

SOCIOLOGY 929
Reading Interrogations, session 5
October 3, 2006
The Weberian Tradition I:
Weber's work on class & John Scott reconstruction

1. Adam Slez

John Scott argues that according to Weber, “Stratification...concerned the social distribution of power, and this distribution of power involves the formation of social strata into structures of domination” (Scott 1996: 24). More specifically, Scott notes that “Weber’s work sustained a multidimensional approach to social stratification in which class, status, and command were seen as analytically distinct, but empirically entwined aspects of the distribution of power and the formation of social strata” (Scott 1996: 187). In Scott’s model, the formation of social strata is actually the demographic manifestation of the **rationalization** of power; more specifically, it is “the ‘natural breaks’ in the structure of demographic relations that discloses the boundaries between social strata” (Scott 1996: 193). **[EOW: Strata need not imply rationalization in the Weberian sense. Strata do entail the formation of social ties, demographically-grounded ways in which lives are interconnected within power positions – thus “circulation” and “mobility” are important. But this need not imply anything about rationalization – this can be ascriptive, traditional, patrimonial, etc.]** The important point to note is that strata are defined in terms of patterns of mobility between different “power situations.” **[EOW: when you say “different power situations” are you referring to the contrast of class/status/command, or different detailed situations within each of these categories? Mostly he talks about strata being formed on the basis of a particular type of power situation – thus class situations give rise to social classes and status situations to estates.]**

Given this model of stratification, what is the mechanism by which mobility patterns change over time? While the answer is mentioned above in passing, it is worth restating: in Scott’s interpretation of the Weberian model, changes in class, status, and command mobility patterns are the result of the rationalization of power in the economic, communal, and authoritarian spheres of society, respectively. **[Where does Scott say this? There has arguably been considerable changes in mobility patterns and strata formation since the mid-19th century because of technical change and other factors, but does this count as increasing “rationalization” of economic power?]** Thus the efficacy of this model ought to be judged according to whether or not rationalization can actually explain changes in patterns of social mobility. **[Are you saying that Scott claims it is rationalization of economic power – i.e. class situations -- that explains changes in class mobility – i.e. social classes as strata? I’m not sure exactly where you see this in his argument. To be sure, this explains the emergence of social classes from the previous society dominated by estates. This was a rationalization process connected to the triumph of capitalism. But here you seem to be arguing about on-going processes of rationalizations within societies that are already capitalist.]** In his discussion of Weber’s concept of class, Wright (2003) criticizes the rationalization

premise on the grounds that “the issue of the performance of labor effort becomes analyzed primarily as a technical problem of overcoming the traditionalism or opportunism of workers as individuals,” thus obscuring the fact that workers retain a significant degree of “class-based power” by virtue of the dependencies inherent in the types of exploitative inter-class relationships which emerge under capitalism (Wright 2003: 851).

By all accounts, this is a fair theoretical critique of the Weberian model of class. What are the implications of this argument for Scott’s model of stratification? Wouldn’t the effects of workers’ class power simply be reflected in patterns of social mobility? **[Why? Social mobility is a fact about individual movements through a structure. Class power can affect the character of the relations between classes within the structure. Why does it need to play out via mobility?]** In other words, accounting for exploitation doesn’t necessarily undermine the use of rationalization as an explanatory concept so much as it suggests that the effects of rationalization on patterns of mobility in the economic sphere are tempered by the retention of class-based power on the part of workers. This type of correction, however, is based on an understanding of the *effects* of the distribution of power within class relations. Weber’s argument about rationalization pertains to the *causes* of various forms of social stratification. In this respect, criticizing Weber for failing to recognize the importance of exploitation is to criticize him in terms of an argument he wasn’t trying to make. It would be fair to argue for the replacement of the Weberian research agenda with a Marxian one if it can be empirically demonstrated that the distribution of power in capitalist class relations is superior to rationalization in terms of its ability to explain patterns of social mobility across the economic, communal, and authoritarian spheres. **[I may just be being dense, but I couldn’t quite figure out your central point here. I was criticizing Weber for his treatment of the problem of extraction of labor effort as a problem of technical control over people which blocks further rationalisation of the social relations between classes – i.e. it undermines the ability for resource allocations to be made exclusively on the basis of instrumental calculation. I argued that this misdescribes the character of these relations. I don’t see what this has to do with the relationship rationalization to mobility.]**

2. Rodolfo Elbert

One of the central aims of John Scott’s book is to define a coherent and systematic conceptual weberian framework for the analysis of social stratification in modern societies. When one reads Weber’s pieces on social groups, it is clear that he distinguishes between status groups (based on honour distinction), classes (based on differentiated market situations) and political parties (based on the distribution of social power). It is hard to imagine how can one develop a coherent stratification map including these three grouping dimensions. Nonetheless, the weberian framework defined by Scott replaces the third component (parties) by authority relations. According to Scott, the overall framework of stratification in a society may be summarised as involving three kinds of power situation: class situations derived from differentials of power in the economic of property and the market, status situations derived from differentials of

power in the social sphere of communal prestige, and command situations derived from differentials of power in the sphere of authority (Scott, 42). My question is what are the theoretical and empirical gains of adding the analysis of command relations to the study of social stratification? Even if this new dimension might be coherent with the Weberian framework for the analysis of social stratification, it is not clear to me the way in which Sociology may study inter and intra generational mobility through elites and masses. In particular, it is not clear to me the way in which we can analyze mobility among a group that involves “leading positions in the state, in an established church or in capitalist enterprises” without contradicting a class based approach to society. **[EOW: This is in a sense precisely what Scott wants to do – contradict a “class based approach to society.” His argument is that this third dimension is *not* a class-based component of stratification, but a logically distinct dimension with independent effects. It may be that in some sense this dimension of power gets subordinated to class power within capitalism, but this need not imply that it is not a distinct form of power with distinct effects.]**

A second issue that I would like to raise refers to the relationship between a Marxist and a Weberian class analysis. According to John Scott one of the main features of Marxism as class analysis was to see them as collective historical actors. This kind of class analysis is located in the study of the macro-structure of societies and the historical development of its political, social, economic and cultural tendencies. On the other hand, according to Scott (page 3) Weber sought to reappropriate the concept’s core meaning, restricting its reference to the role of economic power and resources in the generation of advantages and disadvantages for individual’s life chances. This perspective bases the study of social stratification in the study of those causal components that determines the individual’s location in different strata. My question then is: Is there a Weberian meta-theoretical assumption in all kinds of class analysis whose central goal is to determine the class position of individuals in the class structure of society? **[In the Scott version of Weber, class situation is about the causal component of an individual’s life chances, but the formation of social classes (i.e. the formation of strata based on class) depends on demographic processes that forge common identities and interactions among groups of class situations, and the formation of class parties depends upon the collective organization of such strata into interest groups. So the explanatory program is not restricted to the individual level, but also includes these macro-processes.]** If so, is this a theoretical and empirical disadvantage for a Marxist approach that aims to confront the Weberian perspectives in a field of study based on Weber’s ideas on the study of stratification?

3. Michael Callaghan Pisapia

Both Marx and Weber distinguish between classes as “objectively defined places” and classes as “collectively organized actors,” (Wright 2002: 839) and both suggest that a structure of class places is logically and actually prior to the appearance of organized groups, but they differ in their understanding of the tendency of class places to cause the formation of class groups. Marxist theory seems less nuanced about the actual movement

from class place to collective action. For Weber there seems to be an intervening form – that of social class. For Marx, class place has either translated into a class group that is politicized and that rationally pursues the interests of its members, or if it has a non-politicized class consciousness, it has no real class consciousness, but merely a false class consciousness. For Weber, social class seems to be a social relation the sits between class place and politicized class consciousness. **[You are right that Marx does not very systematically invoke the formation of what Scott is identifying as classes-as-strata (=social classes), although a lot of the discussion of solidarity formation within work places and communities is more or less about these processes. But it is worth emphasizing that Weber also did not lay this out anywhere near as systematically as Scott. In any case, lots of contemporary Marxists do talk about the range of social processes that Scott identifies with the group-formation process even if they do not label it “social class”.]**

Weberian class analysts, such as Scott, make a big deal of this difference between Marx and Weber. For Weber, social classes comprise the “totality of those class situations within which individual and generational mobility is easy and typical,” (Scott, quoting Weber, 1996: 29). Central to Scott’s analysis is that demographic circulation and interaction defines social class, not class structure. If there is a social class of “industrial workers” its formation as a class has less to do with exploitation than it has to do with the fact that class members live together (connubium) and eat together (commensality). Even if patterns of living together and eating together follow from the relations of production, Weber, in my view, still makes an important intervention into Marx’s theory of class. Weber’s theory of social class makes it easier to distinguish between varieties of workers. For example, factory workers and teachers or lawyers are understood as occupying different social classes because of how they marry and who they eat with even though they may be similarly situated in the relations of production (they each sell their labor effort on the market). The children of professionals perpetuate their social class by marrying and dining with the children of other professionals. They are a distinctive social class because of this, even though the dimension of their lives that corresponds to their wage earnings would place them in the same class as factory workers.

Marxist class analysts, such as Wright, diminish the importance of this difference between Marx and Weber (on the question of social class as following from class place, but not taking the form of a collectively organized group for action). Why? Marxist and Weberian theories lead to very different explanations of social class: whereas for Wright, exploitation is central to the formation of class groups (by which he means politically organized groups?), for Weber the formation of politically organized class groups (party) is a separate from the formation of social class. With a focus on social class, exploitation is of minor importance, trumped by the solidarities that are formed through “connubium and commensality.” The latter solidarities operate according to very different logics than the solidarity forged by exploitation (emotional bonds of love rather than antagonist conflicts of interest)? **[I think you are hitting the nail on the right head here: the issue is the role of antagonistic *interests* in the respective theories. Marxists are certainly prepared to see solidarities as involving emotional connections and bonds, not just interests; but still they see underlying those bonds**

commonality of interests because -- I think – this is central to the problem of thinking about *emancipatory alternatives*. The revolutionary project requires figuring out who stands to gain the most from the challenge to capitalism, whose interests are partially aligned with anticapitalism and thus form potential allies and whose interests are opposed. Forging the solidarities to actually wage the struggle may depend upon these affective issues of commensality and connubium, but this is embedded in the interest analysis. What happens if you really do disembed these?] Is the Marxist argument that patterns of marriage and neighborhood formation are determined by exploitative relations of production, and not, say, sentimental familiarity? **[No: Marxists would say that common interests play a role in such processes, but there are lots of other contingent forces which might affect these patterns.]** Scott's focus on inter- and intra-generational mobility and on networks of friends and family is important because it points to a mechanism, absent in Marx, for how social class solidarities (as distinct from political party solidarities) are formed. Is it correct to say that collective action is immediate for Marx, but mediated for Weber by social class? **[I think that for Marx himself he mainly assumed that mobility out of the working class would be relatively minor, and that in the long run the polarization of the class structure itself and the effort by capitalists and their associates to monopolize positions for their children would reduce it further. The rapidity and depth to which the structure of places themselves changed opened up more space for mobility than Marx would have anticipated.]** It seems like Weber's distinction between a social class and a party consciously organized to push the interests of a group is an added layer of complexity that is not theorized by Marx.

The strength of the Weberian framework, then, is that it allows for other factors than position in a system of exploitative relations to enter into the determination of social class – relative status and the distribution of honor may be a factor in how social classes are bounded, and those factors may matter much more for the pursuit of power in the political sphere than class situation. It is not clear, however, how the power situations of class, status, and command are connected with one another. Scott's framework suggests uni-dimensional movement from class, status and command situations directly to social class, social estate, and social bloc. **[There are some places, I think, where Scott seems to suggest that there can be an interweaving of the three power situations in the formation of strata – strata that have a hybrid kind of character. His “elites” really have this character, I think: they are formed as a strata from all three power sources, not just the command structure. Perhaps one can argue that categories like “the people” in populism are also forged this way, although probably with less coherence.]** But, presumably a social estate such as the Brahmins in India, for example, emerges multi-dimensionally, as a result of an overlap of class, status and command situations. How the social theorist may predict which of these power situations is more causally determining of social dominance is not specified (does Bourdieu help here?). On the other hand, it seems that a free market economy is some kind of baseline social order Weber has in mind, and that status and command relations are significant insofar as they interfere with the market, or as they diminish in importance over time in such a way that the rationality of the market may manifest itself unconstrained by relations of status and command.

4. Charity Schmidt

This question stems from last week's discussion, and therefore you may not want to revisit the topic. However, in Giddens' piece (p. 30-31), he explores Marx's concept of class by complimenting the dichotomous classes with 3 (or 4) other groupings; Transitional classes in the process of formation, transitional classes in the process of decline, quasi-class groupings and finally, sectors or subdivisions of classes. How does this class framework compare to Resnick and Wolff's concept of subsumed classes? Do we think that Giddens' framework, allowing for differentiation among classes, is less problematic than Resnick and Wolff's, since it is not dependent on the relation to the distribution of surplus? **[I think that Giddens is trying to deal with some of the same themes and problems by talking about transitional classes and segments and the like, but the conceptual underpinnings are pretty unrelated. There is none of the functionalist mutual-conditions-of-existence idea in Giddens. His is much more of a set of descriptive categories than something derived from some conception of a totality and how it works.]**

How can we assess the potential for the formation of class consciousness or class-based movements within Weber's complex interplay of class and status? **[Weber has some fairly explicit ideas here: that the erosion of status divisions through the market helps facilitate the formation of class based movements out of class situations because the opposition of class situations is obscured by status divisions. I discuss this issue a bit in my essay on Weber – his views and Marx's are rather similar here.]**

5. Elizabeth Wrigley-Field

What I am struggling with overall is the Scott reading is the feeling that it is a very impressively put together theory but I don't feel like I quite have a grasp on it. I abstractly appreciate the symmetry of his typology of power situations and social strata, but when I try to think more concretely about the kinds of explanations we would build with this typology, I find it less convincing, or I can't quite see how the argument would work. I think it's two main questions I'm grappling with:

1. What is the relationship between the three dimensions of power situation? At first I thought that the idea was that these are all of equal significance. As I read further, it became clear that the idea is that societies will vary with regard to which of these predominates in the power situations of that society (and of course individuals will vary with respect to where their own power predominates).

But what determines which dimensions are most significant in a given society? It seems to me that this typology may be a good way of *describing* power situations by isolating causal mechanisms (how much they really should be separated is another question), but how does it account for them? **[EOW: You are right that in Scott mostly these are treated as a schema, a kind of periodic table of elementary forms in**

systems of stratification. There are a few places where there are some ingredients of something more like as theory – as the discussion of Weberian rationalization theme as an overarching process of change, and maybe some ideas of a dynamic that moves from status to class to command as the axial source of power within the different configurations, as first the market corrodes the power basis of status systems and replaces them with economic power, and then how the corporate form and the separation of ownership and control displaces economic power by authority.]

Moreover, it also strikes me that some of the descriptive value of this typology may be more at a meta-theoretical level: it seems like a good way of comparing theories of stratification to see more precisely how they differ from one another (or don't). But if it were the case that one of these dimensions was the most salient in almost all cases we wished to explain, then I don't know how useful it would be to focus on all three dimensions of power in our actual theories of the world (as opposed to our thinking about the possibility-space of theories). It seems to me, then, that there is an implicit claim that all three of these are "roughly" equally salient in some "overall" sense, even if not in some specific society. But I'm not so clear on what the basis for this claim is. **[The main point may not be the which-is-primary problem, but rather the variability in forms of articulation/combination/interweaving. Variation in time and place depends on the varying ways a) life chances are shaped by the interactions among these power situations, b) group formation is created by movements of lives across situations in all three dimensions, and c) interest organizations are consolidated around these groups. So this does tell us what kinds of variations to study, and there is some weak theory that says the kinds of interest organizations you get will be connected to (but not quite determined by) the kind of group formation that you have. There seems to be even less determinacy in the claims about how structural configurations of power situations shape group formation itself.]**

2. What is the relationship between power situations and social strata? Scott says that this is a matter of empirical investigation (so he criticizes people who conflate the two, for example, in debates about whether individuals or households are "the" correct unit of stratification analysis). But the power situations are supposed to posit some constraint on the social strata that form, right? (Otherwise what is the explanatory value of the power situations?) **[Scott is certainly unclear on this point. One possibility might be that this is like the sex vs gender issue: gender is a socially constructed category that transforms biological difference into a social difference\]. There is some kind of constraint there, but it is more in the sense of the raw material for a product than a straight forward cause. There is a kind of presumption that since power situations determine life chances, and people generally want better rather than worse life chances, that there will be motivations for certain kinds of strata formation and not others.]**

Is it that each power situation may or may not cohere into a social stratum, depending on whether it achieves "social closure"? This would mean that power situations and social strata are not 1-to-1 (as Scott says they aren't), but that each social stratum is based **on a distinct power situation**. **[Each social stratum is based on a distinct configuration of power situations, but not based on "a" power situation.]** But

I don't think this is quite right: on page 206, Scott writes: "The homogeneous strata within which mobility is, in Weber's words, 'easy and typical' are *likely* to contain people whose class and command situations exercise a similar causal impact on their life chances." (emphasis added) It's likely, but not necessary. Moreover, the individual-vs-household point also suggests that strata and power situations need not neatly correspond, since individuals (who may have different power situations) in the same household will nonetheless be part of the same strata.

I'm confused, then, about how social strata are supposed to form, and how this links the analysis of power to the explanation of phenomena like collective action, state action, etc.

6. You-Geon Lee

As Wright (2002) pointed out, one of the most important distinctions between frameworks of Marx and Weber may be their different approaches to the concept of 'exploitation'. In terms of class analysis, for Marx, the concept of exploitation, as "the source of profits in capitalism," has played a key role in "explaining the particular character of conflict between workers and capitalists (Wright, 2002: 845)." For Weber, however, there is no explicit explanation about this concept even though Wright (2002: 847) noted that Weber dealt with it a little bit in discussing "an issue of work discipline, the incentives to work, and economic efficiency." Although Weber strongly emphasized a pluralistic conception of classes (Giddens, 1981: 42), he also identified relations of possession or relations of property ownership as the fundamental and original sources of class division (Scott, 1996: 27). Of course, Weber primarily focused on "the ways in which ownership of property affects life chances via instrumentally rational exchanges in the market" rather than "in the interplay of markets and production (Wright, 2002: 850)." In doing so, however, Weber seems to open a way in which exploitative relations can be discussed in his framework. Despite this openness, he paid little attention on a systematic connection to exploitation with market relations and life chances (Wright, 2002: 850). My simple question is that why Weber did this. What are the advantages of paying little attention on exploitative relations in Weber's framework, and what are the disadvantages of including those relations with eagerness in his explanation? Would be there any conflict in Weber's framework if the Marxist concept of 'exploitation' is fully explained rather than being treated as "issues in the technical efficiency of systems of production"? **[It would be interesting to see if exploitation can just be "added back in" to Weber's analysis without fundamentally altering it. Marxists have added Weberian elements into their analysis without this necessarily destroying the core idea of the class/exploitation nexus. What would happen in the Scott version of Weber if claims were made about the existence of exploitive relationships among certain sets of class situations? Would there be an analog in the discussion of relationships among status situations and command situations?**

7. Sarbani Chakraborty

The broad Weberian analysis of class, status and command does not seem to be *totally* incompatible to that of Marxist analysis as Resnick and Wolff seemed to have claimed. Weber, however, pushed more for the socio-political dimensions along with the economic ones in his analysis of class. A seeming difference at first glance but a possible similarity with Marxian theory, seems to be a somewhat (but not entirely) deterministic aspect of his analysis. Through the repeated use of the words probability, chance and class situation, Weber seems to be pointing toward a probabilistic notion of factors especially that of social mobility, which is able to predict various social positions of individuals. Tied to this notion is the idea of rationalized actors, which allows for this predictability. **[EOW: I am not sure why you are identifying “determinism” with probabilistic notions? Weber certainly allows for a great deal of contingency in his explanations and certainly believes that there is no strong tendency for power situations to become strata or strata collectively organized groups. Why is that deterministic?]** What seems to be absent from the whole analysis is a more systematic and in-depth analysis of the concept of ideology and hegemony. The need for the concept of ideology and hegemony seemed important because of his thorough understanding of power, domination, coercion and violence on the one hand and the exposition of stability on the other. The mechanism of that stability could be the processes by which ideological apparatuses function but that mechanism has not been explained well. **[EOW: While Weber certainly doesn't use the word hegemony (as far as I know) anywhere, and only occasionally the term ideology, he talks at great length about legitimation and systems of meaning. His discussion of Traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms of legitimation, for example, is all about the way beliefs of actors support particular systems of domination. Wouldn't this count as at least a significant part of a concept of ideology?]** Incorporating the idea of ruling elite and ruling class rather than explaining the mechanism simply adds on to the innumerable categorizations. Also, the argument that because actors are rational, therefore there is stability does not seem to explain much. The concept of rationality itself can be challenged. That which seems 'irrational' to us is a 'rational' 'act' for the individual within a certain context. **[“Rational” for Weber means that people are able to calculate the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action and make a choice on that basis. This is strictly what he calls *instrumental* rationality, and it is mainly a technical idea about certain kinds of cognitive practices. The opposite of rational is not “irrational” in Weber, but nonrational. When you do something out of habit or out of tradition, this may not at all be irrational, but it does not involve instrumental calculations of the sort Weber is talking about. His theory of rationalization is a theory about how it comes to pass that this kind of instrumental rationality comes to dominate our systems of meaning. This he thinks is in many ways a bad thing because of the ways it suppresses what he terms “substantive rationality” or “value rationality”.]** Some of the Marxian concept of exploitation seems to be devoid of an agentic perception of human beings, relying more on the structural components. But human agency through rationalized actions needs an explanation as to why and how the so-called (rational) (actors) remain dominated in systems of production and consumption.

While class divisions are based on the economic spheres of action, status can be understood through the socio-communal sphere. While class is dynamic, status seems to be a more stagnant category. **[EOW: the strategies of professionals to solidify their “social honor” in the course of occupational differentiation is a very dynamic process of strata formation, so I don’t think status has to be static in the Weberian framework.]** What seems to make the status analysis of Weber more interesting to me is the focus on the consumption side of the equation. The style of life is based on the consumption patterns of individuals. While class and status are sought to be distinguished from each other, they may influence each other under certain circumstances. But it seems that while status **position** may sometimes almost determine class **situation** in terms of life chances, class in terms of ownership/control of economic factors may not always determine status positions. **[EOW: are you using the term “position” to mean “situation” here – i.e. status situation and class situation? It is important to use terms in a technically precise way in this kind of discussion.]** This may hinder the so-called ‘mobility’ in some situations. For example, even if a family owns wealth, or means of production and has disposable income to consume goods and services, it is the consumption pattern itself that determine the status of the family members that may hinder the future inter-generational mobility of the children of that family. **[EOW: remember, of course, that “life style” is a fairly deep concept here, not a superficial one about consumption preferences. It really has to do with the entire way a person’s social-communal activities are organized: what you read, what you talk about, what you enjoy, etc.]** To explain this further, one gets to hear news items in my country that sometimes children of wealthy people (read traders) do not get admission to best schools, because they do not have the requisite indicators of ‘class’, like proficiency in English and certain forms of dress codes. The situation is equally true for people who have lower rankings in social hierarchy both in terms of class and status. How do we understand the concepts of status and class in these situations? **[Those are definitely the effects of status situations that have been consolidated into status strata – i.e. systems with real closure mechanisms. The specific context you have described is a setting where class situation and status situation both affect life chances, but in this case the status situation blocks the ordinary effects of the class situation. Note that this is a nonmarket setting – admission to a school.]**

8. Rahul Mahajan

Questions:

1. Again, if class is the answer, what is the question (see point 1)?
2. How do we theorize the significance of class mobility on class consciousness? Do Weber and his notion of social closure get us farther than the Marxists do?
3. How exactly do Marxists take into account interactions with the market (excluding the labor market) in formulating class, as Wright says they do in "The Shadow of Exploitation?"

Points:

1. At this point, I find myself wanting to call for a timeout. I don't think we can just frame the course with "If class is the answer, what is the question" and let it go at that. Nor can we just let it emerge out of reading all the different approaches. The whole thing is already becoming a morass.

Weberians and Marxians define class differently. Marxians and other Marxians define class differently. We read various debates and critiques; the latest, Scott, seems to have criticisms of the whole world's approach to class. But it's all kind of pointless unless we know what is the question being asked.

Example: Both Wright and Scott believe that relations of command and authority are important in understanding society. Wright includes those ideas in his conception of class. Scott thinks that Wright is foolish to do this. But what's the difference? Why do we care whether these two thinkers include command under the rubric of class or consider it separately? Isn't it just a matter of making different choices about what to call class, rather than making different judgments about what structures are socially important?

If the whole exercise is not to devolve into semantics, we need some unifying notion of what the question is. And yet it's very clear that these different authors have very different notions of the question.

Resnick and Wolff are okay, I suppose. Their question is, "When you clean up Marx's conception of class and remove contradictions and ambiguity, what does it look like?" That's a matter of historical exegesis, which I think they did pretty accurately. Of course, they don't even address the question of the significance of class. **[While the form of their exposition is "what did Marx really mean?" their goal is not just brush clearing in Marxology. They seem to believe that the political project of challenging capitalism is facilitated by their formulation of problem and that it will avoid certain kinds of traps – like imagining that simply getting rid of private property will lead to emancipation – which they feel are deeply connected to the reductionist perspective of everyone but their approach. So I don't think they are merely concerned with exegesis.]**

I don't know the answer – or, rather, the question. There seems to be a tradeoff between maintaining theoretical coherence and faithfulness to the original idea (which obviously has something to do with the economy and with occupational status and condition and not with everything but the kitchen sink) on the one hand and connecting it with social and group consciousness and potential mobilization on the other. For example, Scott seems to want to pull the concept of command (as it relates to the point of production) out of the concept of class that Wright has, but insert what he calls demographic factors (life-course changes, family and kin networks, etc.), which brings it farther from position in the economy and production but nearer to the establishment of shared consciousness. **[He is not packing these demographic elements into the class-as-places concept by into a**

specific aspect of the class-as-social-formation concept. Scott's class situations is logically equivalent to my class locations-within-relations; Scott's class strata or social class + his class as organized group are the equivalent of my class formation. I know that this can seem just word chopping, but still we need to see what these moves amount to: I do include command connected to the relations of production within my concept of class because of its connection to the problem of exploitation; Scott bans it from the concept of class (situation) and treats it as a distinct dimension of stratification. but he is not bringing the demographic elements into the definition of class situation, so it remains a "structurally coherent concept".]

This makes class less structurally coherent a concept from the theoretical point of view, but on the other hand, enables development of a coherent concept of command, which includes command in the economy/production and distribution, the role of the state, and the interactions between "power elites" and the state.

How do we judge between these competing definitions? I don't think the answer is empirical data. A certain theoretical confusion must be resolved before we can try to appeal to the real world to sort this out. This problem will just get worse as the semester progresses. **[You are right that we need to sort all this out: that is precisely what, I hope, we are doing! But I also think we can relax a little bit and just try to understand the arguments of each theorist on their own terms, sort out the logic of the conceptual constructions, and not worry quite so much (at least all the time) about the pros and cons of the differences. That's important, but first lets figure out the details.]**

2. Weber's concept of social closure seems to be of particular importance in understanding the generation of any kind of group consciousness – including class consciousness. This would seem to make questions of class mobility, whether intergenerational, life-course-related, or purely random with relation to systemic effects (one member of a family does really well in school, gets a scholarship to Harvard, etc.) highly relevant if "the question" has something to do with class consciousness. On the other hand, the more structuralist Marxist conceptions would say that the class composition of society is important, but the identity of the individuals in a given class is not. **[I don't think that anyone except hyper-structuralists would argue that it is irrelevant how people move through a class structure.]** Wright has some interesting empirical measurements of class consciousness (although his choice of questions has been severely criticized), but the answers you get there are the answers at a given level of class mobility. They don't tell us much about the importance of class mobility as a safety valve for capitalism.

Interestingly, according to Wright's study in "Class Counts," Sweden has higher permeability of class barriers than the United States and also higher and more broadly diffused levels of pro-working-class consciousness. This calls into question which is the cause and which the effect.

3. In Wright's "Shadow of Exploitation," at one point he characterizes the difference between a Weberian and a Marxian approach to class as follows: Weberians only look at class in terms of position with respect to market interactions but not with respect to production, while Marxians look at both. It seems to me that perhaps something like Wright's definition of class, in its compromise between analytical and classical Marxism and common sense, takes certain positioning with respect to the labor market into account (even there, command of organizational assets, the key non-monetary consideration, is something determined after the fact of labor market involvement, not before it). I don't see that it takes into account any other kinds of market interactions, having to do with consumption, reproduction of the working class, etc. Resnick and Wolff's reconstruction of Marx does, but it also radically de-centers class in the analysis of society. **[You are correct that my specification of class structure only concerns the labor market, not the market for other commodities. And in the context of uneven exchange and global processes it can certainly be argued that this is a problem since the bottom line of my argument centers around antagonistic material interests and these antagonisms can be formed through other exchange relations, not just the labor market. Still, I think the approach I propose would give us a specific way of thinking about these complications: they would generate an additional, distinctive kind of contradictory class location. I still don't think that the productive/unproductive labor distinction helps us here since that does not correspond to a meaningful interest-generating process, either respect to how actors can improve their material conditions of life within capitalism or what their interests might be in transcending capitalism.]**

4. I'd have been much happier with Scott if he hadn't used the phrase "I show" on every other page. He didn't show nearly as much as he claimed to.

9. Hsing-Mei Pan

How do the boundaries of social classes form?

John Scott reconstructs Weber's notion of class. He points out that the existence of social classes (or say the appearance of social classes) is through processes in which the changes of class situations of members of a society occur. According to him, it is such processes that the boundaries among social classes form (p. 29). What I do not realize is that why such **mobility processes** inevitably result in the formation of boundaries of social classes. According to my understanding, social boundaries are often formed on the basis of the collective action or practices of social groups, or on the basis of the subjective cognition of social group members. So why does individual or personal mobility lead to the formation of boundaries of social classes? Does John Scott give clear explanations? Does he clearly present the process through which social classes form?

[This is a nice point. Scott somehow sees these demographic processes as creating the necessary conditions for collective actions of the groups that are so formed, but you are right that the collective actions of these groups can precisely be oriented to forging the boundaries that make movement difficult or easy. I guess what he would probably say is that the *definition* of a boundary is given by the demographic

patterns of movement, but the *explanation* for those patterns might well be the collective action of members of a stratum: they engage in practices that close the boundary, therefore making movement in more difficult.]

On the other hand, John Scott indicates that some social classes possess dominant power through which they get their greatest interests in a given economic system. According to his words, it seems that domination also constitutes an element of the formation of social boundaries among classes as well as mobility processes.

10. Fabian Pfeffer

Still as a sequel to one of my earlier interrogations, I want to re-address the theme of 'complexity in class situations/locations'. Weber's approach to class seems to be the best ground for such enterprise.

Weber allows class situations to be determined by the ownership over a vast array of economic goods that provide a monetary return. As a result, we are confronted with a "bewildering kaleidoscope of economically constituted class situation" (Scott, 28). Those class positions that share a common chance of mobility among each other constitute a social class. This is Weber's ingenious way of consolidating the complexity of class situation into one relevant and empirically workable picture of class structure.

In my opinion, most secondary accounts of Weber choose a different and invalid way of 'reducing complexity'. Broadly speaking, it seems to me that Scott (and others) focuses his attention on what Weber calls a 'commercial class' - to the detriment of 'property class'. In most parts of Scott's book which aim at deriving a valid concept of social class, property is equated with ownership of the means of production and market with labor market (cf. also Wright 2002: 839). However, at least in Weber's biblical exposition of the central concepts (chapter IV), these two class types appear on equal footing. Especially given that Weber lays out his concept of class in only two brief expositions, it is surprising that a serious consideration of one half of it ('property class') is missing in later reconstructions of Weber's theory. Is it assumed that property and commercial class situations always run parallel? **[I would need to reread this part of Weber to remind myself of what precisely is in play here. We can discuss it in the seminar.]** Or is it just sensitive to assume the primacy of commercial class situations, i.e. power relations on the labor market as opposed to the credit market, the real estate market, etc.? (Or, alternatively, am I just misinterpreting Weber's followers?). **[EOW: People mainly use the more developed of the two places where Weber discusses these issues, the class, status party essay, rather than the much more fragmentary and schematic one with the vast array of different class situations. I think that is why the three class model suggested in that part of the Weber canon – workers sell labor power, middle class possess skills, and capitalists means of production – become as important as it did.]**

If we would be willing to confer adequate attention to the ownership over non-production-related economic resources I argue that we are confronted with two challenges: i) where the two categories of class situations are incongruent (e.g. workers who are also landlords) the translation of these competing class situations in one social class could produce difficulties (if, e.g., this worker has higher chances of upward

mobility than his colleagues who are not landlords) **[For me this kind of situation is a specific form of contradictory location: this is a way of diagnosing class situations by the specific mechanisms they entail.]** - this is an empirical question, I guess. ii) In empirical research a social class map is generally reached “in an indirect way [...] through the mapping of occupational titles, treating these as proxies for the underlying power situation” (Scott: 194-5). While occupations are a pragmatic proxy for power relations in the labor market, they seem an inadequate instrument for assessing distinctions based on ‘property class situations’ **[Occupation is not really all that good even for the narrower objective because they have too much heterogeneity with respect to the conceptual field in play here.]**

11. Jorge Sola

After examining these week’s readings I better understand Parkin’s claim: “Inside every neo-Marxist is a Weberian struggling to get out”. I mean that despite the “shadow of exploitation” in Weber, his ideas and concepts might enrich in different ways the Marxist framework. Nevertheless, one has to be careful to avoid the pastiche. I say this because although I like Scott’s effort to integrate the different traditions within a conceptual synthesis, at some point, as with the Marx/Parson functionalism mix, this is a very difficult task to accomplish. I have two interrogations.

1. Status and class formation. Status and class are two well differentiated ideal types. As every ideal type, it appears mixed in real life. However, both Weber and his commentators stress that often status and class obey opposite logics. What I would like to put forth is the question of whether the concept of “status” is able to help us in understanding the process of class formation. I agree (like both Marx and Weber) that the concept of “interests” is appropriately the central criterion in defining class positions. But both Marx and Weber admit that the features of “class” sometimes overlap with the features of “status”, even that the former may be the basis for the latter (Weber, 935; Scott, 32). In this sense, could we claim that both the process of class consciousness and class formation are very related to the adoption by the people who are in such class positions of some characteristics of a status group (i.e. values, customs, honor, etc.)? Indeed, could such shared beliefs, practices and identities contribute to make more transparent the “connections between the causes and the consequences of the class situations” (Weber, 929) and, therefore, make easier the arising of classes as collective actors? I am thinking especially of E. P. Thompson’s works about the “working class’ moral economy” and their “customs in common”. **[I agree with you that the formation of a class identity as a salient component of one’s sense of place in the world is closely bound up with the formation of a status group. Class identity in the working class often involve notions of, for example, the “the dignity of the working class” and this certainly has an important element of social honor in it, which is the pivotal content of the status concept. But I don’t think that class formation is simply a subtype of status group formation. The specific kinds of solidarities that constitute class collective action have much more reciprocity and conditional altruism to them than is captured by the idea of a status group.]**

2. Class, parties and elites. One of the things Gubbay criticized (rightly, in my opinion) in Wright's framework is that it was unable to give an analysis of the major owner-capitalist, because the category "capitalist" aggregated within it every kind of employer. The analysis of these big capitalists might be important insofar as the class structure is affected by political mediations and these capitalists are in an hegemonic position to influence these mediations, in different ways and at different levels. Neither Marx nor Weber deployed a systematic framework to explain how the ruling class rules, although both of them wrote a lot of interesting lines about this issue. Since the Weberian framework of social stratification 1) is broader (in any sense) than the Marxian and 2) pays more attention to parties as organizations which might organize the social classes' (or social states) action in struggles for power although they may have considerable autonomy; could such a framework be useful in explaining the actions of the big capitalists as well as their relations with the political elites who make key choices in the nation-state or other transnational institutions (like the IMF)? Scott suggests some clues to approaching this issue, but one also could think that such an issue is not related to class analysis as one of his parts. **[I don't particularly see the advantage of Weber for this specific purpose. the Marxist concept of the "Capitalist State" seems better able to provide a way of understanding the privileged location of big capital, especially finance capital, within the structure of the state, and the ways in which political elites become tied to the capitalist class. This is a major preoccupation within Marxist analysis and only peripheral for Weberians, who are more concerned with especialising the autonomy of state elites and their distinctive interests.]**

12. Adrienne Pagac

Despite a rather small interest/focus on 'class' (as perhaps we have attempted to define it in class these past few weeks), Max Weber certainly seemed to have much to say about it, its theoretical principles and its future ramifications. I was/am quite surprised to find that some of Weber's concept of class (read: its background) was in line with Marx—that they agreed on theoretical ideas of the development of class locations/situations in capitalism, for example. However, I am rather flummoxed by a conclusion/end point/outcome Weber draws from this understanding—the feasibility, stability, etc. of capitalism as an economic system (which I understand to be a result of the 'bureaucratization' of the state). My confusion most likely lies with the importance he grants to rationality of the market and of capitalism. Is Weber operating under a definition of rationality much like the one used in fiscal policy today? Is it 'liberal' economic policy (i.e., neo-liberal today)? **[Not really, I think. "Rationality" means instrumental rationality here: the selection of a course of action on the basis of the expected pay-off which is calculated through some sort of systematic procedure. This is means-ends rationality, where the ends are given. The market pushes for that kind of choice-process.]**

I find accepting the notion that capitalism is a stable system extremely problematic. Moreover, I am confused that Weber did not find it also; if he grants that an individual is 'compelled' to sell their labor power to a capitalist in order to live (and I believe he does), then how can that admission of an exploitative relation allow for a

'stable' system? Why wouldn't an individual, along with other individuals, grow tired of being 'forced' to labor, especially if he/they are out to pursue their own self-interest (the subjective interest)? **[EOW: They might go along with it because they cannot envision an achievable alternative, particularly given the time horizons under which they act. Furthermore, capitalism concentrates coercive power in a state that adds to the problem of forming an alternative . Humanity has "accepted" oppressive conditions for thousands of years, after all]** Does he envision capitalism as 'rational' and therefore, lasting, because he did not believe that it had not fully 'rationalized' itself at the time he wrote? From my understanding of the Giddens reading, it seems as though Weber posits that capitalism would not give way to another economic system because it was still proceeding towards some 'perfect' end. *See Giddens 46.*

Would you please define: rationality of technique and rationality of domination? **[Rationality of technique means the choice of the most efficient technical means to achieve a given end. The expression "rationality of domination" could mean different things depending upon the specific context of Weber's writing. Usually in discussions of domination a three-fold distinction is made between the different ways that domination is legitimated: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. The "rational-legal" legitimation refers to the justification of domination on the grounds that it follows a set of rules that are themselves designed to insure the most efficient choice of means to accomplish the ends of an organization. The ends are not chosen on instrumentally rational grounds; they are chosen for other reasons. But the procedures are designed to insure "rational" means to accomplish those ends.]**

13. Ann Pikus

Scott's arguments about why it is important to distinguish status from class hit home with me. Being able to parse out status from class would undoubtedly clarify my own often muddled thinking around these concepts and would help me apply the concepts in empirical work more fruitfully. However, even after reading Weber's (and others) attempts to distinguish the concepts, I still find the line between class and status to be very blurred. For example, in *Economy and Society*, Weber writes: "...classes are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas status groups are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life" (p. 937). Yet earlier in the same chapter he mentions that "rational economic pursuits" including entrepreneurial activity and exploiting otherwise appropriate activities (i.e. arts, literary work) for income can lead to a disqualification of status. Wouldn't that be an example of status stratification due to relations to production? Similarly, Weber's assertion that "...everywhere some status groups, and usually the most influential, consider almost any kind of overt participation in economic acquisition as absolutely stigmatizing" seems to implicate production and acquisition of goods in status stratification. Furthermore, while in times or societies where the leisure class are more prevalent the aversion to economic acquisition may have made more sense, how would Weber reconcile this view of status with the Trumps, Bill Gates, etc. of today who clearly enjoy high status and who do not merely restrict the

market by withholding their wealth (although they do a significant amount of that) but are very involved in the production and acquisition of goods as well? **[EOW: I am not a deep Weber expert, but you have identified here – at a minimum – some expositional ambiguity. Fundamentally status refers to social honor, and a status situation to a situation that bestows on people a particular form and degree of such social honor (or prestige). The expression “special styles of life” is a component of that, a component we will see much more of when we talk about Bourdieu. But you are absolutely correct that what one does, not just how and what one consumes, also bestows status and thus must constitute a component of the status situation of people.]**

I am also very interested in discussing how law structures the perpetuation of both class and status stratification. The perceived legitimacy of legal systems and actors would seem to threaten social action and increase the propensity to view inequality as individualized rather than a structured group phenomenon.

Alas, this interrogation and the next arrived after midnight just as I finished all of the other interrogations.....so no comments this time.

14. Joe Ferrare

John Scott provides a very analytically coherent reconstruction of Weber's ideas on stratification. He weaves together many different (and often opposed) theoretical traditions and provides a picture of how these traditions compliment one another within his multi-dimensional Weberian framework. I found it particularly helpful how he kept class situations, status situations, and command situations analytically distinct, yet proposed an empirical agenda that necessitates an understanding of how all three "situations" are inextricably intertwined at levels that are dependent upon the degree to which a particular society is one of class, status, or command (His metaphor of geology was prudent, though I would argue the inter-relations among class, status, and command situations are more complex than the relationship among geological intrusions, fissures, and conglomerates, if for no other reason than the fact that stratification analysts, and the subjects they study, are themselves entrenched in this process. Giddens' notion of the 'double hermeneutic' speaks to this directly.).

The point at which I begin to have concerns is when one relies on a strictly Weberian notion of class. According to Weber, "class situations" are "market situations," in which one's life chances are determined by their ability to realize and impose their will through market exchanges. As Wright notes, this component of class relations is in line with a Marx's understanding, but it falls short in that it ignores production relations and ultimately exploitation. Aside from the research ramifications that Wright points out, I am equally, if not more concerned with the political ramifications of limiting class to market capacity in exchange relations. Ignoring production relations and exploitation fails to recognize the dependence that capitalists, and those whose loyalties fall with capitalists due to their receipt of a share of the appropriated surplus, have on the working class. This relationship seems to be missing from Weber's concept of class. Further,

although at times Weber mentions the damaging impacts of capitalist society, I find that he more often writes in a way that makes him seem agnostic (particularly in the way he and Scott speak of *domination* without any mention of exploitation) to the exploitive nature of capitalist relations. While it may be the case that he was much more concerned with appearing "value-free" than Marx was, the ease at which someone could suppress exploitation through Weberian class analysis concerns me.

One way around this concern would be to simply use a neo-Marxist concept of class (focusing on exchange relations and production relations) in place of Weber's exchange notion of class, but keeping the general framework of Scott's (class, status, and command) in tact. A general question, then, is whether or not a neo-Marxian notion of class can fit within this reconstructed Weberian approach to stratification. Scott seems to think that these various theoretical traditions can be (and are) complimentary. I can not really think of any reason why this would not be the case, but I do think it deserves further interrogation.

15. Assaf Meshulam

Can class and status be disentangled? Ultimately, Weber's separation of the two seems too superficial given the complex interrelations between the two. In order to create the division between the two, Weber created different spheres—the social order and the economic order—that do not seem to be autonomous as he set them. He assigns "class situation" to the "purely economic" sphere, with various sets of power relations (what Scott calls domination by virtue of a constellation of interests, by virtue of prestige, and by virtue of authority (p.25)). But does a "purely economic" sphere or relations exist? Weber's description of the market as a neutral system with its own laws that create an equal playing field does not describe the reality of the capitalist market. In reality, the market is not neutral, nor are all players equal, which is a product of status and the social order. It cannot be said that the market "knows no personal distinctions...it knows nothing of honor" (Weber, 936). Weber's assumption that all share similar "rational" behavior in the market is also questionable. Not only do all actors not behave rationally, but there might be more than one "rational" behavior. Weber's separation of class and status (and party) does help to simplify the complex and contradictory aspects of the Marxist notion of class. Yet while this helps methodologically, the powers, struggles, and identities that are produced by these two concepts are too overlapping to be considered independent.

Scott argues that "[t]he social classes that form in modern capitalist society ... are likely to have certain status characteristics, even where traditional status ideas have disappeared ... [S]ocial class boundaries may themselves be reinforced by boundaries of a status kind." (1996:36). Indeed, in capitalist societies today, status features that were set along traditional or religious status lines (basis) and excluded access through "connubium" and "commensality" have less validity. However, class (and status) mobility is most easily achieved with money and its benefits (like access to good education). Thus "social class boundaries" are reinforced by status that is achieved through the market, the economic sphere, further heightening the interdependence of the two "orders."

Finally, Weber's tripartite model of social stratification enables him to bypass the issue of exploitation. While Wright tries to trace the "shadow of exploitation" in Weber's analysis, it seems that the difference in perspectives taken by Marx and Weber—of the worker's welfare and interests and the maximization of capital, respectively—offers a compelling explanation as to the absence, or dearth, of exploitation in Weber's analysis, as suggested by Wright.
