

Max Weber, “Class, Status, and Party”

Key Ideas, Context and Summary

Key Ideas in Weber

(Some glosses developed from <http://www.brooklynsoc.org/courses/43.1/weber.html>)

Social class, status and party exist in a complex relationship within the sphere of **power**.

Power is defined as: “the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action” (56).

In this way, **power** is not exclusively “economically conditioned,” but emerges through various social orders. “Man does not strive for power only in order to enrich himself economically....The striving for power is also conditioned by the social ‘honor’ it entails” (56). Weber conflates “social honor” and “prestige.”

Economic order and **social order** are not identical.

Economic Order is defined as: “the way in which economic goods and services are distributed and used”

Social order is defined as: “The way in which social honor is distributed in a community between typical groups participating in this distribution” (56).

Thus, “class,’ ‘status groups,’ and ‘parties’ are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community” (57).

Class is more closely tied to economic order (which has an intimate connections to status and party concerns). Concerned with “life chances” tied to economic interest and wealth.

Status is more closely tied to social honor/prestige order (which has an intimate connections to class and party concerns). Concerned with “life chances” tied to honor and prestige.

Party is more closely tied to the legal/political order (which has an intimate connections to class and status concerns). Purpose: struggle for domination. Concerned with “life chances” tied to the political realm.

The text, then, is largely an exploration of the variations of how these different social strata interact.

Key Concepts Outside of the Reading:

Besides **power** (see above), we get **Domination** and **Communal** and **Societal Action**.

Domination is the exercise of authority. Three ideal types of domination: charisma, tradition, and rational-legal.

Communal and Societal Action:

Communal Action, actions brought about on the basis of a shared belief of affiliation. A belief that members belong together and act together.

Societal Action, Actions brought about through a rational recognition of interests.

Life Chances: Opportunities to improve an individual’s quality of life which can come from their class, status or party.

Context and Summary of “Class, Status and Party”

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1. Introduction

Weber developed a different approach to the study of social groups and classes than did Marx. For Marx, there were two primary groups in society and these were classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, whose contradictory social relationship is the motive force for change in capitalism. Marx considers these classes to be defined and determined by whether they own the means of production (bourgeoisie) or whether they do not own the means of production and must sell labour power to those who do (proletariat).

In contrast, social groups and classes are in the sphere of power and how power is distributed. Given that there are various ways that power can be exercised, for Weber it is not possible to reduce the organization of all these groups to a single dimension or factor such as ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. Rather, for Weber there is a pluralism associated with class structure in that people attempt to achieve ends using various means – each of these may create a grouping such as a class, status group, or party. Social stratification has multiple and overlapping dimensions and groups that involve a complex set of social relationships.

The essay “Class, Status, and Party” is part of Chapter IX “Political Communities” in *Economy and Society*. Preceding this essay are discussions of political organizations, associations, and prestige, and the nation. Weber discusses these within the context of power and the distribution of political power in political communities. “Class, Status, and Party” was translated by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, two United States sociologists who helped to develop a critical approach to American society and the dominant mid-twentieth century sociological approach. Page references in these notes are to the handout from *Economy and Society*.

2. Power

For Weber, what we would call social stratification, social class, or social inequality is in the sphere of power, and can be analyzed by examining economic situation, status honour, or parties (organizations formed by people to achieve certain ends). In a section of *Economy and Society* concerned with the distribution of power, Weber begins his analysis of class status and party. Weber’s definition of power is as follows (quote 14)

In general, we understand by ‘power’ the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the same action. (Weber, p. 926).

This is a very broad definition that could include political or economic power exercised at the level of community or society as a whole, or it could refer to smaller scale actions taken by groups in communities such as religious or peer groups, or even the exercise of power in institutions such as the family. The examples that Weber provides are usually quite specific though and he is concrete in his application of this definition.

While Weber did not ignore economic power, he does not consider it to be the only source of power, noting that power “may be valued for its own sake” (Weber, p. 926). He also notes that there is a complex relation between power and social honour, “While power may lead to social honour, “not all power ... entails social honour” (Weber, p. 926). Social status and honour is a key concept in this

essay, with Weber being concerned with social honour and its origins, and distribution. This refers to elements of respect or consideration given to and received and enjoyed by others.

Other complex relationships emerge from the relationship among the various structural orders of society – economic, legal, status orders (Weber, p. 927) – and others such as the religious, political, military which Weber does not mention here. In general, he considers such orders, and the structures associated with them, to be independent orders but also interlocked with each other. That is, each of these has a life of its own but interacts with and affects the other orders. In considering any social action, each of these orders may be key or may modify or condition developments emerging from other orders.

3. Classes

Weber's approach to class is broader in scope than that of Marx, in that it examines the many possible relationships of an individual or group to markets. At the same time, for Weber class as a social concept emerges in the economic order, based on relationships to markets. Among the possible classes that emerge are financiers, debtors, professional groups such as lawyers or doctors, or landowners. That is, for Weber, there are more possible classes than only capitalists and workers.

a. Class Situation

Weber begins his analysis by defining class situation as the relationship of a person or number of people to a particular market that has an important effect on the lives of these people. Weber notes

The typical chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions, and personal life experiences, in so far as this chance is determined by the amount and kind of power, or lack of such, to dispose of goods or skills for the sake of income in a given economic order. (This is excluded from the English edition of *Economy and Society*, but in Gerth and Mills, p. 181, it appears directly after the three items of part B, p. 927.

From this approach, Weber argues that there are three features of class situation. These are as follows.

i. Life Chances. “A number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances” (Weber, p. 927). That is, a group of people in a similar situation so that they have their life chances determined more or less in common, by some factor that strongly affects this. The ownership or non-ownership of property is one factor that affects life chances. For example, the wealth, income and property of two people may be similar, and this tends to imply a similar outcome to their actions. To each of the sets of causes is attached a probability of a set of possible outcomes, so that people with the same life chances may end up in different positions. The meaning each person attaches to these, and the manner these are used, may differ quite considerably. Weber notes how the power of those with property, compared to those without property, gives the former great advantages over the latter. But Weber does not restrict the definition to property in the means of production though, and notes that it could emerge in the area of distribution, for example in sales, where owners of different types of sales operations could form different classes – wholesale, retail, mining, forestry, etc. (Weber, p. 928)

ii. Economic Interest. “This component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income” (Weber, p. 927).

iii. Markets. This component “is represented under conditions of the commodity or labor markets” (Weber, p. 927).

Together, items ii. And iii. mean that class situation refers to a similar position with respect to the ownership of property or goods, or having (or lacking) opportunities to obtain specific types of income on the market (e.g. lawyers, entertainers). That is, those having similar economic interests with respect to particular markets are in a similar position. And note that these need not just be markets in labour or means of production, but could be an interest in any form of market, where that market has a strong effect on life chances. Examples of non-Marxian forms of class situations might be professionals (lawyers, doctors, accountants), technicians with different specialties (carpenters, computer programmers), entertainers, or professionals in sports. While individuals in each of these may have different backgrounds, in conducting their profession and selling their expertise, each has a common relationship to a market.

Slavery. Weber notes that slaves are not a class, presumably because they are not in a class situation with respect to a market. Slave owners treat slaves as their property, so that the slave owners could be a class, but slaves themselves are not in a position where they can sell anything in a market. Weber thus considers slaves to be a status group, that is, there is a negative form of social honour accorded to slaves, one that slaves become subject to.

b. Class

“The term ‘class’ refers to any group of people that is found in the same class situation” (again appears in Gerth and Mills, p. 181). Together these three aspects define the class situation, and those with a common class situation form a class. For example, for Weber the working class or proletariat is a social class, since it is a set of people, each with a common relationship to labour markets, and it is this connection that has a major impact on their life chances. The petty bourgeoisie is another class, since its members have in common the characteristic that they have ownership of means of production, but in such limited manner, that they must also exercise their own labour in order to survive and maintain this position in society.

While Weber considers classes to be important, especially for life chances, he argues that the common class situation does not necessarily, or even usually, form the basis for social action. He notes “In our terminology, ‘classes’ are not communities; they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for communal action” (Weber, p. 927). With respect to the working class, Weber notes that

the direction in which the individual worker, for instance, is likely to pursue his interests may vary widely, according to whether he is constitutionally qualified for the task at hand to a high, to an average, or to a low degree. ... The rise of societal or even of communal action from a common class situation is by no means a universal phenomenon. (Weber, p. 929).

That is, “the concept of class-interest is an ambiguous one” (Weber, p. 928) and Weber regards the claim that “the class is infallible about its interests” as a “pseudo-scientific” operation (Weber, p. 930). At the same time, later in the essay he notes that rapid technological and economic changes “pushes the class situation into the foreground” (Weber, p. 938) and “Today the central issues is the determination of the price of labour” (Weber, p. 931). Weber argues that the latter may not be a demonstration of class struggle in that they do not indicate any attempt to change social structures but are merely disputes over distribution. But he also notes “today the class situation is by far the predominant factor” (Weber, p. 935) in formation of status groups. Thus Weber questions simplistic connections

between class situation, class, class consciousness, and class struggle, but recognizes that there is considerable identification of these in the society of his time.

Throughout this and other of his essays, note Weber's concentration on probability, chances, average, and variation. For example, he notes that class interest is ambiguous apart from implying "a certain probability from the class situation for a certain average of those people subjected to the class situation" (Weber, p. 929). He appears to argue that simple identification of class consciousness with class situation comes from a concentration on averages, without consideration of variation of interest, motives, or situation of those in similar economic and market position. Much of his analysis is devoted to explaining these variations, arguing that they produce a range of meanings for individuals and various forms of social action in such situations. He also emphasizes chances and probability, with the implication being that any common response is subject to various causes, so that a common social action may not be the result of a common situation.

c. Conditions for development of class interest

For those in contradictory property situations, Weber does not consider that the similar (objective) market situations to necessarily lead to the organization of a group on the basis of this similar situation. The sections "Social action flowing from class interests" and "Types of class struggles" (Weber, pp. 928-931, p. 305) indicate how class can be meaningful to individuals or collectivities in producing social action. This can be interpreted as showing that Weber did not really believe that Marxian classes, with full class consciousness, can develop. Alternatively, these arguments can be interpreted as forms that impede development of class consciousness, simultaneously pointing to conditions that have to be removed, changed, or created for such consciousness to emerge. Some of these arguments are as follows.

- The class or collectivity as a whole may have common (or average) interests, with a probability associated with this, but individuals within this class have a variation in interests. This could mean that individuals pursue perceived class situation in their own best interests, without considering the common interest of all those in this situation. If there is considerable competition among members of a class or significant chance for upward social mobility, these factors may dissipate class action or mean no serious class struggle.
- The presence or absence of institutional factors such as trade unions, or other class related organizations may affect the outcome. A strong trade union may be a means by which consciousness is affected, and the organizational abilities of the class are concentrated. However, Weber may consider this to be within the sphere of parties, rather than classes. (Weber, p. 929, 305)
- General cultural conditions affect social action – the intellectual development of the class, the "transparency of the connections between the causes and the consequences of the class situation" (Weber, p. 929). Weber notes that status groups obscure such connections.
- There may be similar reactions by many of those with a common class situation, but reactions may not be generalized, they may be amorphous, and may dissipate. Weber cites "grumbling" associated with disaffection, but notes the difficulty of this becoming a common and important social action. The grumbling of farmers, or students, or faculty, tends to be of this sort. That is, it is not generally strong enough to produce any significant action to change outcomes. (Weber, p. 928) Political parties may be a means

that alliances of proletarians with other collectivities oppose the bourgeoisie (Weber, pp. 931-2).

- There may be social action, but it may not be derived from members of a single social class. Rather, those with different class situations may together produce action – that is, there may be alliances across class that produce meaningful social action. Weber argues it “is not basically action among members of the identical class; it is action among members of different classes” (Weber, p. 930). For example, tax revolts or struggles over environment may be of this sort and, if so, there may be not clear cut relationship to class.
- The nature of struggles change at different times, so that to combine all these as expressions of a common history of class struggle is misleading. Early class struggles tended to concern debt bondage, later struggles concerned shortage of bread or other necessities of life, the “means of sustenance emerged” (Weber, p. 931). These were often slave or peasant revolts – protests against the withholding of goods from the market by the wealthy, in their attempt to increase prices. For Weber, these have nothing in common with modern capital-labour struggles. Even capital-labour struggles may be primarily concerned with the price of labour (wages) and can be restrained within a fairly limited and economic framework. That is, a struggle over wages could primarily be an attempt to protect lifestyle and status. If the concern is only with maintaining a standard of living, this struggle may restrain itself within limited boundaries, and not challenge property, or existing social relationships.
- Modern capital-labour struggles tend to be between the workers and the immediate bosses over the workers – managers, manufacturer, or business executive. The real difference of interest is that between workers and property owners, perhaps a rentier or shareholders. It is the shareholders or ultimate owners who obtain the greatest benefit from the economic situation. But in a bureaucratic enterprise and in complex markets, there are many layers, offices, and intermediaries between those with opposed interests. These mask the true nature of the dispute, making class struggle problematic. (Weber, p. 931, 305).

d. Types of Classes

Classes may be distinguished in several ways and since there are many markets, interests, and class situations, there are potentially a multiplicity of classes in any society. Weber develops the following classification for different possible types of classes.

i. Property or ownership classes. (Weber, p. 303). These are the positively privileged who own mines, cattle, slaves, capital goods, stocks, money, land and real estate, buildings, and in today's world new forms of property such as forests, water, technology (patents), communications (media sells audiences), franchises, and intellectual property. Capital becomes highly differentiated depending on how it is used in the market, and how the owner of capital employs it. One can lend money and merely collect interest or a return on this money (rentier), or the owner of capital can become actively involved as an entrepreneur. Weber does not consider capital as merely a technical aspect of production, but examines the meanings that owners of capital attach to its use. The consequences of each different type of use of capital can be quite different, in terms of societal effects.

ii. Commercial Classes. (Weber, p. 304). Among the possible forms taken by the commercial class are merchants, bankers and financiers, professionals, and industrial

and agricultural entrepreneurs. Where there were different classes of this sort, there could be struggles if there was some difference in economic interests, e.g. between debtors and creditors.

The positively privileged portions of this class have great wealth. At the opposite end of the spectrum are those who are negatively privileged – those without property. These are not necessarily an undifferentiated group. Just as there are several types of property ownership, there are also many ways in which individuals or groups may lack property. Debtors represent a class situation where net assets may be positive, but where the benefit of the asset is taken by others (farmers and small businesses). This is different than those with no property at all. Some of those without any property may be slaves (unfree), the poor, paupers, or homeless. These latter groups differ from proletarians, in that they have reached a condition where they are unable to sell even their labour power. Further, some with no property, may have something else which can improve their market situation, the acquisition classes. Even the proletarians of Marx must have something to sell – their labour power or their ability to work. The lumpenproletariat may lack even this.

iii. Acquisition Classes. These are individuals with no (or very little) tangible, marketable property but with skills or abilities which can be offered on the market. They are likely to receive a return over and above that received by those who have only labour power to offer on the market. There are many different types of marketable skills, both in terms of specific type, and the value of this type. Specialists, or those with unusual or rare talents, such as entertainers or sports professionals, may be able to be well situated with respect to some market. Those who are able to exercise a monopoly over their skills by keeping others from acquiring these skills (monopoly or some closure to the group) are well situated. Those with higher levels of education, qualifications, and credentials may be similarly well situated.

iv. Major Classes. While there could be such a pluralism of classes that it would be difficult to analyze class structure, Weber notes that at a particular time and place there were a number of major classes that are most important. In “Status Groups and Classes” (Weber, pp. 302-307), Weber identifies the major social classes as

- the working class as a whole, the more so the more automated the work process becomes
- the petty bourgeoisie
- the propertyless intelligentsia and specialists (technicians, various kinds of white-collar employees, civil servants – possible with considerable social differences depending on the cost of their training)
- the classes privileged through property and education.

For the latter two groups, Weber notes that members of the propertyless intelligentsia may have a chance to move become members of the classes privileged through property or education, and Weber notes that “money increasingly buys *everything*.” (Weber, p. 305).

Weber’s methodology could be applied to Saskatchewan or Canada today. With some additions and modifications, the major classes might be farmers, petty bourgeoisie, lower level white collar (clerical and sales), industrial working class and trades, upper level white collar and professional, and propertied. The latter differs in this province from that of large centres with very wealthy capitalists having greater

amounts of control over capital and the economy. There are also different sections of the propertied – real estate, industrial, financial, oil, or mining. See the analysis of the class structure of the United States developed by Erik Olin Wright and that of Canada by Wallace Clement.

4. Status and Status Groups

a. Groups

Sociologists since Weber have distinguished groups from aggregates or collectivities. An aggregate of individuals may have a common class situation, they may be considered a class, but this class may not be a group. This collectivity could even have a common set of values, ideas and norms, but do not interact in a sustained or patterned fashion.

A group carries with it the notion of interaction among group members. Two examples of sociological definitions of groups are as follows. “Social groups are collectivities of individuals who interact and form social relationships. ... They have their own norms of conduct and are solidaristic. Within this category may be included the family, groups of friends and many work groups.” (Theodorson, pp. 97-98). Groups could be considered (i) to have an ongoing and independent reality, with individuals coming and going but the group remaining active, (ii) to have an effect on the attitude of members, and vice versa, socializing new members, and (iii) there will be some difference of opinion among group members. (Burkey, pp. 9-12). The group may be a community, and it may cut across classes, or at least across class situations.

Weber notes the possibility that classes may form groups, but considers this to be unlikely. The common class situation does not usually lead to social action on the basis of the common class situation. In order for such social action to take place, there have to be proper cultural and intellectual conditions, and the nature of the contradictory market situation would have to be relatively transparent to all. These struggles are likely to be most clearly expressed when other aspects, such as status differences, are removed. Weber argues that there is class conscious organization where (i) there are no groups between the real adversaries, (ii) large numbers of persons are in the same class situation, (iii) it is technically easy to organize those in the common class situation, and (iv) where the goals of the class are well understood, and this understanding is led by those outside the class (intelligentsia). Note how different this is from Marx's view of class. For Marx, class involved not only a common market situation or position (and one restricted primarily to the capital-labour relation), but also the recognition of this common position by members of the class, the ability to act as a class, and the opposition of the class to the interests of another class. Marx's expectation was that this class consciousness would develop. Weber is skeptical about consciousness developing in a class.

b. Definition

Weber argues that groups are more likely to be formed on the basis of status or status honour than from class situation or class.

In contrast to classes, *status groups* are normally groups. They are, however, often of an amorphous kind. In contrast to the purely economically determined ‘class situation’ we wish to designate as *status situation* every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*. This honor may be connected with any quality shared by a plurality, and, of course, it can be knit to a class situation: class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions. (Weber, p. 932).

Honour refers to any distinction, respect, or esteem that is given or accorded to an individual by others. Such social recognition may be a formal process (titles, awards) or it may be in ordinary informal forms of social interaction whereby we respect or disrespect others (forms of greeting, inclusion or exclusion in a formal or informal group, relations associated with friendships). Social honour is expressed in social relationships, in how we interact with each other. Social esteem may be either positive or negative, so that an individual may be given a high level of social esteem or honour, or at the other ending, a low level of such esteem – the latter may be associated with prejudice, discrimination, or separation. Status groups are thus associated with positive, neutral, or negative aspects of honour – those favoured and those less favoured or excluded.

Weber describes this well in the essay on ethnic groups, noting that such distinctions concern one's conception of what is correct and proper and, above all, of what affects the individual's sense of honor and dignity. All those things we shall find later as objects of specific differences between status groups. The conviction of the excellence of one's own customs and the inferiority of alien ones, a conviction which sustains the sense of ethnic honor, is actually quite analogous to the sense of honour of distinctive status groups. (Weber, p. 391).

For Weber, social honour is social in nature, in that it does not automatically result from a market or property relationship in the economic sphere, but is an expression of a social relationship. It can be associated with any quality that is socially valued (positive) or is not desirable (negative). We accord each other honour on all sorts of characteristics, and where these affect some component of life, then this can be considered to be an element of status honour. For example, we may accord status and recognition for outstanding achievements (scholarships and student awards), or respect for abilities and accomplishments of others. It may be negative where someone does not live up to ordinary standards, where behaviour is socially disapproved (associated with ethnicity, outcast groups, those who do not properly adhere to particular religious rituals or accepted practices).

Status honour is linked to social evaluations, whereas class is related to the economic or market situation. Weber considers status honour to be a more important basis for people forming themselves into groups or communities. Or communities may be formed, and this community and its mode of behaviour and norms become the basis for status honour in this community. In the essay on ethnic groups, for example, Weber notes that different customs may be caused “by the diverse economic and political conditions of various social groups” (Weber, p. 392), by geographic separation, or “political action can give rise to the belief in blood relationship” (Weber, p. 393). The resulting forms of status honour may appear to be more subjective (social esteem) than objective (common market situation), but may be just as effective in maintaining status groups and leading to social or political action. In terms of groups formed by economic factors, the distinction that status groups may have from classes is that they are more likely to emerge from a difference in forms or levels of income and consumption (standards and levels of living associated with particular status) as opposed to production and relationships to the means of production (position within this is the basis for class).

c. Forms of status groups

A status group could be formed on the basis of any characteristic that is socially recognized by others, and which becomes the object of social honour. For example, social honour could recognize ethnic or religious characteristics, male-female characteristics, or lifestyle characteristics such as bikers, musical tastes, or association with sports. There is a

multiplicity of status groups, with Weber identifying three major types of social honour that can form the basis for power and affect life chances of individuals and groups. The status situations and groups that interest Weber are those in the sphere of power, where life chances are related to the status groups. Peer groups or groups based on musical tastes or lifestyles factors may be important in terms of status honour, but are not really status groups in that they have much effect on life chances.

i. Property is an important basis for a status group, especially where markets prevail. Those with considerable property or wealth have the means to develop a certain style of life, and those without property are not able to exercise this style. Because of this, or on the basis of property alone, social honour may also be accorded these same people. (Weber, p. 932).

Hadden notes that status “may get in the way of communal action on a class basis” (p. 148). Markets concern gains and losses through exchange and, in their workings, are not associated with honour, although most of us expect certain standards of conduct and behaviour to be adopted by those engaging in market exchange. But if markets were allowed to operate fully, this would destroy status differences and only market considerations would influence life chances. While property can form an important basis for status, property alone is not the key to status, and status “normally stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property” (Weber, p. 932). Those who acquire property may not be accorded the same status privileges are those who originally held property. One example of this is the distinction between established society and the nouveau riche. Status groups may hinder “the free development of the market” (Weber, p. 937) and some types of market activities. Alternatively, market privileges may be extended only to those with the proper status levels (old boys network). Weber notes various forms of status privilege – wearing special costumes, carrying arms, extending economic privileges to group members, and intermarriage (Weber, p. 935). In this connection, Weber makes an interesting comment that privileged status groups disdain “common physical labour,” some forms of rational and entrepreneurial work, and artistic and creative activity (Weber, p. 936).

ii. Styles of life emerging from differences of income, forms of consumption, place of residence, or fashion can, and frequently do, lead to Weberian status groups. While property and income are the source of funds required for consumption, it is not so much the source of the income that forms the status group, but rather the set of objects and services consumed which leads to the social honour associated with group interaction. Groups may form around residential neighbourhoods, professions, and educational levels (community associations, professional associations, restrictions based on educational qualifications). (Weber, pp. 932-3).

iii. Groups unrelated to property could also be formed. These could be ethnic groups (see the essay on ethnic groups), religious groups, groups around sexual orientation, and the various urban communities and groups which form around common sets of interests. In each, some form of social recognition and honour is accorded to members, there is likely to be some closure of the group (some are included and others are excluded), and membership may carry with it certain duties and privileges. Some of these groups may have effect on life chances, especially where religion or ethnicity is an important feature of social organization.

These considerations might be developed into a model of gender status and status groups, with male status denied to females, and also the reverse. Some types of male status privilege extend across property or income lines, denying women the same forms of status recognition and honour, and thus excluding women from male groups. Similarly, women may form status groups around motherhood, parenting, and the family, whereby males are excluded. Since males in modern society have generally had more access to jobs and income, this can become a basis for economic, social, and political inequality between men and women. Forms of honour associated with male status may even be denied to those women who have property or have acquired a prominent or high income position. In other cases, such status differences may lead to legal differences – eg. the inability of women in some place in the nineteenth century to become property owners or pass on property to their children. While Weber develops guidelines for analyzing status differences by ethnicity or race, he did not generally develop such an analysis for issues of sex and gender relationships. Such an analysis of sex or gender stratification comes from recent feminist writers.

d. Features of Status Groups

Weber notes how status groups can cut across property lines, so that “propertied and propertyless people can belong to the same status group, and frequently they do with very tangible consequences” (Weber, p. 932). Weber notes that this is more common in America than in Europe, given the more democratic and open social relationships, and the greater degree of social mobility, that have existed in North America as compared with Europe and other regions.

Such cross-class status groups are especially common in the case with ethnic groups, where social honour is accorded those who are considered to have the same ancestry, customs, language, or religion. Those without these characteristics are generally excluded, since they cannot be accorded the same status honour. In some ethnic groups there may even be disrespect or dishonour associated with those who do not have the same ancestry or other defining characteristics. These are generally closed groups, in that membership is not generally open to members except for those with the set of characteristics that are recognized by the group. It may be possible to leave the group but difficult to enter. Religion is also a common basis for such cross-class status groups, although some draw primarily from a particular class situation or ethnic group. In contrast to ethnicity, such religious groupings are much more open in that anyone can join, by adopting the precepts of the religious group. In fact, some religious groups make recruiting of new members a major aspect of their organization or even of status honour (eg. missionaries of Latter Day Saints).

Honour or dishonour can form the basis for awarding jobs, opportunities for promotion, and privileges in the political sphere. Characteristics of this type that affect life chances may be more meaningful to people than is relationship to markets (class situation), so that social status is the basis on which groups are formed. Another example is where groupings of men create “old boy networks” that control hiring, promotion, and rewards within institutions. When these men act together as a group, they exercise control over life chances to almost the same degree, or even more so, than does the rationality of labour markets. Since honour and dishonour are socially formed, those who are members of a status group associate meaning with the characteristics honoured. While this may be income and a particular style of life, it is not so much the relationship of the individual to the means of production as the meaning associated with the income and style of life. In this sense, relationship to the market and class situation may be an underlying factor, but it is the status honour or dishonour associated with lifestyle which Weber regards as more crucial to group formation and social action.

Status groups are usually associated with some restrictions on social intercourse or interaction with others. There is extensive interaction within the group, whereby meaning associated with social honour and dishonour is expressed among members of the group. That is, there is some degree of closure to outsiders, and the status group exercises some degree of management of relationships of those within the group. While there may be relationships with those outside the status group, these may be primarily market or political relations, whereby the normal forms of status honour are not offered or extended to these outsiders. For example, Hutterites have high degree of closure, extensive regulation of status honour and group social interaction, but also relate to those outside the group in economic matters.

In ethnic or religious groups, such as the Hutterites, marriage may be endogamous within the group. Those who are members are likely to belong to a circle or community. Various religious groups may operate in this manner, with fairly close guidelines concerning who members are permitted to associate with, and with whom members are allowed to marry. Such forms are more common in groups formed by tradition (religious and ethnic), with most contemporary status groups being more open. In contemporary society, with great geographic and social mobility, it may be difficult to maintain this closed nature. In contrast, where there is little social or geographic mobility, Weber notes that social status groups may solidify into castes.

5. Parties

Parties are organizations, rather than communities or groups, and they involve striving for a goal in a planned manner. They are associations of people that attempt to influence social action. Since they are concerned with achieving some goal, they are in the sphere of power in that. In Weber's words,

Whereas the genuine place of classes is within the economic order, the place of status groups is within the social order, that is, within the sphere of the distribution of honor. From within these spheres, classes and status groups influence one another and they influence the legal order and are in turn influenced by it. "*Parties*" reside in the sphere of power. Their action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power, that is to say, toward influencing social action no matter what its content may be. (Weber, p. 938).

That is, classes are in the economic order, status groups in the social order, and parties in the sphere of power. In some senses, power is not a separate order, in that classes and status groups are concerned with power. The difference between parties on the one hand, and status groups and class on the other, is in the level of analysis. Parties are organizations, whereas classes and status groups are groupings of people. If status groups or classes become well organized, they may form parties, or their parties may become the organizational wing of the class or status group. Trade unions, professional associations, ethnic organizations, and religious institutions are examples.

Parties also differ from classes or status groups in that they "always involve association" (Weber, p. 938), not only social interaction. That is, they attempt to achieve specific and well understood goals in a planned or rational manner. The party has causes, aims, goals, or purposes that it aims to achieve. It considers various possible ways of achieving these, and selects a course of action that it considers the most likely to achieve that goal. The structure of the party is also rational in that these actions are not a byproduct of social interaction, but are carefully considered and selected. The party is likely to have a constitution, a set of officers, and means of filling these positions with people most suited for them.

Parties may be political parties, or they may be other organizations aimed at achieving other goals. As such, they can cut across both status and class lines, expressing interests that may be common to those from many different sectors of society. Examples could be groups organized around helping to

solve the problems of specific diseases (Cancer Society, Arthritis Society), groups such as the Wildlife society, or even sporting and recreation organizations. Some may have political ends, others may merely attempt to pursue a particular aim of those in the organization. Adams and Sydie note that parties are likely to be mixes of class or status group interests, “they are more likely to be mixed types” (p. 187).

For political parties to gain political power, they must attempt to represent a fairly broad range of interests. Putting together a political program involves identifying issues which are key, and other issues which will pull in various groups. Some parties, such as the British Labour Party, may primarily represent a specific class. Other parties, such as the Canadian Liberal Party or the Saskatchewan NDP attempt to put together programs which appeal to a wide variety of interests.

It might also be noted that these parties may acquire a life of their own and pursue ends that are not part of their original purposes. Weber noted how social action can have unintended consequences which may be no part of the original intentions of the class, status group, or party. The most famous example is the Protestant ethic, which was established for purely religious or spiritual reasons. Weber argued that the establishment and power of this ethic had the unintended consequences of assisting the development of capitalism. Particular political parties are established with certain ends in mind, but as organizations, especially ones with some power, become subject to a variety of social influences which may change their purposes. Some long-time NDP supporters claim that the NDP has become more interested in maintaining power than in pursuing principles of social democracy. Parties tend to be a feature of modern societies, where power is exercised in a more formal, rational, and planned manner than in traditional societies. They do not operate in traditional societies, where personal relations or patronage may dominate. Parties are means of organization to achieve specific ends in modern society and, once organizations are developed as parties, they become more rational, that is systematic and permanent.

6. Ethnic groups

a. Definition of ethnic group

Human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. (p. 389)
Differs from kinship group by being presumed.

b. Race or ethnic identity

- Common inherited or inheritable traits (p. 385)
- Common descent (p. 385)
- Intermarriage (pp. 385-6)
- Biological heredity (p. 387)
- tradition (p. 387)
- Differences of custom (p. 387) – honour and dignity
- Habits of life (p. 387)
- Physical types (p. 388)
- Language, ancestry, religion (p. 390)
- Blood disaffinity (p. 392)
- Symbols (p. 396)
- Stories (p. 396)

c. Perception or subjective component

- Perceived – group only when race perceived as common trait and this requires joint (political action). (p. 385)
- Antipathy related to inherited traits or visible differences (p. 385)
- Abhorrence of intermarriage socially determined (p. 386)
- Belief (p. 387)
- Memory (p. 388) of migration
- Childhood reminiscences (p. 388)
- Attachment to homeland (p. 388)
- Belief in group affinity (p. 389)
- Presumed identity (p. 389)
- Feelings, sentiments (p. 390, 393)
- Symbols (p. 396)
- Awareness (p. 392)
- Imitation (p. 392)
- Idea of blood disaffinity (p. 392)

d. Social action

- Joint (political) action (p. 385)
- Antagonism against others (p. 385)
- Usually negative – despised or venerated (p. 385)
- Need for political support (p. 388)
- Belief in group affinity can help form political community (p. 388)
- Social action may not be concrete, unlike kinship group (p. 389)
- Facilitates group formation (p. 389)
- Common action

e. Sources

- Historically accidental habits (p. 387)
- Imitation (p. 388)
- Migration (p. 388)
- Politics inspires belief in common ethnicity (p. 389)

f. History

- [source] forgotten (p. 387)
- Differential instability of type and custom (p. 388)

g. Effects

- Monopolization of social power creates abhorrence of intermarriage (p. 386)
- Favourable chances of survival and reproduction for certain hereditary qualities (p. 388)
- Monopolistic closure (p. 388)
- Sentiments of likeness (p. 390)
- Beliefs limits social circles (p. 390)
- Chosen people (p. 391)

h. Interconnections

- May live in sharply segregated proximity (p. 388)
- With class (p. 392), diverse economic and political conditions

i. Note

- Conditions for determining ethnically based social action (bottom of p. 394)
- Ethnicity as a concept vanishes if concepts carefully defined (p. 395)
- French Canadians (p. 397)

7. Conclusion

Weber's discussion of class, status and party give an idea of how markets affect people, and how people form themselves into groups, partly as a result of markets and partly on the basis of other factors that are socially important. To some extent, Weber's status groups would appear to be ways in which people in capitalism protect themselves from the effects of markets, but at the same time using the market as they can, and using the means of power they have at their disposal.

In spite of the myriad factors that must be taken into consideration when looking at these social structures and institutions, Weber concludes that there are relatively few dominant features of social structure. In terms of classes, the major classes are the working class, the capitalist class, and the middle professional group. For Weber there are also a number of major status groups and parties, not necessarily identical to or determined by the same factors as are classes. That is, one may consider some of the major styles of life as those of upper class, middle class, and lower class. Within this system of stratification, the working class does not fit, although the working class has been and continues to be an important social class in capitalism. Finally, people in societies create some major parties, political parties and other organizations, each aiming to achieve some end. Again, it is likely that only a few of these organizations will acquire major importance for people at any one time.

Weber's writings can thus be used as a guide, but one should not get lost in the mass of details to be considered. Rather, one must attempt to reconstruct the major groups and classes in society, determine how people related to these, and how these interact.

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