

Erik Olin Wright, *The Debate on Classes* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 278-301

pp.313-348 (301-313 optional)

2 What Do Classes Have in Common That Make Them Classes?

Class structures, for most Marxists anyway, are thought to designate real mechanisms, causal processes that exist independently of the theorist. The concept of class is not meant to be simply an arbitrary, analytical convention invented by the theorist. To define a class, therefore, is to make a claim about the nature of these mechanisms.¹¹ Mechanisms are effect-generating processes.¹² To identify a mechanism is to give an account of the way it produces specific kinds of effects. One crucial aspect of the theoretical content of the concept of class, therefore, concerns the specification of the kinds of direct effects that class structural mechanisms are thought to produce.

11. Two methodological points need to be made here. First of all, what is at issue here is not the use of the word "class," but the status of the concept itself. The use of words is obviously a matter of convention. The claim here is that the theoretical concept designated by that word is meant to designate a real mechanism. In this sense, the definition of the concept class structure can be *incorrect*, not simply *unhelpful*. Second, I am not claiming that the only legitimate kind of concept in social theories is one which attempts to represent real mechanisms in this way. For certain analytical tasks, strictly conventional, heuristic concepts may be entirely appropriate.

12. To say that mechanisms are effect-generating processes does not imply that mechanisms invariably generate *empirically observable* effects. Since, to use the formulation of Roy Bhaskar, the world is an open system consisting of many distinct mechanisms operating simultaneously, it is always possible that the presence of one mechanism can block the effects of another. This does not deny that mechanisms can be viewed as effect-producing processes (or, in Bhaskar's terminology, as *event-producing* processes), but simply that the effects never appear as discrete events in our empirical observations. Our observations (which Bhaskar refers to as "experiences") are always constituted by concatenations of many intersecting events. To identify a mechanism is therefore to identify an effect-producing process which will have a tendency to be embodied in one way or another in empirical observations, but the actual empirical realization of that tendency may depend upon a variety of other contingencies. See Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1975), and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979) for an elaboration of this conception of mechanisms.

While it is a commonplace in the Marxist tradition to say that class structures are defined by the "social relations of production," and specific classes within that structure are defined by their location within those social relations, there is much less agreement on which of the various effects generated by the relations of production are the most central to the concept of class. If the social relations of production constituted a simple mechanism which generated a single kind of effect, then this problem would not arise. But the concept "social relations of production" encompasses a complex set of interconnected mechanisms which generate a variety of effects, and there is no general agreement about how these are linked to the concept of class structure. One of our first tasks, therefore, is to try to sort out the kinds of effects that are generally seen as giving theoretical content to the concept of class structure.

Clarifying this issue is important both for understanding how the concept of class structure figures in class analysis in general and for our specific task of producing a more concrete, micro-level concept of class structure. The broader explanatory objectives of class theory hinge on an adequate understanding of the effect-producing mechanisms constituted by class relations. The concept of class figures in the explanations of many sorts of phenomena: state policies, social conflict, wars, ideologies, illness, voting behavior, etc. In each case, the explanatory power of class depends upon the immediate effects class mechanisms are thought to produce. For example, when we say that class structures figure in the explanations of state policies there is always, at least implicitly, a claim that class structures directly generate effects—perhaps material interests of key actors, perhaps consciousness, perhaps resource constraints on alternative strategies—which in turn explain (in conjunction with other mechanisms) state policies. Even if the actual explanation of policies involves many other factors and many contingencies, so that policies cannot be *reduced* to class, there must still be some rudimentary claim about the necessary effect-producing mechanisms of class in order for class to figure systematically in the explanation.

Clarifying the nature of the effect-producing mechanisms implicated in the concept class structure is also important for the project of elaborating a more differentiated repertoire of class structure concepts. If we want to construct a class structural concept at a lower level of abstraction than the perfectly polarized structure of class relations within pure "modes of production," it is necessary to have an explicit account of these effect-producing mechanisms, since it is only in terms of such mechanisms that we can evaluate the consistency of the new concrete concepts with respect to the more abstract ones. Without an explicit account of these mechanisms, we would be unable to know whether our

more concrete concepts were indeed concrete *class* structure concepts or, perhaps, concrete concepts of some other more abstract theoretical object (such as stratification categories or occupational groups). In order for the attempt at building the more concrete class structure concept to be coherent with the more abstract concept, an explicit understanding of the mechanisms identified with class structure is essential.

In these terms, Marxist treatments of class structure can be seen as emphasizing one or more of three types of effects: material interests, lived experience, and capacities for collective action. While theorists generally do not use precisely this language, implicit in most elaborations of the concept of class structure is one or more of these kinds of class-generated effects. In each case, these effects are seen as directly generated by class structural mechanisms as such and, therefore, as providing the basis for the theoretical relevance of the concept of class. This does not mean, it must be stressed, that class by itself is thought to explain subjective understandings of material interests, or the forms of consciousness rooted in lived experience or the actual struggles of collectively organized actors. These empirical phenomena, like all empirical phenomena in a complex "open system," to use Roy Bhaskar's formulation, will be shaped by the joint operation of many distinct mechanisms, not simply class structural mechanisms.¹³ What is being claimed, however, is that to the extent that class is explanatory of empirical phenomena, it is explanatory by virtue of the way class mechanisms generate material interests, or lived experiences, or collective capacities.

I will argue that of these three possible bases for the specification of class mechanisms, material interests provides the most coherent basis for the elaboration of concrete, micro-level concepts of class structure. Before explaining why I feel this is the case, it will be useful to briefly examine the logic of each of these positions.

2.1 *Material Interests*

Class is sometimes viewed as an answer to the question "Who gets what and how do they get it?" The social relations of production determine a set of mechanisms through which people obtain access to material resources and the social product which is produced using those resources. Two critical kinds of material interests are bound up with these mechanisms: first, interests with respect to *economic welfare*, and second, interests with respect to *economic power*. Before discussing each

13. See Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*.

of these, a brief comment on how I will use the term "interests" is needed.

Intrinsic and Instrumental Interests In the analysis of interests it is important to make the distinction between what can be called *intrinsic* and *instrumental* interests. Intrinsic interests refer to the ends of actions, the goals that one is trying to accomplish through particular strategies. Instrumental interests, on the other hand, refer to interests organized around the necessary means for accomplishing those ends. Thus, for example, a particular level of consumption can be thought of as an intrinsic interest—it is a goal sought for its own sake; whereas improving one's market position for the acquisition of income is an instrumental interest.

In discussions of class interests the primary concern is instrumental interests. Take the question of economic welfare which we will discuss below. In terms of the *ends* specified by economic welfare—high standards of living, lower toil (unpleasant work), more leisure, etc.—there is no basic difference in the interests of individuals within different classes. Everyone, regardless of class, has an intrinsic interest in improving economic welfare. When we look at instrumental interests, on the other hand, there are big and systematic differences across classes. To improve their economic welfare, workers have to engage in quite different strategies, both as individuals and as members of a collectivity, from capitalists. The claim, for example, that workers have an interest in socialism whereas capitalists have interests opposed to socialism, means (among other things) that socialism constitutes a reorganization of society within which the welfare of workers would be improved while the welfare of capitalists would decline. Individuals in both classes have the same interest with respect to welfare as such, but they differ in their instrumental interests with respect to the means of realizing this interest. The interests which are most relevant for understanding the differences among classes, therefore, are these kinds of instrumental interests.

Economic Welfare Economic welfare, in this context, is not equivalent to income or consumption. Rather, it refers to the total package of toil–leisure–income available to a person. Thus, to say that people have an "objective interest" in enhanced economic welfare, does not mean that they have an objective interest in more consumption as such, but simply that, all other things being equal, they have an objective interest in having superior trade-offs between toil–leisure–consumption. If given the choice between a package of 8 hours of toil plus 8 hours of leisure plus \$40 of income and 6 hours of toil plus 10 hours of leisure plus \$50

of income, then the latter package is an objective improvement in economic welfare.

To say that people within a given class share common interests with respect to economic welfare does not mean that they all, necessarily, have the *same* level of actual economic welfare. Some workers may be relatively affluent, others may be poor. Indeed, it is quite possible for people with the same level of income to have quite distinct and even opposed class interests, if the income is generated through different mechanisms. Workers and petty bourgeois farmers may have very similar levels of income, but quite different class interests. Class interests with respect to economic welfare are determined by what a person must do to achieve a given economic welfare, that is, by the welfare-generating mechanisms, not by the outcome itself. To talk about common class interests, then, means that people in a given class, by virtue of their relationship to the underlying mechanisms embedded in the social relations of production, objectively face the same broad structure of choices and strategic tasks when attempting to improve their economic welfare—that is, the package of toil–leisure–income available to them.

Economic Power The social relations of production do not simply distribute, through a set of mechanisms, economic welfare to individuals; they also distribute a crucial form of power: control over the surplus product.¹⁴ While there are many difficulties in a precise definition of the surplus product since much of it may take the form of earned incomes, loosely we can define the surplus product as that part of the total social product that is left over after all of the inputs into production (both labor power and physical capital) have been reproduced.¹⁵ The control of the surplus product fundamentally determines

14. In an earlier draft of this paper I had restricted the discussion of material interests entirely to the problem of interests in economic welfare. This was in keeping with the thrust of my argument in *Classes* in which exploitation was defined, following Roemer, in terms of the causal interdependencies of the welfare of exploiters with the deprivations of the exploited. Joel Rogers (personal communication) pointed out that this preoccupation with individual material welfare missed one of the central aspects of class structures, namely the way they shape what he would call *political* interests, namely interests over the control of economic power resources. While in other contexts (such as the analysis of state policies in capitalist societies) I have emphasized this issue, it was largely absent from my specific discussion of class structure.

15. The difficulty in the specification of the “surplus” arises because of problems in defining the “costs of reproduction” of labor power. These costs certainly cannot be equated with actual employee incomes, since for reasons we will discuss in section 3.1 below, the wages and salaries of certain categories of employees embody appropriations of parts of the surplus product.

the nature of economic investments and consequently the form and character of economic development. Because of the centrality of investments to a broad range of social goals, the control over the surplus can also be considered a central mechanism constraining social and political alternatives in general.¹⁶ As many commentators have stressed, the private, capitalist control over the surplus imposes a pervasive limit on the potential exercise of democratic political power in a capitalist society.¹⁷

As in the case of the argument about interests with respect to economic welfare, class interests with respect to economic power are based on the underlying mechanisms which determine access to the surplus, not simply on the outcomes themselves. In early capitalism, for example, a feudal lord and a capitalist could control the allocation of the same amount of surplus, but since their ability to appropriate this surplus is rooted in different mechanisms of appropriation (feudal rents and capitalist profits) they would have different class interests. In a complementary manner, the class interests with respect to economic power of serfs and workers would be different. More controversially, a similar argument can perhaps be made about the mechanisms underlying the appropriation of surplus by credentialed professionals, corporate managers, and state officials in contemporary capitalism. In any case, the central point here is that material interests are bound up with basic questions of social power and not merely individual economic welfare.

This dimension of the commonality of class interests is particularly salient for the problem of linking macro and micro levels of class structure analysis. The kind of economic power generated by the control over the surplus affects the overall, macro-structural development of a society, not simple the fate of the individual who exercises that power. Since the core of the explanatory project of macro-level class analysis centers on large-scale processes of institutional change, understanding

16. In neoclassical economics it is argued that capitalists do not actually have any meaningful *power* with respect to the allocation of investments, since they are driven by competition to invest in the most profitable way. That is, their apparent control of the surplus is really illusory. If any actor has real power in this system, it is consumers, who by their market choices dictate where investments will move. Two things are worth noting in this approach: first, since consumers vote with dollars—one dollar, one vote—it would still be the case that exploitation would enhance the economic power of exploiters by virtue of their purchasing power. Exploiters would have many more votes in the market than would workers. Second, since exploiters have control over the decision of whether to consume or invest the surplus they appropriate, this too represents an exercise of power. Workers do not have that choice. Thus *even if* we adopt the highly questionable view that the decisions about *where* and *how* to invest are totally determined by “the market,” nevertheless the appropriation of the surplus by capitalists constitutes an appropriation of power as well.

17. See, in particular, the elegant statement of this argument in Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

the problem of economic power derived from class structures at the micro level of analysis is potentially of considerable importance.

Material Interests and Exploitation In Marxist theory, these two kinds of material interest—interests in securing the conditions for material welfare and interests in enhancing economic power—are linked through the concept of *exploitation*: exploitation defines a set of mechanisms which help to explain both the distribution of economic welfare and the distribution of economic power. That is, by virtue of appropriating the surplus, exploiters are able both to obtain much higher levels of economic welfare (by consuming part of the surplus) and to have much higher levels of economic power (by retaining control over the social allocation of the surplus through investments). For the exploited, economic welfare is depressed by virtue of having surplus appropriated from them, and economic power drastically curtailed by being excluded from control over the allocation of the surplus.¹⁸ Exploitation generates both deprivations and powerlessness, and material interests are structured around both of these. Within Marxism, therefore, to say that what members of a class hold in common is a common set of material interests is to argue that they have common interests with respect to the process of exploitation.¹⁹

Marxism is not the only theoretical tradition which sees the essential commonality of classes as rooted in common material interests. The Weberian concept of members of a class sharing common “life chances” based on their common market capacities, for example, is a specific way of grounding classes in common material interests. As in the Marxist

18. It should be noted that the arguments here do not depend upon the labor theory of value for its theoretical power. The value of the surplus product may or may not be determined by the amount of socially necessary abstract labor time embodied in it, and yet the control over that surplus can give people enhanced material welfare and social power.

19. It is worth noting that John Roemer's analysis of exploitation, which as many of the essays in this book have stressed has played an important role in my analyses of class structure in *Classes*, focuses exclusively on the first of these interests—interests in material welfare. He is not concerned with the way systems of exploitation constitute the basis for economic power, but simply for distributional outcomes. It is for this reason that, in the end, Roemer is able to argue that perhaps we should forget about exploitation as such and simply focus on the issue of the relationship between unjust distributions of resources and unjust distributions of welfare outcomes. (For this argument, see John Roemer, “Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 14, pp. 30–65 (1985)). In his view nothing is really added to the analysis by identifying the causal mechanisms involved in this relationship as “exploitation,” since the *moral* indictment revolves entirely around the issue of the unjustness of the initial distribution of assets. If, however, we see the problem of interests in economic power as central to class analysis, then it is hard to see how the concept of exploitation can be so marginalized since this economic power is based on the appropriation and control of the social surplus.

concept, it is not the common “life chances” (economic welfare) as such which defines common class membership, but a common relationship to the market capacities which generate such life chances. In the Weberian approach, there are as many classes in a society as there are types of market capacities that generate common life chances.

Where the Marxist and Weberian concepts of class sharply diverge is that Marxists, but generally not Weberians, analyze the linkage between class and material interests through the concept of *exploitation*.²⁰ Within the Marxist tradition, members of a class do not simply share a common attribute—common material interests—but those interests are relationally linked in a specific way to the interests of other classes through exploitation. Relationally defined classes, in these terms, do not simply have *different* material interests, as in the Weberian tradition: they have *opposed* material interests. While Weberians would certainly acknowledge that there are many circumstances in which class actors subjectively *perceive* their interests to be opposed to those of other actors, this perception cannot be traced back to any inherent antagonism of interests, but must be explained in terms of the particular construction of cultural meanings in the society.²¹

The objectively antagonistic character of the material interests of classes helps to explain, Marxists generally argue, why class structure should be associated with class conflict: if the material interests bound up with classes are inherently opposed to each other, then it would be expected that the divisions between structurally defined classes would have a tendency to be the basis for cleavages between conflicting groups. To be sure, this need not imply the inevitability and universality of class conflicts—a variety of social processes can block the translation of exploitation into collectively organized conflict. And it does not preclude the possibility of class *compromises*—stable institutional

20. Of course, there are theorists identified with the Weberian tradition who do talk about exploitation. Anthony Giddens and Michael Mann are notable examples. When they do so, I would argue, they are talking in a Marxian voice. This is particularly true for Giddens who has argued (personal communication) that in spite of the fact that everyone considers him a prime example of a neo-Weberian sociologist, he sees his work as at least as indebted to the Marxist tradition as to the Weberian. Giddens's views on exploitation and class are much more clearly laid out in his recent work, especially *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) than in his earlier work directly on class theory, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). See also Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

21. The absence of a concept of exploitation and control over the surplus from the Weberian concept of class has also meant that most Weberians have treated the material interests linked to class structures exclusively in terms of the problem of the market-based acquisition of individual incomes. Characteristically, the problem of the linkage between class structures and social power has not been a systematic concern.

arrangements in which mutual concessions are made.²² But it does provide a nonarbitrary theoretical grounding for the expectation that class structures shape class conflicts.²³

Interests, Trade-offs, Strategies The concept of interests, even when circumscribed as "material interests," is by no means unproblematic or uncontested. In recent years Marxists and others have become increasingly suspicious of claims concerning the "objective" interests of actors, interests which supposedly exist independently of the subjective understandings of those interests held by the actors themselves. To say that members of a class share common material interests, therefore, seems to imply that theorists know what is good for the people in a class—what is in their "true" interests—better than they do themselves.

This kind of criticism, however, really misses the theoretical point of the claim that common material interests constitute the critical commonality of class. To say that a group of actors share common material interests shaped by the social relations of production is to say that *they objectively face similar dilemmas and trade-offs in the pursuit of economic welfare and economic power*. Once again: it is not the distributional outcomes of welfare or power as such which define the critical commonality of class interests, but the common material conditions which shape the available choices and strategies with respect to those outcomes.

The expression "available choices and strategies" in this formulation can refer to choices faced by individuals in a class *as individuals* or to choices they face as potential members of organized collectivities. Thus, as an individual, to be a capitalist means that economic welfare depends upon extraction of surplus labor from workers, technical innovation, successful investment strategies, market competition with rival capi-

22. The view that the material interests of workers and capitalists are inherently antagonistic, however, does imply that a class compromise is a compromise; it does not obliterate the conflicts of interests, but contains those conflicts within bounds due to reciprocal (if asymmetrical) concessions.

23. Because Marxists regard the interests of classes as inherently antagonistic, they are committed to a much stronger set of predictions than are Weberians. For Marxists it is clear that if a society is characterized by class exploitation, then it would be surprising if no regular conflicts were observed between the allegedly antagonistic classes. The absence of systematic conflict, therefore, would imply the presence of some powerful mechanism which prevents the interest mechanisms from generating empirical conflicts. For a Weberian, on the other hand, since the interests specified by classes are merely different, not inherently conflictual, there are no particular general expectations one way or the other about the patterns of conflicts that will be associated with class divisions. In principle Weberians would be no more surprised by the presence of class conflict than by its absence in capitalism. As I will argue in section 4 below, the capacity to be surprised by one's observations is one of the strengths of Marxist class theory relative to its Weberian rivals.

talists; as an individual, to be a worker means that economic welfare depends upon successfully selling one's labor power to a capitalist and competing with other workers for better jobs. But both workers and capitalists also face distinctive structures of choices with respect to the collective pursuits of economic welfare. Workers, for example, face choices between various individualist market strategies (via training, promotions, geographical mobility, etc.) and various kinds of collective strategies (unionization, revolutionary politics, etc.). And, of course, they face the choice of participating in various kinds of ongoing collective strategies from which they might benefit or being a free-rider on the actions of others. To describe members of a class as sharing common material interests, therefore, suggests that they share common dilemmas with respect to collective action as well as individual pursuit of economic welfare and power.²⁴

Now, in these terms to talk about the common material interests of workers is not to make a claim about which of the actual potential choices listed above are "best" for workers as individuals. No claim is being made, for example, that for any given worker it is objectively in their interests to pursue unionization strategies rather than geographical mobility strategies to advance their economic welfare. Rather, what is being claimed is that by virtue of being workers (that is, by occupying similar locations with respect to the relations of exploitation) they face broadly similar structures of trade-offs with respect to these kinds of choices.²⁵

These kinds of choices and trade-offs rooted in the conditions for the pursuit of economic welfare can be defined both within the "game" of

24. To use the language of rational actor models, members of a class share common free-rider problems with respect to the collective pursuit of material interests. Thus, part of what capitalists have in common by virtue of being capitalists is an interest in increasing the free-rider problems for workers while decreasing them for capitalists, whereas part of what workers have in common by virtue of being workers is an interest in decreasing free rider problems for workers while increasing them for capitalists. It might be noted that this is essentially equivalent to what Nicos Poulantzas means when he says that the essential capitalist character of the capitalist state is constituted by the state's effects on organizing capitalists (overcoming their free-rider problems) and disorganizing workers (increasing their free-rider problems). See Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1973).

25. The qualifying expression "broadly similar" obviously begs a number of difficult questions. How similar do the structure of choices have to be to be counted as "similar"? Workers in secondary labor markets or workers who are oppressed minorities may, for example, face different trade-offs and dilemmas (different structures of choices) from various other categories of workers. Does this mean that they are in a different class? It is essentially on the basis of such differences in material interests, for example, that some feminists have argued that female workers are in a different class from male workers. While such arguments are important and deserve serious consideration, I will not address them here.

capitalism and with respect to the choice between the game of capitalism and socialism. That is, to occupy a class location within capitalism is to face specific strategic alternatives within the capitalist game as well as to face strategic trade-offs with respect to struggles over the basic property relations of capitalism. In classical Marxism, where the class structure was conceptualized primarily at the abstract level of the mode of production as a game involving only two actors—workers and capitalists—there was a high level of congruence between the analysis of interests within the game of capitalism and the analysis of interests over which game was being played. The class forces lined up in the same way in both analyses. This was one of the central reasons why Marx and other classical Marxists felt that the intensification of class polarization and struggles within capitalism tended to enhance the possibility of class struggle over capitalism itself.

Once we move to more concrete and micro levels of analysis, however, and give specificity to the variations in class locations within capitalist class structures, the picture is no longer so simple. As we shall see, the terrain of material interests constituted by the class structures of concrete capitalist societies is not perfectly polarized, and there is not a simple relationship between the concrete matrix of material interests of actors constituted within the game of capitalism and the interests over what kind of game should be played.

2.2 Lived Experience

Some Marxists have questioned the adequacy of grounding the concept of class in material interests. Interests, it is argued, are causally efficacious only when they are embodied in the subjective understanding of actors. Theorists can define whatever they like to be the “material interests” of a class, but the people in a class will act on those interests only to the extent that they become actual, subjective preferences. Common material interests, therefore, only become part of the commonality of class membership if they generate a set of systematic experiences that actively shape subjective understanding.²⁶

In these terms, common lived experience becomes the central, abstract content of the commonality of class membership. Instead of seeing class as an answer to the question “Who gets what and how?” it is seen as an answer to the question “Who does what and why?” The social

26. To use the idiom of rational actor models, the analysis of material interests focuses on the *feasible set* of alternatives facing actors (that is, the mechanisms which determine the trade-offs they face in pursuing material welfare and power), whereas the analysis of lived experiences focuses on the *preference ordering* of actors over this feasible set.

relations of production, in these terms, impose a set of practices on people within those relations. Those common practices systematically generate common experiences, which in turn are the basis for a common set of understandings about the world.

In the abstract model of the pure capitalist mode of production with a polarized relation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, there are three critical lived experiences which it can be argued constitute the commonality of the working class. First, and most obviously, there are experiences of being forced to sell one's labor power in order to survive. Showing up at the factory gate, being unable to reproduce oneself without entering the labor market, does not simply define a set of material interests of actors, but a set of experiences as well. Second, and perhaps more controversially, within production itself there is the experience of being dominated, bossed around, within work. Under a set of production conditions in which the critical task for employers is to extract surplus labor from their employees—to turn labor power into effective labor—experiences of domination will be an inherent aspect of the class relation itself.²⁷ Third, the inability of workers to control the allocation of the social surplus also generates a certain kind of lived experience—the experience of powerlessness in the face of social forces that shape one's destiny. In all of these cases, the critical issue is not the material interests as such which result from these practices, but the experiences, and associated subjectivities, which they generate.

In a way quite parallel to the linkage between material interests and exploitation, these aspects of lived experience are closely tied to the concept of *alienation* in the Marxist tradition. When Marx discusses

27. John Roemer has argued forcefully in several places that it is possible to construct a model of something like capitalism in which there is no coercion at the point of production, and thus, he argues, domination within production should not be seen as an inherent aspect of capitalist class relations. To make this argument, however, he has to assume that workers agree to perform a given amount of actual labor (effort) within work and that they do not “cheat” on this contract. Under this assumption, cheating is a deviation from the model that occurs at a lower level of abstraction (as is the case, for example, in cheating within exchange relations among capitalists). The counter-argument to Roemer's position, with which I agree, is that what Roemer is calling “cheating” by workers is inherent in the capital-labor relation by virtue of the antagonistic interests and asymmetries of that relation and is therefore not a problem that only enters at a lower level of abstraction. In the case of cheating among capitalists, because of the essential symmetries in the exchange relation, there is no reason to believe that the cheating is not also symmetrical (that is, each capitalist cheats from the other), and thus cheating need not enter the specification of the exchange relation itself. This is not the case for the performance of labor effort within the labor process. Being told what to do within the labor process and then being monitored sufficiently to see that you do it is therefore built into the capital-labor relation itself. For Roemer's views on these issues, see John Roemer, “New Directions in the Marxian Theory of Class and Exploitation,” *Politics and Society*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1982).

alienation in the context of an analysis of what he calls human "species being," he argues how the loss of control over one's labor and over the product of one's labor generates a set of experiences that pervasively dominate one's life. Both exploitation and alienation are rooted in the same relational properties of production, but one is centered primarily around the material interests and the other the life experiences generated out of those practices.

An objection might be raised against this characterization of working-class lived experiences on the grounds that this is a largely *male* characterization. Feminists have correctly pointed out that the lived experience of women in the working class is in many respects distinctively different from that of men. In the present context, this issue is particularly striking for full-time working-class *housewives*, whose lived experience of class is clearly not adequately characterized by saying that they are "forced to sell their labor power in order to survive" or that they are "bossed around within production."²⁸ Only with respect to the broader experience of powerlessness with respect to the control of the surplus can men and women in the working class be said to share essentially the same "lived experiences," and even here there are probably significant gendered aspects to the experiences in question.²⁹ Because the lived experiences of women and men are so systematically different within the working class, it is not possible—the argument goes—to construct a meaningful "gender-blind" concept of class experiences.

This objection, I think, is not really to the characterization of the lived experiences linked to classes within the abstract capitalist mode of production as such, but rather to the theoretical legitimacy of that abstract concept itself. What is being questioned is the possibility of formulating an adequate abstract concept of class structure that identifies class mechanisms as such without simultaneously incorporating a gendered dimension in the conceptualization. The objection is thus to the very attempt at producing a gender-blind concept of class—that is, a concept that can be specified independently of any specification of gender mechanisms.

This set of claims, I believe, collapses the different levels of abstraction at which the problem of class structure and its effects can be analyzed: while it is legitimate to insist on the importance of gender for understanding and explaining the *concrete* lived experiences of people, it

28. This objection was raised by Barbara Laslett (personal communication).

29. A similar kind of argument could be constructed around the racial or ethnic dimensions of lived experience, or, for that matter, any dimension of lived experience that is linked in one way or another to class (for instance, age).

does not follow from this that gender must be incorporated in the *abstract concept* of class itself. To insist on this incorporation amounts to a denial of the very existence of distinct class and gender mechanisms. The implication is that we should abolish *both* of these concepts altogether and replace them with a single, fused concept, which perhaps could be called "clender" (class-gender). In such an approach people within clender categories may share common lived experiences, but these experiences cannot in any analytically coherent way be disaggregated into the effects of class mechanisms and gender mechanisms; they are the effects of clender mechanisms as such. *If* one believes that this is unlikely to be a useful way of conceptualizing the complex relationship between class and gender, then at this level of abstraction it becomes necessary to define class independently of gender and seek to understand their interactions rather than to merge them into a single, unitary concept.

Within a Marxist class structure concept, at the level of abstraction of the pure capitalist mode of production, there are no "housewives" of "male breadwinners" (but, equally, there are no *male* breadwinners as such). At this level of abstraction, therefore, it is impossible to specify the crucial differences in lived experiences of men and women in the working class that is generated by the concrete *intersection* of class relations and gender relations. In this specific sense, the concept of class is "gender blind" at the level of abstraction of modes of production. This does not mean, it must be stressed, that the concrete analysis of classes that deploys this concept need be gender blind. One can certainly study the ways in which concrete class structures are shaped by the forms of gender relations in the society, for example, or the ways that class and gender jointly shape forms of consciousness and collective action. But within this conceptual framework, gender relations, in general, should not be packed into the abstract concept of class itself.³⁰ I will thus, throughout this discussion, continue to assume that one can legitimately identify a set of lived experiences associated within abstractly defined common locations within class structures.

As in the case of interest-based concepts of the commonality of class, experience-based concepts are found in a variety of theoretical traditions besides Marxism. Most notably in contemporary social theory,

30. There could be special cases in which at the level of abstraction of mode of production gender relations might appropriately be considered a dimension of class structure. This could be the case, for example, in what is sometimes described as a "kinship mode of production" in which the essential social relations of production are constituted in part by gender. In such a situation it might not be possible to even describe the relations of production independently of the gender relations themselves.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of class relies heavily on such an approach.³¹ Bourdieu attempts to elaborate a view of class around the dual concepts of class *habitus* and *capital*. A class habitus is defined by a set of common *conditions* in everyday life which produce common *conditions* experienced by people and which, in turn, generate a common set of internalized *dispositions* to act in particular ways. These dispositions range from *tastes* (the central preoccupation of Bourdieu's book, *Distinction*) to receptivities to particular ideological appeals and calls to action. In Bourdieu's analysis, a class habitus is not simply constituted within the workplace, but in community, schools, families and other institutions as well. These institutional settings generate lived experiences (conditionings) over the life cycle which reinforce certain modes of thought and action and undermine others. The decisive criteria which distinguish classes are thus not reducible to differences in their material interests (based on their control over different kinds of capital in Bourdieu's analysis), but must include differences in their habituses as well.

Anthony Giddens's analysis of class structure also puts considerable emphasis on the role of lived experience in the constitution of classes. For Giddens, classes are the outcome of a process through which economic *categories* (which he does not want to consider proper classes) defined by market capacities are transformed into collectivities sharing common lived experiences. He refers to this process as "class structuration." As in Weber's analysis, the location of people in the market—whether they own property, skills, or mere labor power—determines a set of material interests. These material interests, however, are insufficient to constitute "classes." In order for these economically determined categories to become classes, there must be some process by which the lives of people with those interests become structured around those interests. This can occur through a variety of mechanisms: restrictions on inter- and intragenerational mobility across economic categories provide a basis for the transmission and "reproduction of common life experiences;"³² the technical division of labor, especially between manual and nonmanual labor, generates a set of distinctive working conditions which define a common set of work experiences; authority relations generate experiences of command and obedience;

31. See especially, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, no. 6 (1985), pp. 723-44; and "What Makes a Social Class?," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol. 22 (1987), pp. 1-18.

32. Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 108.

and distributive outcomes create common experiences of community and living conditions. To the extent that these various processes of structuration overlap and correspond to the "objective" divisions of market capacities, then distinctive classes will be constituted in a class structure.³³

One of the most explicit statements of this general approach in the Marxist tradition is found in E.P. Thompson's well-known discussion of class in *The Making of the English Working Class*:

I do not see class as a "structure," nor even as a "category," but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships. . . . And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different (and usually opposed) to theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter voluntarily.³⁴

While the category "interests" does enter into Thompson's statement, it is treated as a subjective category conceptually subordinated to the commonality of experiences rooted in common conditions of work and life. It is around these common experiences that the concept of class revolves.

2.3 Collective Capacity

Commonalities of interests and experiences are certainly the principal ways that Marxists ground the concept of class. But there is a third way

33. Similar kinds of arguments are made by other theorists commonly regarded as working in the Weberian tradition. David Lockwood, in *The Blackcoated Worker* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), builds a class structure concept around the dual dimensions of "market situation" and "work situation." The market situation dimension follows fairly closely the traditional Weberian account of market capacities based on different kinds of property (capital, skills, labor power). The theoretical status of the "work situation" dimension is somewhat less clear, but it seems that it is meant to tap the ways in which common working conditions are linked to common identities, presumably via the kinds of workplace experiences such conditions generate. It is at least partially on this basis that Lockwood argues that routinized white collar jobs are in a separate class from manual workers, even if under certain circumstances their material interests are essentially the same. Similar kinds of arguments are made by John Goldthorpe in his various analyses of the service class. See especially his essay, "On the Service Class: Its Formation and Future," in Anthony Giddens and Gavin McKenzie (eds), *Social Class and the Division of Labour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 162-85.

34. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 9-10.

which, while usually deployed in combination with one of the first two, is also important. The essential commonality of a class is sometimes seen as derived from its potential capacity for collective action. In particular, one of the central properties of the working class, it is often claimed, is that it has the potential capacity to organize collectively to overthrow capitalism and transform the social relations of production into socialism. In this view, the social relations of production do not merely distribute material interests or the pattern of lived experiences across classes; they also distribute a range of resources which underlie the potentials for collective action. For a category of agents to truly constitute a class they would have to at least have the potential capacity to organize society in their interests.

For Marx, the peasantry in mid-nineteenth-century France was not really a class precisely because it lacked any capacity for this kind of systemic collective action. In his view, while peasants may have shared common material interests and conditions of life (and thus, by implication, common experiences), they were so atomized and fragmented that they could not constitute a collectivity capable of transformative struggle. They were, in his words, like a sack of potatoes, remaining discrete individuals even when grouped together.³⁵ The working class, on the other hand, was seen by Marx to have this capacity for collective transformative struggle for two main reasons: first, workers were the direct producers of society's wealth and thus they collectively possessed the necessary knowledge to organize social production; and second, the concentration and centralization of capital generated by capitalism brought masses of workers into contact and interdependency with one another which generated the kind of solidarity and organizational capacity needed to challenge capitalist power.

Occasionally one does find this kind of argument outside of strictly Marxist approaches to class. Alvin Gouldner's analysis of the "New Class" in capitalist societies, and Ivan Szelenyi's and George Konrad's analysis of Eastern Europe intellectuals, both treat the *potential* for becoming a ruling class as an essential element in the claim that intel-

35. Marx, of course, may have been wrong in this judgment about the collective capacity of peasants. The point here is that he used the criterion of collective capacity as a way of distinguishing a full-fledged class from what might be called a proto-class. If we use the classical Marxist distinction between a class-in-itself (a class structurally defined) and a class-for-itself (a class collectively organized for struggle), then Marx is saying that a class-in-itself only exists even as a class-in-itself if it has the potential of becoming a class-for-itself.

lectuals should be treated as a class in the first place.³⁶ In more Marxist analyses, this same kind of argument is sometimes used to justify the claim that routinized office workers and unproductive laborers should not be considered to be working class: while they may share certain basic interests with workers, some theorists claim that they are not part of the collective capacity to transform and organize society, and thus they are not properly part of the working class as such.

2.4 Levels of Abstraction and the Commonality of Class Locations

At the highest level of abstraction of class analysis, all three of these effects of class relations are credible candidates for the essential criteria defining the commonality of class locations. At the level of abstraction of the capitalist mode of production, one can make plausible arguments that there is a certain kind of commonality of material interests, lived experiences, and capacities for collective action that are generated directly by the social relations of production as such. That is, the social relations of production in the capitalist mode of production directly determine certain critical aspects of interests, experiences, and capacities of actors defined by those relations. For the working class, for example, we can say that their location within capitalist social relations of production analyzed at the most abstract level directly determines:

1. a set of material interests opposed to those of capitalists by virtue of the relation of exploitation between them;
2. a set of common lived experiences bound up with selling labor power, being dominated within the labor process and being excluded from control over the social surplus;
3. a set of collective capacities for struggle rooted in the interdependencies among workers within the labor process and the centrality of workers to the overall process of social production.

If we were exclusively interested in analyzing capitalism abstractly as a mode of production, then we could probably treat the concept of class structure as built simultaneously around all three of these commonalities (although we might still want to give interests and experiences a logical

36. See George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1978), and Alvin Gouldner, *Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

priority over capacities within the concept of class structure).³⁷ The problem occurs when we try to move to lower levels of abstraction, particularly when we want to do so in a way that is analytically powerful at the micro level of analysis.

When class is analyzed at a relatively concrete, micro level of analysis there is no longer necessarily a simple coincidence of material interests, lived experience and collective capacity. As theorists who see lived experience as the pivotal issue in class analysis stress, the lived experiences of workers within the production process (let alone within the society at large) cannot be derived even in a complex way simply from their location within the abstractly defined relations of production as such. The same can be said for collective capacities. This means that when we specify the social relations of production at a relatively concrete, micro level of analysis, people occupying a common location within those relations will nevertheless have different lived experiences and collective capacities.³⁸

37. Even at this abstract level of analysis, the capacity dimension of class analysis should be conceptually subordinated to the interests and experiences dimensions. Unless we have specified the interests of actors and their subjective understandings of the world, it makes little sense to describe their capacities to act as *class* capacities. Capacities to act are always relative to a set of interests and motivations, and these are derived from the first two dimensions. In order to even describe a class capacity as an instance of *working-class* capacity one must have a logically prior specification of the interests and/or experiences which define workers as workers. Interests and experiences thus have a logical priority over capacities.

38. In classical Marxism there was a general belief that at the concrete level of analysis these three conceptual foundations for class structure analysis had an historical tendency towards convergence for the working class in capitalist society: the category of agents sharing common material interests by virtue of capitalist exploitation progressively came to share increasingly profound common lived experiences by virtue of the progressive homogenization and proletarianization of working conditions, while at the same time their capacity for collective action was enhanced by the increasing concentration and centralization of capital. The structural boundaries of material interests, lived experience and collective capacity at the concrete and abstract levels of analysis thus had a tendency to increasingly coincide in the course of capitalist development.

Relatively few Marxists today accept this vision of the trajectory of capitalism and its implications for the analysis of class structure. Instead of becoming ever more polarized, the class structure appears to be becoming increasingly complex and differentiated, with an accompanying differentiation of material interests among employees. The lived experiences of employees both within production and outside of production have if anything become increasingly heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous. And the capacity for revolutionary transformation has become sufficiently problematic, at least in developed capitalist societies, that it seems hard to treat it as a decisive criterion of class structure analysis, even aside from the problem of the disjunction between interests and experience. Whatever else one might want to say about the class structures of advanced capitalism, there does not seem to be a powerful tendency for simultaneous, overlapping polarization in terms of material interests, lived experiences and capacity for transformative struggle.

In light of this failure for interests, experiences and capacities to coincide at the concrete level of analysis, class theorists face several choices. One possibility is to simply abandon the concept of an objectively given class structure altogether. This is essentially the position of Adam Przeworski, particularly in some of his more recent writings.³⁹ Classes are not structured prior to struggle; they are strictly the effects of the strategies of collectively organized actors, especially political parties. While those strategies may themselves be conditioned by the legacies of past struggles and by a host of structural properties of the society—political institutions, legal institutions, property relations—they are not conditioned by the distribution of people into an objectively given class structure as such. The “objectively” defined working class—whatever be the specific definition of that class—has no more “natural affinity” to support the socialist party than any other category of agents.⁴⁰

Few class analysts have followed Przeworski's lead in categorically rejecting the concept of class structure. Most class theorists continue to believe that objectively constituted class relations are important for understanding material interests and/or lived experiences and/or collective capacities, and our theoretical task is to figure out appropriate ways of conceptualizing these relations.

A second general strategy for contending for the concrete non-coincidence of class interests, experiences and capacities would be to escalate the complexity of the concept of class structure at the concrete level of analysis by retaining all three aspects of the commonality of class location but allowing them to vary independently of each other. We

39. In Przeworski's earlier writings on the working class, he seemed to suggest that classes had a structural foundation that existed independently of the strategies of parties and other collective actors. Thus, for example, in his initial essay on social democratic voting, he defends the adoption of a narrow definition of the working class as manual industrial wage-earners, not simply because this was the view of socialist party activists, but also because this definition reflected a line of real division in the society: “But the specific definition also involves a bet on our part: a hypothesis that the line of sharpest divisions, of interest and values, lies between narrowly defined manual workers and other wage-earners” (*Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1985), p. 105). In the final version of this argument, appearing in his coauthored book with John Sprague, *Paper Stones* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), this claim to an objective status of the manual/nonmanual divide is dropped, and class definitions are viewed strictly as the outcome of the strategic choices of collective actors.

40. If one were to follow this line of thought in a completely consistent manner, then the *empirical* affinity of the working class for socialist and other progressive political orientations would be seen simply as the cumulative effect of the historical trajectory of ideologies, programs, and strategies of party elites. Since parties from the start mobilized “workers” on the basis of a discourse of class, parties today are to a greater or lesser extent constrained by the legacies of these past ideologically driven practices of mobilization.

could then define a kind of three-dimensional class structure space consisting of: class-interest structure, class-experience structure, and class-capacity structure. At the mode of production level of abstraction these three dimensions coincide: agents defined with respect to the class interest dimension of class structure also share common class experience and class capacity. At the lower levels of abstraction, the overlap of the three dimensions declines thus allowing for a much wider array of structural "locations" defined by the disjunctures between interests, experiences, and capacities.

This solution to the problem of the concrete noncoincidence of interests, experiences, and capacities adds such complexity to the concept of class structure that it risks adding more confusion than clarification. But there is an additional reason why I do not think it is a viable general strategy for dealing with these problems, at least at the current state of our theoretical knowledge: while there are a range of strategies for deriving concrete material interests from the abstract concept of class relations, I know of no parallel way of deriving concrete lived experiences and collective capacities.

As we shall see in section 3, on the basis of material interests, there are a number of specific analytical strategies for producing class structure concepts at lower levels of abstraction from the pure mode of production. For example, concrete class structures can be treated as specific combinations of different modes of production (or, equivalently for present purposes, types of production relations or types of exploitation). Within such a concrete class structure concept, different specific class locations and the material interests associated with them, are defined by the intersection of these multiple production relations in jobs filled by individuals.

I know of no comparable analytical strategy for producing a concrete concept of class structure built around collective capacities and lived experiences. One might try to construct such a strategy in a way analogous to the strategy based on interests just described. One could argue, for example, that there are distinctive forms of collective capacity or lived experience linked to each type of production relation, and thus the commonality of the class locations formed by the intersection of production relations is defined by a collective capacity or lived experience emerging out of the separate capacities/experiences associated with each relation taken separately. Such a strategy, however, seems implausible at best, and in any event, to my knowledge no one has even attempted constructing such a derivation of concrete experiences and capacities from abstract relational categories. For the moment, therefore, the only coherent way that I know of to generate systematically concrete concepts of class structure from the abstract concept of mode

of production is via the category of material interests.⁴¹

This conclusion should not cause great dismay to theorists for whom the category of lived experience is seen as central to understanding social conflict and social change in class analysis. First of all, this conceptual strategy does not mean that lived experience has been banned from the concept of class structure altogether (let alone from class analysis in general). Lived experience is still an integral part of the *abstract* concept of class structure, and thus remains embodied in the concrete concepts as well (since they are all nested within the abstract concept). The point is that whereas the concrete, micro-level concepts of class structure attempt to embody a more complex and differentiated mapping of the material interests of actors than the abstract concept, they retain the relatively thin understanding of their lived experiences associated with the more abstract concept.⁴²

Second, to reiterate a point already made, to say that concrete concepts of class structure can most systematically be built around exploitation and material interests does not in any way prejudice the *explanatory* importance of material interests relative to lived experience

41. It should be noted that this argument in favor of deriving concrete class structure concepts on the basis of material interests is somewhat different from the one I offered earlier in reply to Johanna Brenner's criticisms (see pp. 210–11). There I argued that since the lived experiences of workers were drastically different in different times and places, it seemed implausible to build a map of class structure on a logic of commonalities of such experiences, whereas it was possible to build such a map around material interests. It now seems to me that while my conclusion may have been justified, my arguments were not entirely on the mark. In the earlier argument against a concrete lived-experience based concept of class structure I was assuming a quite rich profile of lived experiences—one that included all of the diverse experiences generated by the practices of actors within production analyzed at a relatively low level of abstraction (since it is only at a concrete level that, for example, workers in Japan, South Africa, and the United States are distinguishable). The analysis I offered of material interests, in contrast, was based on arguments about mechanisms of exploitation analyzed at the highest levels of abstraction of class structure analysis. If the material interests of workers had been analyzed at the same level of abstraction as experiences, then they would also have been characterized by considerable contingency and heterogeneity (due to the specific circumstances of jobs, geographical location, industrial sector, not to mention things like race and gender). The real issue, then, is the extent to which we can construct a concrete concept of class structure based on material interests that is systematically derived from the more abstract concept, whereas we cannot do this for lived experiences, at least at the present stage of theoretical development.

42. That is, in the concrete micro-analysis of the working class, the lived experiences that we attribute to them directly by virtue of their *class* location are based on the abstract concept of class structure. No new complexity in the analysis of experiences is systematically added by moving to the more concrete and micro-analysis of class structure as such (although, of course, a rich array of new elements can enter the concrete analysis of lived experience by virtue of other principles besides class structure). In the case of material interests, by contrast, the concrete analysis embodies a much more complex picture of the matrix of these interests than is found in the abstract analysis.

or collective capacity. It could be the case, for example, that the most important cause of variations in the degree of militancy of working classes across countries is variations in their collective capacity for struggle or variations in the lived experiences within production, not their material interests as such. If anything, the identification of class *structure* with exploitation and material interests would facilitate discovering this conclusion (assuming, of course, that it is correct) since it acknowledges the independent explanatory potential of experience and capacity.⁴³

Finally, in practice theorists who see lived experience as the pivotal category for class analysis generally do not narrowly tie lived experience to the relations of production. Thus, the kinds of lived experiences which they emphasize are not really candidates for inclusion in the concept of class structure as such anyway. For example, Michael Burawoy argues that the critical kinds of lived experiences that shape class consciousness of workers are determined by the social relations in production, rather than the social relations of production. In particular, they are generated by what he calls the political apparatuses of production which shape the forms of competition among workers and interactions with bosses on the shop floor.⁴⁴ Or, to take another example, Ira Katznelson places the ongoing lived experiences of workers at the core of his analysis of class formation. But for him the critical complex of experiences centers on the interrelationships between work and community, between the experiences workers have on and off the job. While the social life of working-class communities may be shaped in various ways by the social relations of production, they are not part of, or derivable from, those relations, and thus do not constitute part of class structure as such.⁴⁵ In terms of these kinds of analyses of lived experience, the decision to build the concrete, micro-level concepts of class structure around the problem of material interests does not in any way marginalize their central theoretical concerns.

I will therefore follow a general strategy of trying to elaborate the concept of class structure at a more micro and concrete level of analysis on the basis of the linkage between material interests and the social relations of production. I will try to do so in a way that is consistent with the more abstract concept of class structure as embodying lived experiences and collective capacities in addition to material interests, but these

43. It should be also noted that building the concrete concept of class structure around the dimension of material interests does not prejudice the relative explanatory importance of aspects of lived experience generated by mechanisms other than class (gender, race, nationality, etc.).

44. See Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*.

45. See Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

will not directly be the basis for the production of the more concrete micro concepts.

3 Attempts at Building an Adequate Map of the Class Structure

The decision to ground the production of concrete concepts of class structure in an account of relationally generated, antagonistic class interests is only a point of departure. A wide variety of specific strategies for actually elaborating the substantive content of such a class concept and developing an explicit set of criteria for class structural analysis are consistent with such a decision.

In my own work I have explored two different general approaches to this problem. These can be referred to as the *contradictory locations* approach and the *multidimensional exploitation* approach.⁴⁶ Both of these strategies are attempts at providing a positive theorization to the category "middle class" within an essentially interest-based framework. Each of these solutions, in my judgment, has attractive features to them, but—alas—each has serious problems as well. In what follows I will very briefly outline the central arguments of each approach and lay out their central weaknesses and strengths. I will then discuss the apparent attractiveness of neo-Weberian solutions and explain why I feel they do not offer a cogent alternative.

3.1 The First Solution: Contradictory Locations

Most class structure concepts are built on the unstated premiss that there is a one-to-one mapping between "locations" in a class structure (the places filled by human individuals) and "classes" themselves: every location is in one and only one class. In capitalist society this implies that everyone must be located in the working class, the capitalist class, the petty bourgeoisie or, perhaps, some entirely "new" class (appropriately called by some theorists, therefore, the "New Class"). The concept of contradictory locations within class relations was an attempt at breaking with this assumption: some locations in a class structure might be in two or more classes simultaneously. Managers, for example, could be understood as simultaneously in the working class and the capitalist class: they

46. In *Classes* I referred to both of these strategies as involving contradictory locations: "contradictory locations within class relations" for the first strategy, and "contradictory locations within exploitation relations" for the second. In the present context, the discussion will be facilitated by using the expression "multidimensional exploitation" for the second strategy.