and are influenced by their material conditions: for example, their degree of hunger, degree of protection from the environment, opportunity to enjoy the amenities of life, and ability to realize their creative potential. This emphasis constitutes a fundamental epistemological break with idealism. In effect, Marx stood Hegel “right side up” by transforming philosophy into an empirical social science.

The Characteristics of All Societies

Based on this vision of social theory, Marx emphasized that theoretical analyses should be oriented to what he called “the real process of production”—that is, the most essential characteristics that all societies have in common. These characteristics (Marx called them *moments*) do not refer to evolutionary stages of development but rather to social conditions that have “existed simul-

5. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, p. 7.

6. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, p. 8.

taneously since the dawn of history and the first men, and . . . still assert themselves in history today.”⁷ Marx’s language is significant. He used a phrase that appears to have narrow, economic connotations—“the real process of production”—to refer to a more general sociological issue. Such phrasing occurs frequently in his writings.

The first characteristic of all societies is that human beings, unlike other animal species, produce sustenance from the environment in order to live and thereby “make history.” Marx noted that human “life involves before anything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other [material] things.”⁸ Such needs are satisfied by employing technology to manipulate the environment in some socially organized manner. For Marx, this fact clearly implied that social theory had to deal with more than just ideas. It had to be grounded in “the existence of living human individuals,” who have material needs that must be satisfied through production. From this angle of vision, the task of social theory is to explain how people “produce their means of subsistence.”

The second characteristic of all societies is that people create new needs over time. Need creation occurs because production (or work) always involves the use of tools or instruments of various sorts, and these tools are periodically improved, yielding more and better consumer goods. Thus, Marx said the processes of production and consumption always fed back on each other in a cumulative fashion, so that as one set of needs was satisfied, new ones emerged.⁹

This close connection between production and consumption led him to assert that the two were “identical” to or “simultaneously” each other, because it is not possible to consider one apart from the other. For Marx, the process of need creation, as indicated by the changing modes of production and consumption, implies that social theory must deal with historical change, its direction, and its source. As will become clear, he believed that human history displayed an evolutionary pattern from less complex to more complex social structures and that the origin of change was internal to each society.

It is important to understand that the process of need creation involves the desire not only for improved food, clothing, and shelter but also for the various amenities of life. Marx observed that in the production and consumption of goods beyond the minimum necessary for survival—what are called amenities—people became “civilized” in the sense that they distinguished their uniquely human characteristics from those of other species. Thus, in

7. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, p. 18.

8. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, p. 16.

9. Marx, “Introduction,” *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 188–217.

The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (written in 1844), he described productive work as serving a dual purpose: (1) to satisfy physical needs and (2) to express uniquely human creativity. According to Marx, this duality is why other animals work only to satisfy an “immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, Marx believed, most people are prevented from expressing their human potential through work because the exploitation and alienation inherent in the division of labor prevent it.

The third characteristic of all societies is that production is based on a division of labor, which in Marx’s writings always implies a hierarchical stratification structure, with its attendant exploitation and alienation. The division of labor means the tasks that must be done in every society—placating the gods, deciding priorities, producing goods, raising children, and so forth—are divided up. But Marx observed that in all societies the basis for this division was private ownership of land or capital, which he called the *means of production*. Private ownership of the means of production produces a stratification structure composed of the dominant group, the owners, and the remaining classes arrayed below them in varying degrees of exploitation and alienation. Nonowners are exploited and alienated because, without owning the means of production, they cannot control either the work they do or the products produced. For example, capitalists, not employees, organize a production line to produce consumer goods; and capitalists, not employees, own the finished products. But because employees, whom Marx called *proletarians*, need these products to survive, they are forced to return their wages to the capitalists, who use the money to make more consumer goods and enrich themselves further. In this context alienation takes the form of a fantastic reversal in which people feel themselves to be truly free only in their animal-like functions—such as eating, drinking, and fornicating—whereas in their peculiarly human tasks, such as work, they do not feel human because they control neither the process nor the result. On this basis, Marx concluded, in capitalism “what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.”¹¹ Thus, paradoxically, the division of labor means that proletarians continually re-create that which enslaves them: capital.

In some form or another, Marx argued, exploitation and alienation occur in all societies characterized by private ownership of the means of production. That is, in all societies a stratification structure exists in which the members of

10. Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (New York: International, 1964), p. 111.

11. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 111.

the subordinate classes are forced to continuously exchange their labor power for sustenance and amenities so they can keep on producing goods to benefit the members of the dominant class. For Marx, this situation implied that social theory had to focus on who benefits from existing social arrangements by systematically describing the structure of stratification that accompanies private ownership of the means of production. In addition this situation also implied that only collective ownership could eliminate these problems.

The fourth characteristic of all societies is that ideas and values emerge from the division of labor. Put differently, ideas and values result from people's practical efforts at obtaining sustenance, creating needs, and working together. As a result, ideologies usually justify the status quo. "Ideologies" are systematic views of the way the world ought to be, as embodied in religious doctrines and political values. Thus, Marx argued, religious and political beliefs in capitalist societies state that individuals have a right to own land or capital; they have a right to use the means of production for their own rather than the collectivity's benefit. It is perverse, he noted, for everyone to accept these values even though only a few people can exercise this right, such as landowners and capitalists.

Marx believed the values (or *ideologies*, to use his word) characteristic of a society are the tools of the dominant class because they mislead the populace about their true interests. This is why he described religion as "the opium of the masses."¹² He reasoned that religious belief functioned to blind people so they could not recognize their exploitation and their real political interests. Religion does this by emphasizing that salvation, compensation for misery and alienation on earth, will come in the next world. In effect, religious beliefs justify social inequality. For Marx, the fact that ideas and values emerge from the division of labor implies that social theory must focus on both the structural sources of dominant ideas and the extent to which such beliefs influence people.

Marx contended that although societies differed in many ways, all displayed these four characteristics, and his subsequent works built on this insight. Interestingly, this orientation does not make Marx unique today. Virtually all modern social theories recognize that societies have such characteristics, although the ideas are usually phrased rather differently. What makes Marx unique is the theoretical methodology that emerged from these premises.

12. Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in Tucker, ed., *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 16-26, 53-66.

Marx's Theoretical Methodology

The exposition in *The German Ideology* is an early example of Marx's dialectical materialism. Although he did not use this phrase, it expresses discontinuity and continuity between Hegel and Marx. As we explained previously, Marx rejected Hegel by grounding social theory in the real world, where people must satisfy their physical and psychological needs. The term *materialism* denotes this fact. Having rejected the substance of Hegel's idealism, however, Marx continued to use the Hegelian method of analysis. The term *dialectical* denotes this fact. In Marx's hands dialectical materialism transforms historical analysis.

Dialectical materialism has four characteristics. First, society is a social structure, or *system*. This is a modern term, one that Marx did not use. It means societies can be seen as having interrelated parts, such as classes, social institutions, cultural values, and so forth. These parts form an integrated whole. Thus, the angle of the observer is very important when viewing a society. In tracing the connections among the parts of the stratification structure, for example, it can be seen that from one angle a specific label can be applied (for example, bourgeoisie), whereas from another angle an opposing label can be applied (for example, proletariat). But there is an inherent connection between the two classes, which is why Marx noted in *The Communist Manifesto* that it was tautologous to speak of wage labor and capital, for one cannot exist without the other. Similarly, as observed previously, this is why he described production and consumption as "identical," or as occurring "simultaneously." He meant that they were parts of a coherent structure, or system, and that there was an inherent connection between them. Furthermore, the process of production and consumption (which today would be called the economy) is connected to stratification. More generally, class relations are reflected in all arenas of social behavior: the economy, kinship, illness and medical treatment, crime, religion, education, and government. Although Marx emphasized the primacy of economic factors, especially ownership of the means of production, his work is not narrowly economic; it is, rather, an analysis of how social structures function and change.

Second, social change is inherent in all societies as people make history by satisfying their ever-increasing needs. This orientation is an endogenous (or internal) theory of social change. Thus, it asserts that the most fundamental source of change comes from within societies rather than from outside of them. According to Marx, not only are all the parts of society connected, they also contain their own inherent "contradictions," which will cause their opposites to develop. For example, as will be described in the next section, Marx argued that feudalism contained within itself the social relations that eventually became capitalism. Similarly, in the *Manifesto* and *Capital*, Marx contended

that capitalism contained within itself the social relations that would inevitably engender a new form of society: communism.

Third, social change evolves in a recognizable direction. For example, just as a flower is inherent in the nature of a seed, so the historical development of a more complex social structure, such as capitalism, is inherent in the nature of a less complex one, such as feudalism. The direction of history is from less complex to more complex social structures, which is suggested by the pattern of need creation depicted earlier. As Robert Nisbet comments, Marx was a child of the Enlightenment, and he believed in the inevitability of human progress.¹³ He had a vision of evolutionary development toward a utopian end point. For Marx, this end point was a communist society.

Fourth, freely acting people decisively shape the direction of history in light of the predictable patterns of opposition and class conflict that develop in every society. As with all of Marx's concepts, his use of the term *class* is sometimes confusing. The key to understanding this concept lies in the idea of opposition, for he always saw classes as opposed to one another. It should be remembered, however, that this opposition occurs within a stratification structure; classes are opposed but connected.¹⁴

Thus, regardless of their number or composition, the members of different classes are enemies because they have opposing interests. This is not a result of choice, but of location within the stratification structure. For example, if the position of an aggregate of people makes obtaining food and shelter a constant problem and if these people cannot control their own activities or express their human potential, they are clearly in a subordinate position in relationship to others. In their alienation they have an interest in changing the status quo, whether they are aware of it or not. On the other hand, if the position of an aggregate of people is such that their basic needs are satiated, if they can control their daily activities, and if they can devote themselves to realizing their human potential, such people have an interest in preserving the status quo. Marx believed that these opposing interests could not be reconciled.

Hence, given a knowledge of the division of labor in capitalism, the differing interests and opportunities of the proletarians and capitalists are predictable, as is the generation of class conflict. The latter, however, is a matter of choice. History does not act, people do. From this point of view, Marx's theoretical task was to identify the social conditions under which people will recognize their class interests, unite, and produce a communist revolution. As will become clear later, Marx believed that he had achieved this goal. The

13. Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

14. Bertell Ollman, "Marx's Use of 'Class,'" *American Journal of Sociology* 73 (March 1968), pp. 573-80.

important point to remember is that his theoretical methodology combines determinism, or direction, with human freedom: a communist revolution is a predictable historical event ushered in by freely acting people who recognize and act in their own interests.

Dialectical materialism can be summarized in the following way: Within any society a way of producing things exists, both in terms of what is produced and the social organization of production. Marx called this aspect of society the *productive forces*.¹⁵ In all societies the productive forces are established and maintained in terms of a division of labor. Those few who own the means of production make up the dominant class, which benefits from the status quo. The masses make up the subordinate class (or classes). They are exploited and alienated because they have little control over their lives, and hence they have an interest in change. Over time, new ways of producing things are devised, whether based on advances in technology, changes in the way production is organized, or both. Such new forces of production better satisfy old needs and also stimulate new ones. They are in the hands of a new class, and they exist in opposition to current property relationships and forms of interaction. Over the long run the tension between these opposing classes erupts into revolutionary conflict, and a new dominant class emerges.

Marx's methodology is unique because it is a logically closed theoretical system that cannot be refuted. This fact separates Marxist and non-Marxist social scientists today. Among non-Marxists, theories are evaluated in light of observations, which means they can be disproved. The goal is to develop abstract statements that summarize patterns of social organization. From this point of view the social sciences resemble the natural sciences in orientation.

Among Marxists, however, theories are evaluated in light of what they lead people to do (or not do), which means they cannot be disproved. Because the goal is to assess where a society is along an evolutionary continuum, theories are constantly adjusted in light of changing political conditions.¹⁶ As we noted at the beginning of the chapter, the end point of this continuum is a communist society, a communal social organization in which there is collective control of the means of production (in today's societies, this is capital) so people, acting cooperatively, can be free. In such a social context, Marx

15. Sometimes Marx uses the phrase *forces of production* narrowly, so that it refers only to the instruments used in the productive process. Sometimes, however, he uses the phrase so that it refers to both the instruments used in production and the social organization that accompanies their use. By *social organization* is meant not only the organization of work (as in factories) but also family life, law, politics, and all other institutions. This tactic occurs with many of Marx's key concepts. See Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

16. See Richard Appelbaum, "Marx's Theory of the Falling Rate of Profit: Towards a Dialectical Analysis of Structural Change," *American Sociological Review* 43 (February 1978), pp. 73-92.

argued, exploitation and alienation will not exist because the division of labor will not be based on private ownership of property. From this point of view, the social sciences are radically different from the natural sciences.

The German Ideology constitutes the first presentation of Marx's theory. It is, however, incomplete. It does not, for example, raise one of the most crucial issues: how are the oppressed proletarians to become aware of their true interests and seize control of the society for the benefit of all? This and other problems of revolutionary action are dealt with in *The Communist Manifesto*.

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

In 1847 Marx and Engels joined the Communist League, which they soon dominated. Under their influence its goal became the overthrow of bourgeois society and the establishment of a new social order without classes and private property. As described in Chapter 6, Marx and Engels decided to compose a manifesto that would publicly state the Communist League's doctrines. The result constitutes one of the greatest political pamphlets ever written.

The *Manifesto* opens with a menacing phrase that immediately reveals its revolutionary intent: "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter." In a political context where opposition parties of all political orientations were called communist, Marx wrote, it was time for the communists themselves to "meet this nursery tale of the specter of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself."¹⁷ The remainder of the *Manifesto* is organized into four sections, which are summarized below.

Bourgeois and Proletarians

Marx presented his theoretical and political position early in the text when he emphasized that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." He continued by observing that in every era "oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another [and] carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes."¹⁸ Put differently, Marx believed that in every social order those who owned the means of production always oppressed those who did not. Thus, in his view, bourgeois society merely substituted a

17: Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 87.

18: Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 88.

new form of oppression and, hence, struggle in place of the old feudal form. Marx argued, however, that bourgeois society was distinctive in that it had simplified class antagonisms, because the "society as a whole is splitting up more and more into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."¹⁹ Because one class owns the means of production and the other does not, the two have absolutely opposing interests: the bourgeoisie in maintaining the status quo and the proletariat in a complete reorganization of society so that production can benefit the collectivity as a whole. This situation reflected a long historical process. As in *The German Ideology*, the analysis in the *Manifesto* is an example of Marx's dialectical materialism:

Historically, Marx argued, capitalism emerged inexorably from feudalism. "From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie [capitalists] were developed."²⁰ Such changes were not historical accidents, Marx said, but the inevitable result of people acting in terms of their own interests. The rise of trade and exchange, stimulated by the European discovery of the Americas, constituted new and powerful productive forces, which faced a feudal nobility that had exhausted itself by constant warfare. Further, as they were increasingly exposed to other cultures, the members of the nobility wanted new amenities, and so they enclosed the land in order to raise cash crops using new methods of production. It should be recalled that production and consumption reciprocally affect each other, and they are tied to the nature of the class structure. As this historical process occurred, the serfs were forced off the land and into the cities, where they had to find work.

During this same period a merchant class arose. At first the nascent capitalists existed to serve the needs of the nobility by facilitating trade and exchange. But over time, money, or capital, became the dominant productive force. This process occurred as new sources of energy (such as steam) were discovered, as machines were invented and speeded up the production process, and as the former serfs were pressed into service in new industries as wage laborers. The result, Marx noted, was that in place of feudal retainers and patriarchal ties, there was "left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.'"²¹

19. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 89.

20. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 90.

21. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 91.

The *Manifesto* summarizes the situation in the following way:

The feudal system of industry, under which industrial production was monopolized by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place; the guild masters were pushed on one side by the manufacturing middle class; division of labor between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labor in each single workshop.

Meantime, the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacture no longer sufficed. Thereupon steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, modern industry, the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois. . . .

We see then: the means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organization of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, feudal relations of property, became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder, they were burst asunder.²²

Thus, the rise of capitalism meant that the forces of production changed, and therefore so did the class structure. Marx said that although these developments had been the result of freely acting people pursuing their self-interest, they had also been predictable—indeed, inevitable—historical events. Furthermore, as a result of the rise of capitalism, the class structure became simplified. Now there existed a new oppressed class, the proletarians, who had to sell their labor in order to survive. Because these people could no longer produce goods at home for their own consumption, they constituted a vast exploited and alienated work force that was constantly increasing in size. Opposed to the proletarians was a new oppressor class, the bourgeoisie (or capitalists), as a few former artisans and petty burghers became entrepreneurs and eventually grew wealthy. These people owned the new productive forces on which the proletarians depended.

22. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 90, 94.

Marx then described the truly revolutionary nature of the capitalist mode of production. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, the bourgeoisie “has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put into the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.”²³ However, in order for the bourgeoisie to exist, Marx predicted, it must constantly revolutionize the instruments of production and thereby create new needs that can be filled by manufactured products. As this process occurs, the bourgeoisie also seizes political power in each country, so that “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”²⁴

Having described the great historical changes accompanying the rise of capitalism, Marx then made two of his most famous predictions concerning the ultimate demise of the capitalist system. The first is that capitalism is inherently unstable because of its recurrent industrial cycles and that its downfall is inevitable as a result. Capitalism, Marx wrote, is characterized by “an absurdity—the epidemic of overproduction.” According to Marx, the essential problem of nineteenth-century capitalism was that its industrial cycles, epitomized by recurrent commercial crises, were weathered only by the destruction of products, more thorough exploitation of old markets, and the continued conquest of new markets. But such tactics clearly could not succeed over the long run because capitalists continually undercut one another. Thus, Marx argued, as industrialization advances, the productive forces become no longer capable of operating efficiently in a competitive context where people try to maximize profits by pursuing their individual self-interest.

Marx’s second prediction was that “the modern working class, the proletarians” would become increasingly impoverished and alienated under capitalism. Because they could no longer be self-supporting, the proletarians had become “a class of laborers who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital.”²⁵ Thus, in a context characterized by the extensive use of machinery owned by others, proletarians have no control over their daily lives or the products of their activities. Each person becomes, in effect, a necessary but low-priced appendage to a machine. In this situation, Marx said, even women and children are thrown into the maelstrom. Thus, under capitalism, human beings are simply instruments of labor whose only worth is the cost of keeping them minimally fed, clothed, and housed. Confronted with their own misery, Marx predicted, the proletarians will ultimately become class conscious and overthrow the entire system.

23. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 92.

24. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 91.

25. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 96.

The rise of the proletariat as a class proceeds with great difficulty, however, primarily because individual proletarians are forced to compete among themselves. For example, some are allowed to work in the capitalists' factories, and others are not. Within the factories a few are allowed to work at somewhat better-paying or easier jobs, but most labor at lower-paying and more difficult tasks. After work proletarians with too little money still compete with one another for the inadequate food, clothing, and shelter that is available. Under these competitive conditions it is difficult to create class consciousness. Nonetheless, individuals and aggregates of workers have periodically rebelled since the beginnings of capitalism, although they often directed their attacks against the instruments of production rather than the capitalists. When they did organize, the proletarians were often co-opted into serving the interests of the bourgeoisie.²⁶ However, with the development of large-scale industry, the proletariat constantly increases in size. Like many other observers of nineteenth-century society, Marx predicted that the number of working-class people would continually increase as elements of the lower-middle class—artisans, shopkeepers, and peasants—were gradually absorbed into it. Furthermore, he believed that even those in professions such as medicine, law, science, and art would increasingly become wage laborers. He thought that all the skills of the past were being swept aside by modern industry, creating but two great classes.

The revolutionary development of the proletariat would, Marx argued, be aided by the fact that it was becoming increasingly urban, and hence its members were better able to communicate with one another. Further, they were becoming better educated and politically sophisticated, partly because the bourgeoisie constantly dragged them into the political arena. And although the proletarians' efforts at organizing against the bourgeoisie were often hindered, Marx believed that they were destined to destroy capitalism because the factors mentioned here would stimulate the development of their class consciousness.

Proletarians and Communists

As Marx expressed it, the major goal of the communists could be simply stated: the abolition of private property. After all, he noted, under capitalism nine-tenths of the population has no property anyway. As might be imagined, the bourgeois were especially critical of this position. But Marx felt that just as the French Revolution had abolished feudal forms of private property in favor of bourgeois forms, so the communist revolution would abolish

26. See Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), pp. 178–244. Marx shows here how the proletarians actively participated in subjecting other classes to the rule of the bourgeoisie.

bourgeois control over capital—without substituting a new form of private ownership. Marx emphasized, however, that the abolition of the personal property of the petty artisan or the small peasant was not at issue. Rather the communists wished to abolish bourgeois “capital, i.e., that kind of property which exploits wage labor and which cannot increase except upon condition of begetting a new supply of wage labor for fresh exploitation.”²⁷

In order to change this situation, the proletarians periodically organized and rebelled during the nineteenth century. As noted in Chapter 6, shortly after publication of the *Manifesto*, revolts occurred throughout Europe. Even though such efforts were always smashed, Marx believed that the proletariat was destined to rise again, “stronger, firmer, mightier,” ready for the final battle.

It is important to understand that he viewed this process as an inevitable evolutionary development. In the *Manifesto* Marx emphasized that “the theoretical conclusions of the Communists . . . express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from an historical movement going on under our very eyes.”²⁸ According to Marx, just like the feudal nobility before it, “the Bourgeoisie [has] forged the weapons that bring death to itself.” This process occurred because the productive forces of capitalism make it possible for all to satisfy their needs and realize their human potential. But for this possibility to occur, productive forces must be freed from private ownership and allowed to operate for the common good. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie has also “called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians.” Marx believed the working classes in all societies would, in their exploitation and alienation, eventually bring about a worldwide communist revolution.

Although Marx did not say much about the future, he knew that the transition to communism would be difficult, probably violent. This is because the communists aimed at destroying the core of the capitalist system: private ownership of the means of production. In order to achieve this goal, Marx believed that the means of production had to be “a collective product” controlled by the “united action of all members of the society.” Such cooperative arrangements are not possible in bourgeois society, with its emphasis on “free” competition and its apotheosis of private property. Collective control of the society, Marx thought, is only possible under communism, where “accumulated labor [or capital] is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the laborer.” This drastic change required a revolution.

The first step in a working-class revolution, Marx argued, would be for the proletariat to seize control of the state. Once attaining political supremacy,

27. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 104.

28. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 103–4.

the working class would then wrest "all capital from the bourgeoisie," "centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state," and "increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible."²⁹ Furthermore, the following measures would also be taken in most countries:

1. abolition of private ownership of land
2. a heavy progressive income tax
3. abolition of all rights of inheritance
4. confiscation of the property of emigrants and rebels
5. centralization of credit and banking in the hands of the state
6. centralization of communication and transportation in the hands of the state
7. state ownership of factories and all other instruments of production
8. equal liability of all to labor
9. combination of agricultural and manufacturing industries so as to abolish the distinction between town and country
10. free public education for all children and the abolition of child labor

Marx understood perfectly that these measures could only be implemented arbitrarily, and he forecast a period of temporary communist despotism in which the Communist party acted in the interests of the proletariat as a whole. In an essay written many years after the *Manifesto*, Marx labeled this transition period the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."³⁰ Ultimately, however, his apocalyptic vision of the transition to communism was one in which people would become free, self-governing, and cooperative instead of alienated and competitive. They would no longer be mutilated by a division of labor over which they had no control. "The public power will lose its political character," Marx wrote. "In place of the old bourgeois society with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."³¹ It is a splendid vision; unfortunately, it is not that of the sorcerer, but of the sorcerer's apprentice.

Socialist and Communist Literature

In the third section of the *Manifesto*, Marx attacked the political literature of the day. He recognized that in all periods of turmoil and change, some inevitably desire to return to times past or to invent fantastic utopias as the way to solve humankind's ills. He believed that such dreams were, at best, a waste

29. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 111.

30. Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, pp. 9-11.

31. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 112.

of time and, at worst, a vicious plot on the part of reactionaries. Thus this section of the *Manifesto* is a brief critique of socialist literature as it then existed. He classified this literature as (1) reactionary socialism (including here feudal socialism, petty-bourgeois socialism, and German “true” socialism); (2) conservative, or bourgeois, socialism; and (3) critical-utopian socialism. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

Reactionary Socialism. Because the bourgeoisie had supplanted the feudal nobility as the ruling class in society, the remaining representatives of the aristocracy attempted revenge by trying to persuade the proletarians that life had been better under their rule. Marx characterized this literature as “half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future” and said that their efforts were misbegotten primarily because the mode of exploitation was different in an industrial context and a return to the past was not possible.

Petty-bourgeois socialism is also ahistorical and reactionary. Although its adherents have dissected capitalist society with great acuity, they also have little to offer but a ridiculous return to the past: a situation in which corporate guilds exist in manufacturing and patriarchal relations dominate agriculture. Because they manage to be both reactionary and utopian, which is difficult, this form of socialism always ends “in a miserable fit of the blues.” Marx had previously criticized German, or “true,” socialism in *The German Ideology*. In the *Manifesto* he merely emphasized again (with typically acerbic prose) that the Germans had written “philosophical nonsense” about the “interest of human nature, of Man in General, who belongs to no class, has no reality, who exists only in the misty realm of philosophical fantasy.”³²

Conservative, or Bourgeois, Socialism. In Marx’s estimation bourgeois socialists, such as Proudhon, wanted to ameliorate the miserable conditions characteristic of proletarian life without abolishing the system itself. Today he might call such persons liberals. In any case, Marx believed that this goal was impossible to achieve, for what Proudhon and others did not understand was that the bourgeoisie could not exist without the proletariat and all the abuses inflicted on it.

Critical-Utopian Socialism. Utopian socialism is represented by the early communist systems devised by Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, and others. Although these writers had many critical insights into the nature of society, Marx believed that their efforts were historically premature because the full

32. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 117.

development of the proletariat had not yet occurred, and hence they were unable to see the material conditions necessary for its emancipation. As a result they tried to construct a new society independent of the flux of history. For the utopian socialists, the proletarians were merely the most suffering section of society rather than a revolutionary class destined to abolish the existence of all classes.

Communist and Other Opposition Parties

In the final section of the *Manifesto* Marx described the relationship between the Communist party, representing the most advanced segment of the working class, and other opposition parties of the time. Basically, in every nation the communists were supportive of all efforts to oppose the existing order of things, for Marx believed that the process of opposition would eventually “instill into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.”³³ In this regard communists would always emphasize the practical and theoretical importance of private property as the means of exploitation in capitalist society.

Marx, the revolutionary, concluded the *Manifesto* with a final thundering assault on the bourgeoisie:

The communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!³⁴

Marx's View of Capitalism in Historical Context

Reading *The Communist Manifesto* makes it clear that Marx saw human societies as having developed through a series of historical stages, each characterized by its unique class divisions and exploitations. His vision is summarized in Table 7-1.³⁵

Marx believed that humans originally lived in hunting and gathering societies in which everyone worked at the same tasks in order to subsist. Private property did not exist. Nor did a division of labor. Hence, there were no

33. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 125.

34. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 125.

35. Marx, “Preface,” *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 22.

Table 7-1 Marx's View of the Stages of History

| Stage | Oppressing Class | Oppressed Class |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Primitive communism | No classes | |
| Slavery | Slave owners | Slaves |
| Feudalism | Landowners | Serfs |
| Capitalism | Bourgeoisie | Proletariat |
| Socialism | State managers | Workers |
| Communism | No classes | |

classes and no exploitation based on class. These societies, in short, were communist, with all members contributing according to their abilities and taking according to their needs. But this primitive communism collapsed, in his rendering of history, as social organization changed.

The first system of exploitation was slavery, in which rank and position were determined by ownership of other human beings. In slave societies, the interests of owners and slaves were obviously opposed. Slaves had an interest in minimizing daily work demands, improving their living conditions, providing mechanisms by which they could work their way out of bondage, and preventing the inheritability of slave status (so their children would be born free). Slave owners had an interest in maximizing daily work (productivity), minimizing expenditures for food and other maintenance costs, making it difficult for slaves to escape bondage, and ensuring the inheritability of slave status. These conflicts of interest grew more difficult to control as the number of slaves increased and owners competed with one another in ways that increased the plight of the slaves—for example, by demanding more work while reducing food rations. The resulting conflict, in Marx's interpretation, led to a revolution in which slaves rose up and abolished the mechanism of their exploitation: the system of slavery.

Slavery was followed by feudalism, in which landless serfs and landowners represented the two great classes. Again, they had opposing interests. Those who owned the land wanted to increase productivity and, over time, to generate more cash income. Serfs were obliged to work the land under the presumption that they would share in a portion of its bounty. Their interest was to retain as much control over their crops as possible. In countries like England, feudalism declined because landowners cleared the countryside of peasants in order to make room for products that would generate cash. For example, sheep were raised not for meat but as a source of raw material for

the nascent wool industry. Sheep generated more profit, enabling landowners to purchase valued goods and amenities.

As described in the *Manifesto*, the feudal epoch gave way to capitalism. The name signifies that capital rather than land became the source of exploitation. The two great classes, of course, are the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (capitalists). Capitalists hire proletarians only if they generate profit, which is why capitalists are often described as leeches in Marx's writings. He believed that capitalism would grow like a giant octopus, spreading its tentacles over the entire globe, until nearly all human activity became debased because it was a commodity subject to purchase.

Marx argued that as the contradictions inherent in capitalism grew, it would collapse and be replaced by socialism. As mentioned earlier, he described this stage as a transitory "dictatorship of the proletariat" in which the Communist party would seize control of the state in the name of the working class and expropriate private property (capital). Eventually, he believed, communism would emerge, a classless society in which all would give according to their ability and take according to their needs. The circle would be complete.

This depiction of the stages of history is superficial and, indeed, quite wrong.³⁶ Remember, however, that Marx did not have access to the data available to modern historians. But his vision does reveal Marx's view of history as successive systems of exploitation in which change emerges from within a society as people with competing interests attempt to satisfy their expanding needs. Thus, it reflects the use of dialectical materialism as a historical method. Moreover, despite its empirical flaws, it is possible to construct a model of stratification and conflict that remains useful.

Marx's Model of Stratification and Class Conflict

Modern readers often have two contrasting reactions when studying *The Communist Manifesto*, neither of which are very clearly articulated. On the one hand, it is easy to see how aspects of Marx's analysis can be applied to societies today. After all, exploitation does occur, and people in different classes do have opposing interests. On the other hand, Marx's political orientation seems both naive and threatening. It appears naive because a truly cooperative industrial society is hard to imagine. It appears threatening because subsequent history shows that a totalitarian government (like that in the former Soviet Union) seems to follow from any application of his ideas. Both reactions reflect Marx's

36. See Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Centuries*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Academic Press, 1980).

peculiar combination of revolution and theory, which, as stated earlier, constitutes the greatest weakness in his writings. Nonetheless, it is possible to extrapolate a useful model of social stratification and class conflict from *The Communist Manifesto*.

Before doing so, however, we must recognize that any discussion of Marx's legacy demands a political confession: we are not Marxists. Thus, in what follows, the analysis implies nothing about the inevitability of a communist revolution or the transformation of society. Rather, it implies a concern with those ideas in Marx's writings that can still serve sociological theory.

Figure 7-1 displays a model of stratification and class conflict taken from the *Manifesto*. It illustrates some of the key variables to look for in studying social stratification and conflict, and it implies a modern sociological orientation. As described earlier, Marx asserted that in a stable social structure goods are produced to satisfy the material needs of people, a process necessitating a division of labor and justified in terms of dominant values. This situation is depicted in the first box in Figure 7-1.

Many past observers have construed Marx's emphasis on productive activity to be a form of economic determinism. But this is too narrow a reading. Marx's point is not that economic activity determines behavior in other areas but, rather, that all social action is conditioned by, and reciprocally related to, the type of productive activity that exists. For example, family life is likely to be different in a hunting-and-gathering society than in an industrial one, as are the forms of government, education, religious beliefs, law, cultural values, and so on. These variations occur, in part, because the way people obtain food, clothing, and shelter differs. Alternatively, however, in two societies at the same level of economic development, the organization of economic activity is likely to vary, in part, because of differences in religious beliefs, law, family life, and so on.³⁷

The recognition of such variation implies an essential sociological orientation: the range of options available to people is shaped by the nature of the society, its way of producing goods, its division of labor, and its cultural values. This orientation is fundamental to sociology today. Some writers like to begin with economic issues, others focus on some aspect of the division of labor (such as the family or criminal justice), still others start by looking at how values circumscribe behavior. In every case, however, sociologists emphasize that society is a social system with interrelated parts and that social facts circumscribe behavior.

37. All of these factors constitute what Marx called the forces of production. See footnote 15.

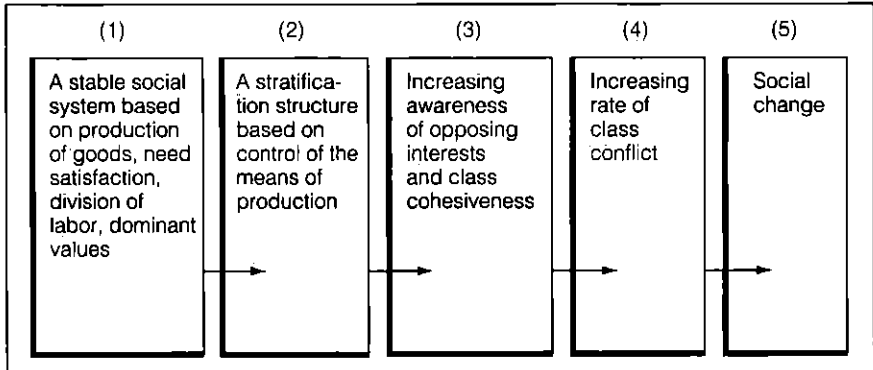


FIGURE 7-1 Marx's Model of the Generation of Stratification, Class Conflict, and Change

Marx argued—and he is probably correct—that a structure of stratification emerges in all societies based, at least in part, on control over the means of production. This fact, which is depicted in the second box in Figure 7-1, means the upper class also has the capacity to influence the distribution of resources because it dominates the state. Thus, those who benefit because they control the means of production have an interest in maintaining the status quo, in maintaining the current distribution of resources, and this interest is pervasive across all institutional arenas. For example, classes in the United States today have different sources of income, they have different political resources, they are treated differently in the criminal justice system, they provide for their children differently, they worship at different churches, and so forth.³⁸

In assessing what modern sociologists can learn from Marx, the use of the word “control” rather than “ownership” in box 2 in Figure 7-1 is an important change, because control over the means of production can occur in ways that he did not realize. For example, in capitalist societies the basis of social stratification is private ownership of property, whereas in communist societies the basis of social stratification is Communist party control of property. In effect the Communist party is a new kind of dominant class ushered in by the revolution.³⁹ In both cases the group controlling the means of production exploits those who do not, while acting to justify its benefits by dominating the state and promulgating among the masses values that legitimize its exploitation.

38. See Leonard Beeghly, *The Structure of Stratification in the United States* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989).

39. See Milovan Djilas, *The New Class* (New York: Praeger, 1965), and *Rise and Fall* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985). See also Michael Voslensky, *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986).

When he looked at social arrangements, Marx always asked a simple question, one that modern sociologists also ask: who benefits? For example, the long empirical sections of *Capital* (to be reviewed subsequently) are designed to show how attempts at lengthening the working day and increasing productivity also increased the exploitation of the working class in order to benefit the capitalists. Marx, however, also applied this question to nonobvious relationships. For example, his analysis of the “fetishism of commodities” in the early part of *Capital* shows how people’s social relationships are altered by the reification (or worship) of machines and products that commonly occurs in capitalist societies, again to the benefit of capitalists. In effect, Marx teaches modern observers that an emphasis on who is benefiting from social arrangements and public policies can always improve an analysis. For example, macroeconomic decisions that emphasize keeping inflation low and unemployment high benefit the very rich in American society at the expense of working people. In every arena—at home, at work, in court, at church, in the doctor’s office, and so forth—it is useful to ascertain who is benefiting from current social arrangements.

The second box in Figure 7-1 is important in another way as well. As emphasized in the *Manifesto*, Marx divided modern capitalist societies into two great classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. Although he recognized that this basic distinction was too simplistic for detailed analyses, his purpose was to highlight the most fundamental division within these nations. Whenever he chose, Marx would depict the opposed interests and experiences of various segments of society, such as bankers, the “lower middle classes,” or the *lumpenproletariat* (the very poor). But he did this on an ad hoc basis. Max Weber, whose work is considered in the next two chapters, outlined a more complete, and therefore more useful, map of the stratification structure. In so doing, he built on Marx’s insights.

Boxes 3, 4, and 5 in Figure 7-1 outline the process of class conflict and social change. Under certain conditions members of subordinate classes may become aware that their interests oppose those of the dominant class. In such a context, Marx taught, class conflict ensues, and social change occurs.

In Marx’s work, of course, this process is linked to assumptions about the direction of history and the inevitability of a communist revolution. But this need not be the case. Members of a class can become aware of their true interests and be willing to act politically without seeking a revolutionary transformation of society. This process occurs because, while classes may be opposed to one another in any ongoing social structure, they are also tied to one another in a variety of ways. As Reinhard Bendix argues, citizenship, nationalism, religion, ethnicity, language, and many other factors bind aggre-

gates of people together despite class divisions.⁴⁰ Furthermore, to the extent that a subordinate class participates effectively in a political system, as when it obtains some class-related goals, it then acquires an interest in maintaining that system and its place within it. In the United States, at least, most mass movements composed of politically disenfranchised people have sought to get into the system rather than overthrow it. The labor movement, various racial and ethnic movements, and the feminist movement are all examples of this tendency. Thus, although there is little doubt that the very rich dominate the political process in American society, subordinate classes do have political power and do influence public policy. This fact militates against a revolutionary transformation of U.S. society.

The emphasis on class conflict that pervades Marx's writings implies what sociologists today call a *structural* approach—that is, a focus on how rates of behavior among aggregates of people are influenced by their location in the society. Their differing locations dictate that classes have opposing interests. Moreover, Marx usually avoided looking at individual action because it is influenced by different variables. Rather, he wanted to know how the set of opportunities (or range of options) that people had influenced rates of behavior. For example, his analysis of the conditions under which proletarians transform themselves into a revolutionary class does not deal with the decision-making processes or cost-benefit calculations of individuals; rather, it shows that urbanity, education, political sophistication, and other factors are the social conditions that will produce class consciousness among the proletarians. Sociology at its best deals with structural variables. Although his work is misbegotten in many ways, Marx was a pioneer in this regard.

CAPITAL

In *The German Ideology* Marx attacked the Young Hegelians because they had avoided an empirical examination of social life. In *Capital* he demonstrated the intent of this criticism by analyzing capitalist society. Using England (and copious amounts of British government data) as his primary example, he sought to show that the most important characteristic of the capitalist mode of production was the constant drive to accumulate capital through the use of exploited and alienated labor. As a result of the need to accumulate capital,

40. Reinhard Bendix, "Inequality and Social Structure: A Comparison of Marx and Weber," *American Sociological Review* 39 (April 1974), pp. 149–61.

Marx argued, the processes of production are incessantly revolutionized, and over the long run the instability and degradation of people characteristic of capitalist society will lead to its complete transformation. Thus, in contrast to the *Manifesto*, which is a call to arms, *Capital* is a scholarly attempt to show why such a transformation of capitalist society will inevitably occur. As such, *Capital* is much more than a narrow work of economics; it is an analysis of capitalist social structure and its inevitable transformation.

Our outline of *Capital* is divided into four sections. The first sketches Marx's labor theory of value. All the arguments that follow are based on this initial idea. The second section contains his analysis of surplus value and shows why it is the source of capitalist social relations. The third section summarizes Marx's explanation of capital accumulation and its consequences for the eventual downfall of capitalism. And the final section describes his analysis of the origins of capitalism. Following this explication we briefly explain some of the theoretical and political implications of Marx's sociology.

The Labor Theory of Value

Marx sketched the labor theory of value in the opening chapter of *Capital*. Although he approached this issue from what appears to be a strictly economic vantage point—the nature and value of commodities—his discussion turns out to have considerably broader implications. A commodity is “an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another.”⁴¹ For his purposes, both the origin of people's wants and the manner in which commodities satisfy them are irrelevant. The more important problem is what makes a commodity valuable. The answer provides the key to Marx's analysis of capitalist society.

Two different sources of value are inherent to all commodities. One resides in their “use value”—that is, in the fact that they are produced in order to be consumed. For example, people use paper to write on, autos for transportation, and so forth. Clearly, some things that have value, such as air and water, are not produced but are there for the taking (at least they were in the nineteenth century). But Marx was primarily interested in manufactured items. Commodities having use value are qualitatively different from one another; for example, a coat cannot be compared to a table. As a result, the amount of labor required to produce them is irrelevant.

Another source of value is the “exchange value” of commodities. It provides a basis for comparison in terms of the labor time required to produce them. Essentially, then, Marx's labor theory of value states that the value of

41. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, vol. 1 (New York: International, 1967). The original spelling is retained in all quotations.

commodities is determined by the labor time necessary to produce them. He phrased the labor theory of value in the following way:

That which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production. Each individual commodity, in this connection, is to be considered as an average sample of its class. Commodities, therefore, in which equal quantities of labour are embodied, or which can be produced in the same time, have the same value. The value of one commodity is to the value of any other, as the labour-time necessary for the production of the one is to that necessary for the production of the other. As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labor-time.⁴²

Marx supplemented the labor theory of value in five ways. First, different kinds of “useful labor” are not comparable. For example, the tasks involved in producing a coat are qualitatively different from those involved in producing linen. All that is comparable is the expenditure of human labor power in the form of brains, nerves, and muscles. Thus, the magnitude of exchange value is determined by the quantity of labor as indicated by its duration in terms of hours, days, or weeks. Marx called this quantity “simple average labor.”

Second, although different skills exist among workers, Marx recognized that “skilled labour counts only as simple labour intensified, or rather, as multiplied simple labour.”⁴³ Thus, in order to simplify the analysis, he assumed that all labor was unskilled. In practice, he asserted, people make a similar assumption in their everyday lives.

Third, the value of a commodity differs according to the technology available. With mechanization, the labor time necessary to produce a piece of cloth is greatly reduced (and so, by the way, is the value of the cloth—at least according to Marx). During the initial stages of his analysis, Marx wished to hold technology constant. Thus he asserted that the value of a commodity was determined by the labor time socially necessary to produce an article under the normal conditions of production existing at the time.

Fourth, and this point will become very important later on, under capitalism labor itself is a commodity with exchange value, just like linen and coats. Thus, “the value of labor power is determined as in the case of every other commodity, by the labor time necessary for the production, and consequently, the reproduction, of this special article.”⁴⁴

42. Marx, *Capital*, pp. 39–40.

43. Marx, *Capital*, p. 44.

44. Marx, *Capital*, p. 170.

Fifth, an important implication of the labor theory of value is the development of what Marx called the “fetishism of commodities.” It occurs when people come to believe that the products they produce have human attributes that make them capable of interacting with and exploiting people. Marx thought that such beliefs were possible only when commodities were produced by alienated labor for purposes of exchange. In capitalist society the fetishism of commodities manifests itself in two different ways: (1) Machines (as a reified form of capital) are seen as exploiting workers, which is something only other people can do. Thus, products that were designed and built by people and can be used or discarded at will come to be seen not only as having human attributes but even as being independent participants in human social relationships. (2) When machines are seen to exploit workers, the social ties among people are hidden, so that their ability to understand or alter the way they live is impaired. In this context, Marx wrote, “there is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”⁴⁵

In later chapters of *Capital*, Marx illustrated what he meant by the fetishism of commodities by showing that machines rather than laborers set the pace and style of work and by showing that machines “needed” the night work of laborers so they could be in continuous operation. Of course, as we will see, hidden behind machines stand their owners, capitalists, who are the real villains.

Capitalists have little interest in the use value of the commodities produced by human labor. Rather, it is exchange value that interests them. Marx writes that “the restless never-ending process of profit-making alone is what [the capitalist] aims at.”⁴⁶ His term for profit was *surplus value*.

Surplus Value

Because Marx believed that the source of all value was labor, he had to show how laborers create surplus value for capitalists. He did this by distinguishing between “labor” and “labor power.” Labor is the work people actually do when they are employed by capitalists, whereas labor power is the capacity to work that the capitalist purchases from the worker. As Marx put it, “by labour-power or capacity for labour is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description.”⁴⁷ Labor power is a commodity just like any other, and in fact it is all the workers have to sell. Marx noted that the laborer, “instead of being in the position to sell commodities in which

45. Marx, *Capital*, p. 72.

46. Marx, *Capital*, p. 149.

47. Marx, *Capital*, p. 167.

his labour is incorporated, [is] obliged to offer for sale as a commodity that very labour-power, which exists only in his living self."⁴⁸ Furthermore, in a capitalist society the proletarians can sell their labor power only to capitalists, who own the means of production. The two meet, presumably on an equal basis, one to sell labor power and the other to buy it.

The value, or selling price, of labor power is "determined, as in the case of any other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article."⁴⁹ Thus, labor power is, at least for the capitalist, a mass of congealed labor time—as represented by the cost of food, clothing, shelter, and all the other things necessary to keep the workers returning to the marketplace with their peculiar commodity. Because workers must also reproduce new generations of workers, the cost of maintaining entire families must be included.

Having discovered that labor power is the source of surplus value, Marx wished to be able to calculate its rate. In order to do so, he distinguished between absolute and relative surplus value.

Absolute surplus value occurs when capitalists lengthen the working day in order to increase laborers' productivity. This issue became a matter of conflict throughout the nineteenth century. Hence, Marx spent a considerable amount of space documenting the way in which the early capitalists had forced laborers to work as many hours as possible each day.⁵⁰ The data he presented are significant for two reasons. First, despite their anecdotal quality (by today's standards), they are clearly correct: capitalists sought to extend the working day and keep the proletarians in an utterly depraved condition. In general, Marx thought that the effort to lengthen the number of hours laborers worked was inherent to capitalism and that proletarians would always be helpless to resist. Second, these remarkable pages of *Capital* probably constitute the first systematic use of historical and governmental data in social scientific research. Marx took great satisfaction in using information supplied by the British government to indict capitalism.

Relative surplus value occurs when capitalists increase laborers' productivity by enabling them to produce more in the same amount of time. This result can be achieved in two ways, he said. One is to alter the organization of work—for example, by placing workers together in factories. Another, more prevalent as capitalism advances, is to apply advanced technology to the productive process. By using machines, laborers can produce more goods (boots, pens, computers,

48. Marx, *Capital*, pp. 168–69.

49. Marx, *Capital*, p. 170.

50. Marx, *Capital*, pp. 231–312.

or anything else) in less time. This means that capitalists can undersell their competitors and still make a profit. Because the reorganization of the workplace and the use of machines were methods of exploiting laborers, they were also the locus of much conflict during the nineteenth century. For such changes meant that proletarians had to work either harder or in a more dehumanizing environment. As in his analysis of absolute surplus value, Marx spent much time documenting the capitalists' efforts at increasing relative surplus value.⁵¹ By using historical and governmental data, he again showed how productivity had increased steadily through greater exploitation of proletarians.

This analysis of the sources of surplus value provided Marx with a precise definition of exploitation. In his words, "the rate of surplus value is therefore an exact expression of the degree of exploitation of labour-power by capital, or of the labourer by the capitalist."⁵² In effect, surplus value is value created by workers but skimmed off by capitalists just as beekeepers take a (large) fraction of the honey from the bees who make it. More broadly, in *Capital* exploitation is not simply a form of economic injustice, although it originates from a view of the economy based on the labor theory of value. The social classes that result from the acquisition of surplus value by one segment of society are also precisely defined. That class accruing surplus value, administering the government, passing laws, and regulating morals is the bourgeoisie, and that class being exploited is the proletariat.

By discovering the advantages of increasing productivity, Marx thought he had uncovered the hidden dynamic of capitalism that would lead inexorably to increasing exploitation of the proletarians, more frequent industrial crises, and, ultimately, the overthrow of the capitalist system itself. His rationale was that the capitalists' increased profits were short-lived, because others immediately copied any innovation, and thus the extra surplus value generated by rising productivity disappeared "so soon as the new method of productivity has become general, and has consequently caused the difference between the individual value of the cheapened commodity and its social value to vanish."⁵³ The long-term result, Marx predicted, would be the sort of chaos originally described in *The Communist Manifesto*.

The Demise of Capitalism

Marx's description of surplus value was a systematic attempt at showing the dynamics of capitalist exploitation. His next task was to reveal the reasons why,

51. Marx, *Capital*, pp. 336–507.

52. Marx, *Capital*, p. 218.

53. Marx, *Capital*, p. 319.

despite its enormous productivity, capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction. He proceeded in two steps. The first deals with what he called *simple reproduction*. It occurs as workers continuously produce products that become translated into surplus value for capitalists and wages for themselves. Proletarians use their wages in ways that perpetuate the capitalist system. Because capitalists own the means of production and the commodities produced with them, as proletarians purchase the necessities of life, they give their wages back to the capitalists. The capitalists, of course, use that money to make still more money for themselves. In addition, after minimally satisfying their needs, workers return to the marketplace ready to sell their labor power and prepared once again to augment capital by creating surplus value. Over time, then, capitalist society is continuously renewed, because proletarians produce not only commodities, not only their own wages, and not only surplus value but also capitalist social relations: exploited and alienated workers on one side and capitalists on the other.

The second step focuses on what Marx called the *conversion of surplus value into capital*. Today, we refer to the reinvestment of capital. Thus, after consuming a small part of the surplus value they obtain from proletarians, capitalists reinvest the remainder so as to make even more money. As Marx observed, "the circle in which simple reproduction moves, alters its form and . . . changes into a spiral."⁵⁴ The result is a contradiction so great that the demise of capitalism and its transformation into "a higher form of society" becomes inevitable.

On this basis, Marx made three now-famous predictions. The first was that proletarians would be forever separated from owning or controlling private property, even their own labor. This situation occurs because capitalists consume first their own capital and then the unpaid labor of others. Yet, paradoxically, the laborers have not been defrauded—at least according to capitalist rules of the game—for as we saw above, the capitalists merely pay laborers for the value of their commodity, labor power. And since proletarians have only labor power to sell, they have little choice but to participate according to the capitalists' rules.

Marx's second prediction was that proletarians would become more and more impoverished and that an industrial reserve army of poor people would be created. This outcome would increasingly occur as capitalists used ever more machines in the factories in order to make labor more productive and lower the price of goods; as a result, fewer laborers would be needed, and their labor power could be purchased at a lower price. Thus, Marx predicted not only that proletarians would continuously reproduce their relations with the

54. Marx, *Capital*, p. 581.

capitalists—that is, selling their labor and making profits for capitalists—but also that they would produce the means by which they were rendered a superfluous population forced to work anywhere, anytime, for any wages. Under these extreme conditions, Marx believed, proletarians will become a self-conscious revolutionary class.

Marx's third prediction was that the rate of profit would fall and bring on industrial crises of ever greater severity. Eventually, then, a class-conscious and impoverished proletariat will overthrow a chaotic capitalist system in favor of a more humane and cooperative one. The logic of Marx's analysis can be understood when it is recalled that labor power is the source of surplus value. As the proportion of surplus value invested in machines goes up in comparison with the amount invested in labor power, profits fall.⁵⁵ In those areas where profits become too low, even though large quantities of goods are produced, production has to slow down or cease altogether, throwing more people out of work. Marx argued that as industrial cycles repeatedly occurred, they would become ever more serious. Thus, according to him, the logic of capitalist development will produce the conditions necessary for its overthrow: an industrial base along with an impoverished and class-conscious proletariat. Ultimately, these dispossessed people will usher in a classless society in which production occurs for the common good.

Capitalism in Historical Context

Marx's analysis of capitalism presupposed that it was an ongoing social system. Thus, in the final pages of *Capital* he once again sketched the origins of capitalism, which he now called the process of *primitive accumulation*. We should recall that capitalist social relations occur only under quite specific circumstances; that is, the owners of money (the means of production) who desire to increase their holdings confront free laborers who have no way of obtaining sustenance other than by selling their labor power. Thus, in order to understand the origins of capitalist social relations, Marx had to account for the rise of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Typically, he opted for a structural explanation.

According to Marx, the modern proletariat arose because self-supporting peasants were driven from the land (and from the guilds) and transformed into rootless and dependent urban dwellers. This process began in England during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and then spread throughout Western Europe. Using England as his example, Marx argued that this process had begun

55. See Appelbaum, "Marx's Theory of the Falling Rate of Profit."

with the clearing of the old estates by breaking up feudal retainers, robbing peasants of the use of common lands, and abolishing their rights of land tenure under circumstances he described as "reckless terrorism." In addition, Marx argued, one of the major effects of the Protestant Reformation was "the spoilation of the church's property" by its conversion into private property—illegally, of course. Finally, the widespread theft of state land and its conversion into privately owned property ensured that nowhere in England could peasants continue to live as they had during medieval times. In all these cases (although this analysis is clearly too simplistic) the methods used were far from idyllic, but they were effective, and they resulted in the rise of capitalist agriculture capable of supplying the needs of a "free" proletariat. Further, given that they had nowhere to go, thousands of displaced peasants became beggars, robbers, and vagabonds. Hence, throughout Western Europe beginning in the sixteenth century, there was "bloody legislation against vagabondage" with severe sanctions against those who would not work for the nascent capitalists who were then emerging.

For Marx, the emergence of the capitalist farmer and the industrial capitalist occurred concomitantly with the rise of the modern proletariat. Beginning in the fifteenth century, those who owned or controlled land typically had guarantees of long tenure, could employ newly "freed" workers at very low wages, and benefited from a rise in the price of farm products. In addition, they were able to increase farm production, despite the smaller number of people working the land, through the use of improved methods and equipment, which increased cooperation among workers in the farming process and concentrated land ownership in fewer hands. Thus, primitive accumulation of capital could occur.

Marx believed that industrial capitalism had developed as the result of a variety of interrelated events. First, he emphasized, usury and commerce existed throughout antiquity—despite laws against such activity—and laid a basis for the primitive accumulation of capital to occur. Second, the exploration and exploitation of the New World brought great wealth into the hands of just a few people. In this regard Marx pointed especially to the discovery of gold and silver, along with the existence of native populations that could be exploited. Finally, he noted the emergence of a system of public credit and its expansion into an international credit system. On this basis, he claimed, capitalism emerged in Western Europe.

Marx believed that *Capital* described the nature and destiny of capitalist societies. Although he was wrong, *Capital* remains a book of creative genius unequalled in the history of the social sciences. Nonetheless, it is misbegotten both theoretically and politically. We conclude our analysis by describing these two problems in Marx's sociology.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MARX'S SOCIOLOGY

Marx believed that he had discovered the pattern of history and that a communist revolution and the destruction of capitalism were inevitable historical events. In drawing this conclusion, he was a political activist, arguing for the destruction of one type of society and advocating the creation of a new type. Although Marx did not see himself as a scientist in the same manner as did Spencer, he nonetheless posited "laws" of capitalism and based his predictions about the fate of capitalism on these laws. And so, if his predictions do not come true, are the laws valid? Or were the predictions wishful thinking, and can they be separated from the laws? Modern-day Marxists are generally willing to concede problems in the predictions but are usually committed to the laws, or at least the basic arguments about the self-destructive nature of capitalism.

Indeed, Marxists often argue that dialectical materialism is not designed to make predictions at all, that it is merely a useful guide to reality.⁵⁶ They further point to Marx's and Engels's many assertions about the importance of studying actual historical events. Nonetheless, the attempt at showing the inherently contradictory character of capitalist society leads inexorably to an interpretation of the pattern of history and to predictions about the future. Such analyses are based on a leap of faith: that a communist revolution and the destruction of capitalism are inevitable. These tenets constitute the core of Marxist thought.

The results, however, are peculiar. As Karl Popper observes, such orientation can explain anything.⁵⁷ This fact means, of course, that it explains nothing because the theory cannot be disproved. Contrary evidence is simply disregarded. For example, if a communist revolution has not yet occurred in a capitalist society, such as the United States, Marxists commonly argue that all the inherent contradictions have not yet worked themselves out. After all, they can demonstrate that most workers are exploited and alienated, because they have little control over their work. Thus, Marxists continue to maintain that working people in America will eventually become aware of their true interests and act politically to overthrow the entire social order. Similarly, if the state becomes oppressive after a communist revolution and if a new dominant class emerges as in the Soviet Union, Marxists argued until recently, the post-revolutionary society remains in a period of transition that may last for centuries.⁵⁸ After a while,

56. Ollman, *Alienation*.

57. Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 33-37.

58. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

they assert, the state will in fact “wither away,” and a true communist society will evolve, one in which “the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all.” In both cases Marx’s theoretical methodology allows uncomfortable observations to be explained away by positing the need for further political action that will verify the “scientific” prediction. The demise of the Soviet Union suggests how flawed this theoretical strategy is.

Although brilliantly conceived, Marx’s orientation is not scientific because, as Popper argues, theories must ultimately be subjected to a critical test. That is, a situation must be devised that is capable of refuting the theory. Dialectical materialism cannot be tested in this way and therefore cannot be scientific. Thus a “scientific political doctrine” is a contradiction in terms, for political action can be justified only in terms of values, not science. Marx constructed a political doctrine that proved to be of enormous historical significance.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MARX’S SOCIOLOGY

Marx had a utopian vision of a classless society within which people acted cooperatively for the common good and, in the process, realized their human potential. Paradoxically, he believed that this goal could be achieved through the centralization of political power in the hands of the state. This belief is why we described him previously as a sorcerer’s apprentice. The image is that of a leader without wisdom who inadvertently releases the power of the nether world on the earth. Put bluntly, Marx’s vision of the transition from capitalism to communism invites the establishment of a regime in which the individual is subordinate to the state and there is strict control over all aspects of life; it invites, in other words, modern totalitarianism.

To understand why Marx proceeded in this way, one needs to appreciate the dilemma he faced. As a revolutionary, he sought to overthrow a brutal and exploitive society in favor of a humane and just community. It is worth remembering that Engels’s description of the living conditions of the working class was horribly accurate, and many nineteenth-century observers saw the situation as becoming steadily worse. Thus, as he saw it, the problem was to get from a competitive society to a communal one, which would free individuals to realize their potential as human beings.

So he made a series of proposals that are worth restating: the abolition of private ownership of land, confiscation of the property of emigrants and rebels, centralization of credit by the state, centralization of communication and transportation by the state, ownership of factories by the state, and several others. These measures imply a belief that unrestrained political power can be

redemptive, that the way to freedom is through totalitarian control. As Marx put it, the transition to communism would require a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat. But experience has shown that this strategy can only mean total rule by the Communist party, which justifies its exploitation of the masses by invoking the common good. Now the political issue is not whether the ends justify the means. It is, rather, whether the means can produce the ends; that is, can power, unfettered by accountability, produce freedom for individuals? The answer is no. There is no evidence that totalitarianism can produce freedom. Despite its grandiose vision, Marx's writings had perverse political consequences.

WHAT HAPPENED TO MARXIAN SOCIOLOGY?

Karl Marx's ideas have, of course, been applied well beyond the realm of sociological theory. They have inspired and, to a lesser extent, guided communist revolutions; as a consequence, they have been part of the ideological and political climate of the twentieth century. Yet within sociology, especially in the United States, Marx's ideas were not prominent until the 1960s, when the last vestiges of the extremes of the McCarthy era were gone. But since the early 1960s, David Ashley and David Michael Orenstein note, over four hundred books on Marxist theory have been published in the United States alone.⁵⁹ Marx's prominence in the broader world of politics and ideology has now been matched by a three-decade burst of Marxian scholarship.

This prominence of Marx's ideas inside and outside of academia makes it difficult to assess the fate of Marxian analysis in the twenty-first century. But if we confine ourselves to the use of Marx's ideas in the narrow arena of sociological theory, it is possible to get a manageable handle on the Marxian legacy. The most prominent lines of influence on sociological theorizing include (1) critical theory, (2) positivistic theories of conflict, (3) world systems analysis, (4) theories of the state, (5) cultural theories, (6) structuralism, and (7) theories of the middle range. Each of these very diverse lines of influence is examined below.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a group of scholars assembled at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, and initiated what became known as the Frankfurt School. Scholars such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer,

59. David Ashley and David Michael Orenstein, *Sociological Theory: Classical Statements*, 2d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1990), p. 246.

Erich Fromm, Franz Neuman, and Herbert Marcuse engaged in critiques of capitalism, emphasizing its domination of the individual.⁶⁰ After World War II, the institute was revived under a new generation, most notably, Jurgen Habermas, to continue what has become known as *critical theory*.⁶¹ Here, the goal is to expose the sources and forces of domination in social arrangements and to propose alternatives to such arrangements. The spirit behind this work is Marx's view of the emancipation of the proletariat that was to come under communism, but this spirit is tempered by a more realistic understanding of the complexities of social forms and the subtleties of domination. Most Marxist-inspired theory reveals this critical stance, revolving around a distrust of capitalism and a hope for a less dominating alternative.

In contrast to critical theorizing, a number of scholars have sought to extract and abstract out of Marx's concerns about capitalism a more general theory of conflict in systems of inequality.⁶² These more *positivistic theories* are criticized when they remove much of Marx's vocabulary and concern with capitalist class relations, but if they stay within the Marxian vocabulary, they are often well received in Marxian circles. The vital point is that considerable effort has been devoted to formalizing Marx's ideas of conflict into a more general theory beyond a particular historical epoch.

Another effort to expand upon Marx's approach is *world systems theory*, in which Marxian analysis is extended beyond the class relations *within* nation-states to systems of superordination and subordination *among* nation-states. Much as the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat within societies, Immanuel Wallerstein⁶³ and others⁶⁴ have thus argued that the developed "core" nations exploit less developed nations at the "periphery," often using "semiperiphery" (somewhat developed) nations as intermediaries. The crises and conflicts inherent in capitalism within societies have their counterpart cycles, crises, and wars at the world systems level. Indeed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the obvious problems of a Marxian-inspired set of political constructions in that nation, many Marxist theorists have shifted attention

60. See Jonathan H. Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), pp. 256–58, for a brief review. Also consult the references cited on those pages for more detailed analyses.

61. See, for example, Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

62. For example, Ralf Dahrendorf, "Toward a Theory of Social Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2 (1958), pp. 170–83, and *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959); and Jonathan H. Turner, "A Strategy for Reformulating the Dialectical and Functional Theories of Conflict," *Social Forces* 53 (1975), pp. 433–44.

63. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Academic Press, 1974, 1980).

64. For example, see Christopher Chase-Dunn, *Global Formation: Structures of the World Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

to world systems dynamics, arguing that until capitalism is truly worldwide, its contradictions and potential for collapse cannot operate in the way envisioned by Marx.

Often associated with world systems analysis, but still quite distinct, are Marxian *theories of the state*. In some of these theories, the state is seen as the instrument of class domination, drawing its key members and policies from economic elites.⁶⁵ In other versions of these theories, the independence of the state from the economy is recognized, and state power is used to create programs (such as welfare, unemployment insurance, health care, and the like) that mitigate against the full contradictions and class conflicts inherent in capitalism and that distort perceptions of class interests.⁶⁶ In still other versions, the modern state itself is seen as an economic actor, along with big “monopoly” business and smaller competitive enterprises. Conflict is structured, theorists like James O’Conner⁶⁷ argue, along these three “sectors”—monopoly, competitive, and state—and the crises that emerge are not so much revolutionary as fiscal, primarily because the monopoly sector has the power to avoid paying its fair share of taxes in the face of the growing gap between government expenditures and tax revenues.

In what was to become ever more common in the twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci⁶⁸ began “to turn Marx on his head,” arguing that the state was able to dominate more by ideology than by coercion. The state becomes the tool of ideology, socializing the young into a civic culture, maintaining a moral order, and legitimating institutional structures. Consensus over beliefs and ideologies is the basis of state power, rather than the other way around. This inversion of Marx created what for lack of a better term we can call *cultural Marxism*, where the class struggle is conducted in the cultural arena—education, ideas, tastes, demeanor, beliefs, speech styles, dress, and so forth. Such an approach has been extended far beyond its Marxian roots; in the hands of theorists like Pierre Bourdieu,⁶⁹ it has become a prominent mode of “class analysis.”

Marxian analysis also took a *structuralist* turn in France, much as other theories succumbed to this broad-based intellectual movement.⁷⁰ The “surface”

65. For an illustration, see G. William Domhoff, *The Power Elite and the State* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990).

66. Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, and Socialism* (London: New Left Books, 1978).

67. James O’Conner, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973).

68. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publications, 1971; originally published in 1928).

69. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

70. See, for an early version, Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus,” in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Press, 1971).

structure of a society is but a manifestation of a deeper, less visible structure. Marxian ideas are then used to argue that the contradictions of class relations, between such matters as private expropriation of surplus and collective organization to produce such surplus, become manifest in a variety of ways depending upon particular circumstances.⁷¹ This more structuralist turn has led Albert Bergesen⁷² to proclaim the birth of "semiotic Marxism," in which the distinctions among economic base and political-cultural superstructure are not just inverted but fused in ways that obliterate causal connections among the economic, political, and ideological.

Finally, perhaps the most important line of influence of Marx's theoretical scheme is in specific substantive areas, where Marxian-inspired "theories of" a particular topic can always be found. We might call these Marxian theories of the "middle range." For example, there are Marxian theories not only of the state or international relations, as noted above, but also of ethnic antagonisms,⁷³ crime and social control,⁷⁴ community growth and development,⁷⁵ and just about any other topic for which sociologists have developed theories.

Thus, Marx's ideas and approach can be found everywhere in sociological theory. The zenith of this influence may have been reached in the later 1970s, as scholars in the United States sought to make amends for the neglect of Marx in the early decades of the century. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the apparent triumph of capitalism in the closing decade of the century has also led to a decline in Marx's influence. Yet although the peak of his influence in the twentieth century may have passed, the power of his concepts ensures that his impact on sociological theory will remain strong well into the future.

71. A less directly Marxian version of this argument can be found in Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

72. Albert Bergesen, "The Rise of Semiotic Marxism," *Sociological Perspectives* 36 (1993), pp. 1-22.

73. Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market," *American Sociological Review* 38 (1972), pp. 583-94.

74. For example, Richard Quinney, *Class, State and Crime*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 1990), *Crime and Justice in Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), and *Critique of Legal Order: Crime in Capitalist Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974).

75. Manuel Castells, *The City and Grassroots* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), and *City, Class, and Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978).