

## **Social and economic hierarchies**

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- Inequality
  - We live in an unequal society, stratified by wealth
    - that is the point of the first part of the Robbins reading, about the Lorenz curve and the Gini coefficient (or Gini index)
    - a few people get a lot of the total income, a lot of people split up the remainder
  - compare our stratification to that of Egypt under Khufu (Cheops), the pharaoh who built the Great Pyramid at Giza
    - Khufu's Great Pyramid at Giza
      - 230 m square (756 feet)
        - if built on this campus, it would cover Stevenson, Darwin, Salazar hall, the Student Union, the Commons, and most of the main quad
      - 146 meters tall (475 feet)
      - 2.3 million cut sandstone interior blocks, 2.5 tons each
      - estimated 84,000 laborers working 80 days/year for 20 years (~ 370,000 person-years!)
      - outside cased in limestone blocks, 16 tons each
      - cost in modern terms:
        - the low-skilled labor alone at California minimum wage (\$8.00/hr since 2008) would total 8.6 billion dollars
        - enough sandstone for the interior blocks would cost almost 0.6 billion dollars (5.75 million tons at \$100/ton)
        - plus all the skilled labor, limestone, granite, etc. which today would be very expensive
        - not to mention all the gold and expensive goods placed in it
      - all told, equivalent to perhaps ten billion dollars
      - building this pyramid was possible because Khufu basically owned the entire country, population, and civilization of Egypt, the greatest on Earth at the time
    - yet there are 35 people in the world today rich enough to do that (*Forbes*, The World's Billionaires 2009)!
      - Bill Gates, worth \$53 billion as of last week (*Forbes*, March 10, 2010), could build and furnish about five great pyramids
      - Gates could buy out the greatest pharaoh of Old Kingdom Egypt and still have most of his fortune left over!
    - today's society is far *more* stratified than the extraordinarily stratified society of Pharaonic Egypt... amazing!
  - **Hierarchy**: a system of ranking
    - hierarchies may rank people (or other things) according to many different criteria
      - wealth
      - class (involves wealth, but also education, descent, etc.)
      - descent (closest to revered ancestor, as among descendents of Thomas Jefferson)
      - ethnicity/race
      - education, age, gender

- position in a hierarchical organization, like the church or a business
- hierarchies can vary in other ways
  - how many levels the hierarchy has
    - US culture acknowledges just a few levels
      - such as lower, middle, upper class
      - although all know that there really are finer divisions
    - India: **caste** system with 100s of levels, lumped into a few larger categories
      - Brahmins: priests
      - Kshattriya castes: soldiers, politicians, administrators
      - Vaisya castes: farmers and merchants
      - Sudra castes: service to other castes; include untouchables in polluting professions
      - the caste system is based on birth: you are born into a caste and stay there
      - different castes are not only ranked by prestige, but they have occupations associated with them, rules about what other castes one can marry, etc.
  - what privileges are associated with different levels
    - castes: profession, social status, who you can marry
    - other hierarchies may determine whether you can vote, hold office, own land, live in certain areas, go to certain schools, etc.
  - how hard it is to change from one level to another
    - also called **permeability** or **mobility**
    - in India, you cannot move between castes; they are fixed by birth
    - in US, we have
      - class hierarchy: one can move between income levels and classes, but most do not
        - in US, class is still strongly by birth: parents' income is the best predictor of children's eventual income
      - hierarchy of ethnicities: harder to move between ethnicities, but possible by education, "passing", marriage, etc.
      - hierarchy of races: hard to move between races, although a few manage to
- Foragers live in rough equality
  - observed both ethnographically and historically
  - foragers: reciprocity is needed to even out subsistence risk
    - chance in hunting, especially, requires sharing in a group
  - leads to an egalitarian ethic
- Most other kinds of societies do not live in equality. Why not?
- hierarchy is NOT typical for humans, who have been foragers for 98% of our existence (or more, depending on how you count)
- Analogy to this semester-long class
  - if the class covered the existence of our own species, from the first archaic *Homo sapiens* to the present, it would start at least 500,000 years ago
  - a semester-long class has 30 meetings of 75 minutes each, or 2,250 minutes; that is 222 years/minute
  - that is about one generation every 5 seconds for the whole semester...

- we would study foragers all the way into the last class meeting, totaling 36 hours, or 98% of the course
- we would not get to the first farmers (11,000 years ago), who were also the first to develop social hierarchies, until 30 minutes into the last class meeting
- we would look at hierarchical societies for only the last 45 minutes of the whole semester
- so how did this aberration of hierarchical society come to be?
  - the historical process is a question for archaeologists
  - the answer is not clear
    - but large, settled groups were apparently a necessary step
    - and with few possible exceptions, these generally appear to have been possible only with farming to support them
- how is social hierarchy constructed?
  - that is, maintained and instilled in each new member born into the society
  - **naturalizing**: making it seem natural, normal, necessary
  - this is an ongoing research interest in anthropology
  - we will look at this process more next time
- but *all* social organization is constructed... so, how is social *equality* constructed?
  - one way, in one culture: “insulting the meat”
  - Lee: *Eating Christmas in the Kalahari* (assigned reading for next time)
- Is hierarchy inevitable?
- Is it necessary?
- Constructing hierarchy
  - Constructing inequality through ideology
    - **ideology**: a set of beliefs and values
      - typically creating or explaining a worldview
      - often (not always) characteristic of a culture: cultural concepts and values
  - Some societies have ideology of equality
    - such as the Ju/'hoansi
  - other societies have ideologies of inequality
    - idea that differences in status, prestige, wealth, power, etc. are normal, right, natural
    - such as our ideology of class (Marx)
      - US ideology of class is based on the idea that there is equal opportunity and a “level playing field”
        - so any differences in success are due to people’s own effort and ability
      - in order for this ideology to be believable, there must be some ability or quality that justifies why some people are upper class
        - some are born or raised to be better equipped to succeed
        - more intelligent, harder working, more willing to take risks, etc.
        - in other societies, it could be that certain families are favored by God, even have the “divine right of Kings”
    - this ideology of class serves psychological needs
      - without it, we would have to think that poverty is unfair

- the lower class might feel wronged; the upper class might feel guilty
  - it also serves social stability
    - otherwise, the lower class might try to change something
    - at the upper class's expense
- Two broad views of hierarchy: integrative theory and exploitative theory
- **integrative** theories of hierarchy (or social stratification, or inequality)
  - hierarchy is needed to coordinate more complex activities
    - which are necessary as population grows and production is intensified
      - irrigation systems
      - storage facilities to tide over crop losses, and to compensate people for activities on behalf of the group, like construction projects
      - defensive walls
      - effective military
      - conflict resolution
      - police to enforce peace, property, civility
      - and many other new functions
  - the more complex the division of labor gets (the more different roles and specialties)...
    - the more interactions there are
    - and the more coordination is needed for successful outcomes
- people who defend the caste system see it as integrative
  - everyone knows their place and role, and does it willingly
  - landowners have willing workers
  - laborers are assured of work
  - all necessary tasks get done without coercion
  - society produces and reproduces itself, remains stable
- **exploitative** theories of social stratification
  - hierarchy is created, maintained, and expanded by individuals or groups who seek to gain wealth or power by exploiting others
    - would suggest, for example, that the caste system originally grew out of some groups' efforts to retain power and wealth and prevent other groups from accessing it
      - noting that lower castes have rebelled on occasion, and been suppressed by forces working for the upper castes
  - one way would be by taking advantage of a redistributive system
    - as Harris suggested in his article about the potlatch
  - a person or group in control of pooled resources for redistribution has power over who gets what
    - may be limited by custom and demands for fairness
    - but skillful people could manipulate this to their advantage
    - eventually (maybe after generations), those in control of the stored surplus could begin to skim some off for themselves
      - now they are gaining not only power, but also wealth
      - which enhances power, too

- eventually leading to a chief or ruler, and probably a surrounding court of nobility, who lives better than everyone else
  - and has power over everyone else: a hierarchy
- or an institution with power and wealth, like a temple
  - operated by people who benefit from the institution's power and wealth
  - who have every reason to keep expanding its role, and their own power
- another way would be through military power
  - people might accept hierarchy as necessary for defense
  - a successful military leader might parlay that prestige and power into a permanent position atop a hierarchy
- and there are other theories, all based on individuals seeking their own advantage
- once a little hierarchy exists, people may tend to work on ascending it and building their own position, wherever they are in it
  - creating ever more levels and inequality
  - building the ideology that legitimizes the hierarchy
- These two views are ideologies in themselves!
  - integrative theories lead to ideologies or worldviews attractive to those at the top of the hierarchy
    - they imply that hierarchy and the people at the top provide a needed function that justifies their higher status and power
  - exploitative theories lead to ideologies or worldviews attractive to those at the bottom
    - they imply that their low status and power is not their fault, but is imposed on them unfairly
- Example of an exploitative theory of inequality: Marxist theory
  - the Marxist model was not intended to be anthropological
    - Marx was not an anthropologist (or he was a very poor anthropologist!)
    - but as you will see, it involves some anthropological ideas
  - it illustrates how culture is integrated, how it all fits together into a coherent whole
    - Marxist ideas lend themselves to explanations of aspects of culture in terms of culture as a system
    - you can understand one aspect only if you understand how it fits into the rest
  - even though many aspects of Marx's work have been rejected, his core ideas still inform a lot of social science
  - some prefer the term "Marxian" theory, to distinguish it from the Marxist political project
- **means of production**
  - the land, tools, raw materials, infrastructure such as workplaces, technical knowledge, labor, and so on needed for production
- **social relations of production**
  - the way people relate to each other in the context of production
  - power, control, cooperation, class relations, etc.
- **mode of production**
  - specific combination of certain means of production and certain social relations of production

- the idea is that only certain combinations of certain means and social relations work together and actually occur
- Marx identified numerous modes of production
  - we won't pursue them all here...
  - anthropologists do not accept all of them
  - anthropology and ethnography did not really exist in Marx's time
  - he based his ideas on travelers' stories and histories, which were little better
- **kin-based mode of production**
  - kin groups own (or control) the means of production
  - labor is provided as a social obligation
    - payment is not only unnecessary, but would be inappropriate or even insulting
    - as in a Ju/'hoansi camp
  - exchange of labor and products is just one of many aspects of the web of social relations
- **capitalist mode of production**
  - capitalists own (or control) the means of production (more on this below)
  - labor is paid for with money (or the equivalent)
  - the relationship between those who do the work and those who direct them is impersonal ("businesslike")
  - owners and laborers become socially separated
- Marx's model of economics (more or less)
  - all value can be expressed in terms of labor
    - the value of an ounce of gold is the total of the labor that went into finding the ore deposit, mining it, refining it, transporting it, etc.
  - so the value of a product that comes out of a workshop equals
    - the value of the materials that went in
    - plus the value of the labor applied to the materials in the process
    - (a complete calculation would also include the value of the means of production: tools, the shop building, etc.)
  - if one group controls the means of production, they can take advantage of the others (exploit them)
    - owners of means of production are **capitalists**
      - **capital** is wealth that is used to produce more wealth
      - by allowing the capitalist to own the means of production
    - capitalists operate the means of production by paying laborers
    - this labor adds value to the product
    - but the capitalist sells the product for its total value
    - but he pays the workers less than the value that their labor added to the product
    - he keeps the difference as his profit
    - this difference is the "**surplus value of labor**"
    - the owner is said to "**expropriate** the surplus value of labor" from the workers
      - Marx saw expropriation as unfairly taking what rightfully belonged to the workers
  - capitalists can get away with paying workers less than the value they add to the product because

- they control the means of production
  - laborers can't work without it
- and capitalists can get away with owning the means of production because they control or influence the state
  - causing the state to set up rules that support the capitalist's exploitation by...
    - requiring payment of debts,
    - limiting escape through bankruptcy
    - limiting or banning strikes or other labor organization
    - prohibiting vandalism, theft, etc.
  - these rules are enforced by the state's police, courts, etc.
    - using the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force
    - the capitalists could not do this themselves
    - although they have tried, with private police forces, strikebreaking thugs, etc.
  - this enforcement of a system by the state that favors the capitalists at the expense of the majority is called **political repression**
- in order to keep laborers from trying to change this situation, capitalists try to control the ideology of the society
  - the capitalist tries to create an **ideology of class**
    - the idea that classes (i.e. laborers and capitalists) are natural, right, normal, and a necessary aspect of reality
    - that lower classes are lower for good reasons
    - that upper classes deserve their status
    - so that workers will go along with being exploited and won't resist, refuse, sabotage, revolt, etc.
  - the capitalist class can promote this ideology through control of
    - private media channels like newspapers, TV, radio
      - which present events in a light that supports the ideology
      - which are obliged to disseminate leaders' speeches, etc. that emphasize that
        - there is equality of opportunity
        - authorities are always striving to ensure a "level playing field"
        - and that anyone can get rich
          - the system is good - it gives you hope
    - think of Rupert Murdoch, Fox news, the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, etc.
      - only the most extreme on the left question the appropriateness of our class system
  - public channels like public schools
    - that teach classical free-market economics, which claims that
      - maximizing material profit is the only rational behavior
        - not even considering other possible goals, like
          - maximizing employment
          - minimizing ills such as hunger or disease
          - maximizing economic equality
          - maximizing economic status of the poorest person, or the median person
          - maximizing lifespan

- maximizing happiness
  - that is, the main goal itself is an arbitrary social construct
  - competition, supply and demand, the “invisible hand of the marketplace” always lead to the optimal allocation of resources
  - that demonstrate that education is necessary to join the upper class, but do not make it available to laborers
  - that children are naturally separated into groups at school that reflect the class of their parents
  - that teach people that the system is good and inevitable
  - that just happens to benefit the capitalist class
  - and through control of the church, that promotes ideas like
    - a hierarchy of gods, saints, etc.
    - which makes the hierarchy in this life seem normal and appropriate
    - low status in this life is rewarded in the next life
      - poverty is a virtue, the rich won’t go to heaven, etc.
    - economic standing in this life does not really matter; spiritual things are what count
    - God works in mysterious ways, so a worker’s status in life is God’s will
    - even that God rewards the virtuous with wealth, so they deserve it, and the poor obviously don’t
    - this is what Marx meant by “Religion is the opiate of the masses”
- The social effects of capitalism:
  - all these aspects of capitalism result in **alienation**
    - the **alienation of labor**: separation of labor from social relationships
      - work is no longer organically embedded in a web of social relations that exist for other reasons
      - it is simply paid for by an employer, and is performed apart from any social relations the worker has
    - **alienation of production**: separation of labor from its product
      - workers are no longer connected to their product
      - they feel little pride in it, responsibility for it, etc.
      - products are not connected to individuals
        - they become simply commodities
  - alienation robs labor of social meaning
    - making labor a meaningless, unfulfilling grind
  - alienation also makes it easier to abuse laborers
    - because workers and managers have little or no social relationship
      - no obligations, responsibility, personal connections
    - abuse of labor (low pay, excessive work, bad conditions, little time off, etc.) is the inevitable result of capitalism
- Marx felt that expropriation of the surplus value of labor by capitalists was unfair
  - the workers will eventually develop **class consciousness**
    - Note: very different from class ideology!
    - class consciousness is the awareness that all workers are in the same boat

- and that their class interests conflict with those of the capitalist class
- as the workers try to better their situation and the capitalists resist, conflict will arise
- the capitalists control the state and means of state repression
- so the only solution, eventually, is to overthrow the state
  - which can only be done violently, because the state and the capitalists behind it won't give up their status willingly
  - that is, the result is **violent revolution**
- Evaluating Marx
  - He got some things wrong
    - his concept of value as labor is incomplete at best
      - value clearly involves how much people want something, separately from how much labor it requires to make it
      - this is handled better by classical market economics
    - there has not been much violent revolution by the labor class...
      - the few “Marxist” revolutions, like Russia's, were really organized by elites, and were not in response to the capitalist abuses that Marx said they would be
    - his communist alternative to capitalism has never been made to work
      - some say that it has never really been implemented
      - many argue that it is fundamentally flawed, and could never work
  - but he definitely got some things right
    - the capitalist class clearly does try, and often succeeds, to use the state, schools, church, etc. to promote its interests
    - there clearly is an ideology of class
  - many of his concepts are very useful for understanding society as a system
    - labor and capital
    - means of production, and relations of production
    - ideology of class that naturalizes class hierarchy
      - and how and why it might be created and maintained
    - that labor and economic exchange are embedded in social relations
    - alienation of labor, and alienation of production
    - and others...
- Both integrative and exploitative views of hierarchy seem true at the same time
  - integrative functions probably really are provided by hierarchy
  - while people at the top probably really are striving to maintain and extend the hierarchy and their positions in it
    - people near the top need not be greedy or cynical to do this
      - they just need to believe the ideology that legitimizes the hierarchy
      - which happens to be to their benefit
      - so it is easy to believe, and keep believing...
- but there are many other bases for inequality and hierarchy aside from just class
  - We will look at some other forms of inequality, and how they are naturalized, next time