

# CONSENSUS AND CONFLICT: THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE. INEQUALITY, CLASS, STRATIFICATION, CAPITALISM

CSTU5170 - Sociology for Social Practice: Inequality and Social Change  
C Tunnicliffe, 2023



# KARAKIA | MANAWA MAI

Manawa mai te mauri nuku  
Manawa mai te mauri rangi  
Ko te mauri kai au  
He mauri tipua  
Ka pakaru mai te po  
Tau mai te mauri  
Haumi e, hui e, taiki e

Embrace the life force of the earth, embrace  
the life force of the sky  
The life force I have fathered is powerful,  
and shatters all darkness  
Come great life force,  
Join it, gather it, it is done

# WAIATA | PUREA NEI E TE HAU

Purea nei e te hau  
Horoia e te ua  
Whitiwhitia e te ra  
Ma hea ake nga  
Po raruraru  
Makere ana nga here  
E rere, wairua e rere  
Ki nga ao o te rangi  
Whitiwhitia e te ra  
Mahea ake nga  
Po raruraru  
Makere ana nga here



<https://youtu.be/wRWwrdRjkDA>

# AGENDA

Discuss essay due date

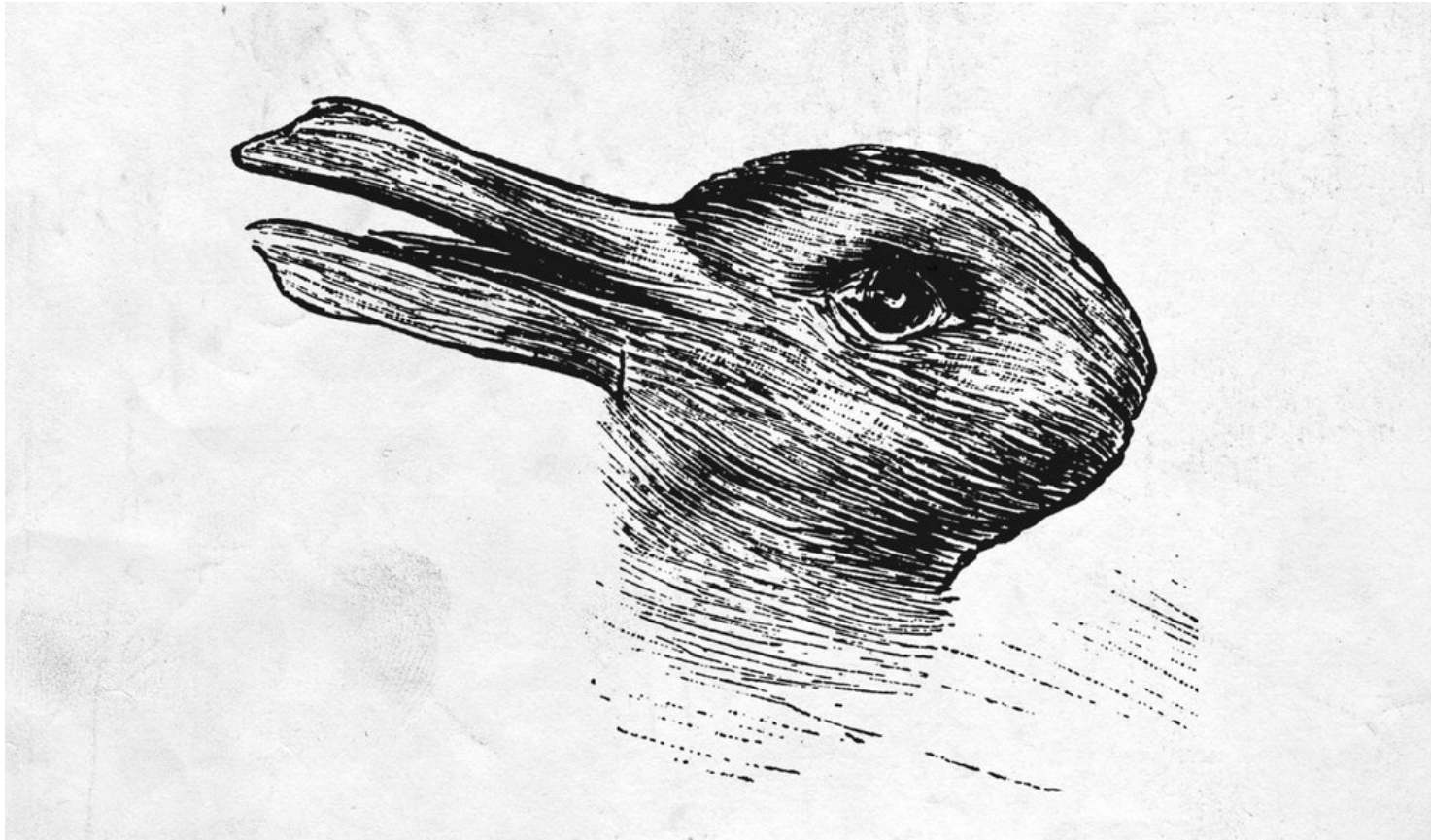
Recap last week

Explore sociological theories (different paradigms).

Explore inequality

Explore class and stratification





# THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Looking at things in different ways.

Looking at the history of the collective us.

How did it become this way?

Are we free to act or are we determined by our social context(s)?

Sociology provides concepts and Frameworks for helping our understanding of our (any others) lives.

Theories, frameworks, paradigms.

# THEORIES THEORIES AND MORE THEORIES

Why?

We all use theories to guide us. We wonder about—why can't I find a job, be rich? Why don't my parents understand me? Or why can't I understand my children? Why did that relationship not work?

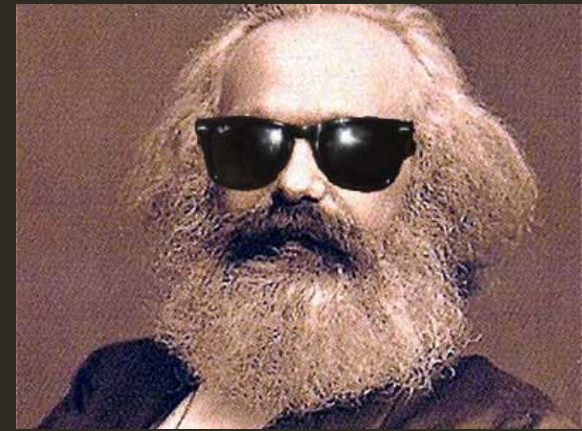
We construct stories that seek to explain this wonderings.

Social theory is the same. It seeks to provide stories that explain our world. Why does it work this way, and not some other way.

It may even go further and seek to offer alternative visions of the future...

As Marx famously put it...

The philosophers  
have only described  
the world... the point  
is to change it.



# FOUNDATIONAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGY

(DON'T WORRY, YOU DON'T HAVE TO MEMORISE THESE!)

These are all considered modern theories (theories developed within modernity, specifically late modernity 1880-1960s)

They are influenced by the ideologies of the time (ideas about what is, and what ought to be).

Strongly influenced by a western world view (ethnocentrism). Often overlooked difference (e.g. gender and non-western contexts).

Creating “grand narratives” of society, people and social change.

Today we will explore Functionalistic and Conflict (or critical) approaches to theory

Theoretical Perspectives	Level of analysis	Focus on
Functionalism:	Macro	Structures and institutions
Conflict (critical) theory:	Macro	Structures, Ideologies
Symbolic interactionism	Micro	Human interaction and the construction of meaning

# MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THEORY

Just as society is not static (fixed/unchanging) so to theories of society have changed and developed.

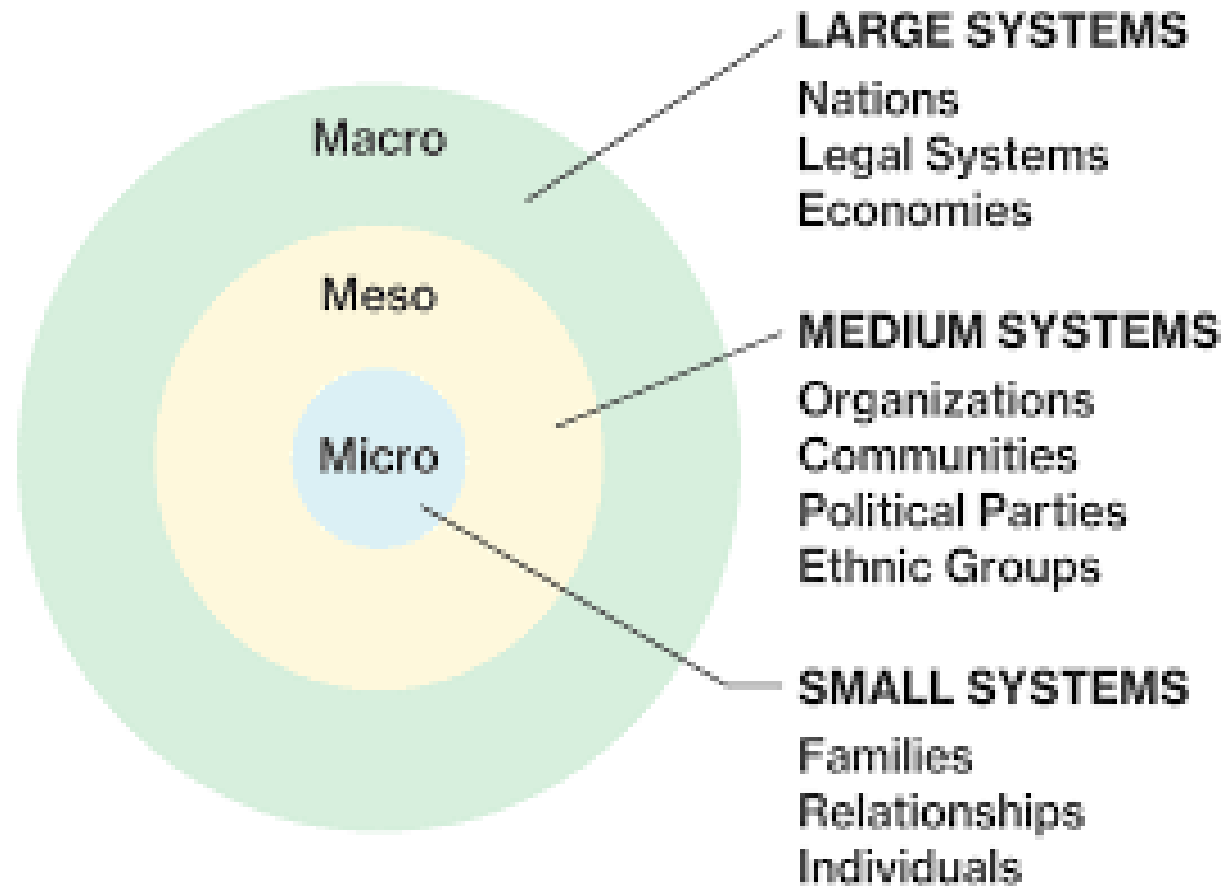
Some of these theories includes the Neo-Marxian theories, social exchange theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Feminism (including liberal feminism, radical feminism, black feminism, and other theories of gender, Structuration theory, Globalisation theory, Critical theories of Race and Racism, Postmodern theory(ies)

Decolonisation Theories

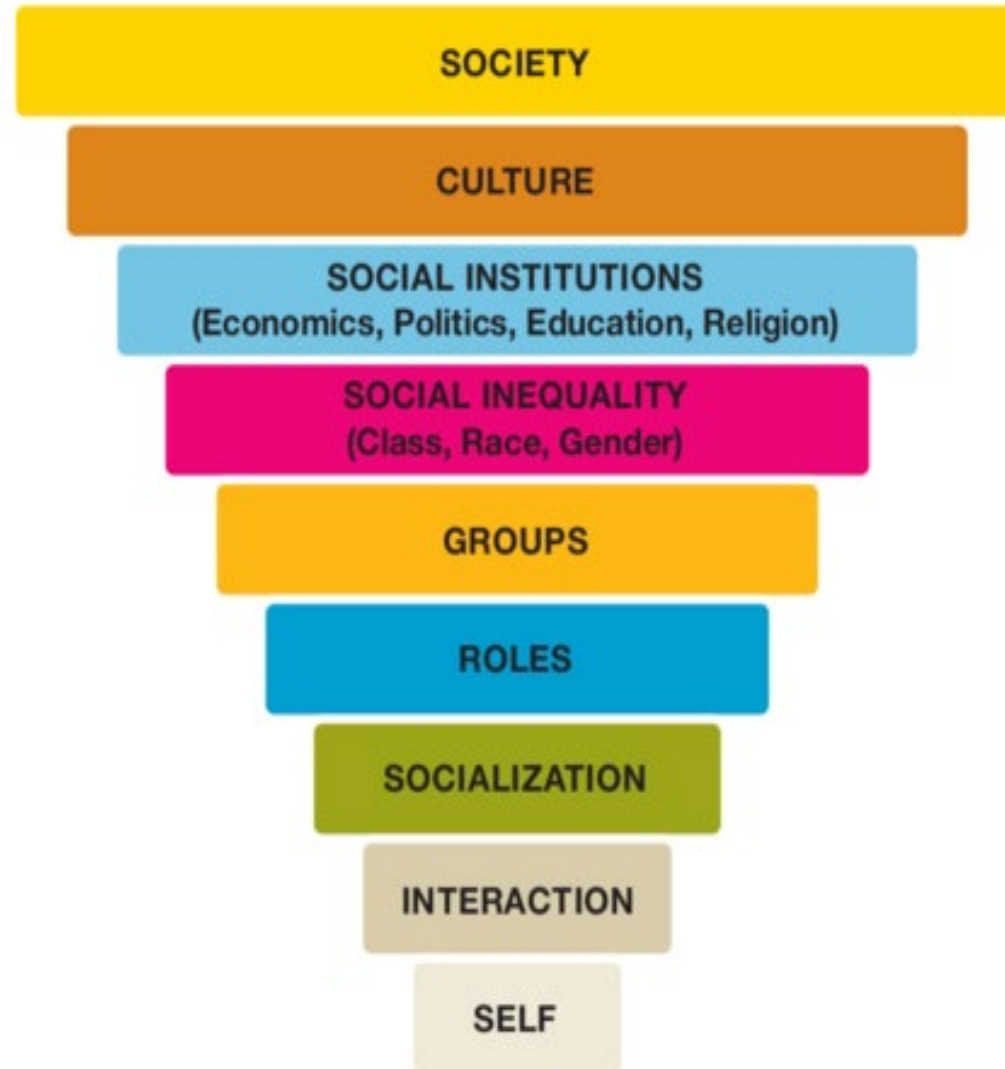
Indigenous theories (e.g. Kaupapa Māori Theory)



## Sociological Levels of analysis



# Sociological Levels of analysis



**Figure 1.2 The Macro-Micro Continuum**

Sociology covers a wide range of topics at different levels of analysis.

## Key debates in sociology (and some more key ideas)

- A big debate in sociology is the relationship(s) between **structure** and **agency**.
- **Structure** (the social patterns through which a society is organized)
- **Agency** (the ability to act or to effect change also the capacity of individuals to perceive their situation, reason about it, consciously monitor their action, form motives)
- The structure agency debate is the question of how much the structures of society constrain or determine individual lives (or how much agency do we actually have).
- Macro approaches tend to focus on the effects of structures on people. They understand the ways structure constrain options/choice
- Micro approaches tend to focus on how the individual acts on their environments. They stress free will and choice.

# STRUCTURALISM

**Structure** (the social patterns through which a society is organized)

Structuralism argues that modern societies are complex interconnected systems, or subsystems (e.g. economics, politics, culture), that together make up the whole of society.

And that....

Rather than individuals acting freely...

we are often influenced by objective forces that are both hidden and outside of our control.

“being human involves living in a world that has been determined”

**“Men (sic) make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, 1851).**

# FUNCTIONALISM

Developed from the “classic” sociology of Durkheim.

It is a structural perspective on society

Society can be seen to being held together by consensus (shared rules, morals, norms).

Our shared ideas create a collective conscience which binds society together.

Institutions (e.g. family, education, religion) are seen in terms of their function in maintaining society. Institutions were seen as part of a whole (like the organs in a body) requiring each to function properly and support the functioning of the others.

In modern societies the division of labour causes more interdependence (i.e. we need others to help us fulfil our needs) which in turn creates social solidarity.



# CONFLICT/CRITICAL THEORY

Developed in the influential work of K Marx

He saw conflict, not consensus as being the key feature of society.

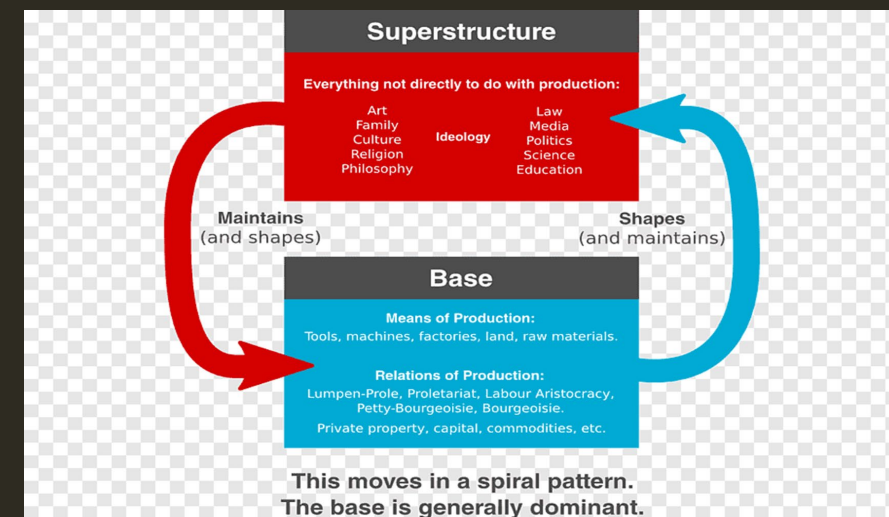
In particular, within capitalistic society, this is conflict between classes (i.e. the capitalist class exploiting the working class)

Society was seen as having an economic base (substructure) – containing the forces of production and the relations of production And The superstructure – which contains the rest of society – including family, the education system, ideas and beliefs, the legal system, the political system.

The base is material while the superstructure is non-material (ideological)

The ideological elements of society create a false consciences about the true reality of exploitation

Watch <https://youtu.be/UCSGGATWiQc> (first 5 minutes)



“Coffee break” may impose a normative standard ☺

# COFFEE (OR NON-CAFFEINATED BEVERAGE OF CHOICE) BREAK

15mins



# GROUP KORERO

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What does inequality mean to you?

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Are there different types of inequality?

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Are some more important than others?

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Discuss

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Feedback

# INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

Inequality is an issue for social work, as it forms a central part of the context of practice.

In our competencies as:

“Competence to promote the principles of human rights and social **and economic justice**” (Social Workers Registration Board [SWRB], 2021).

It is also described internationally through the International Federation of

Social Work (IFSW) stating that “Social, Economic and Environmental Justice are fundamental pillars underpinning social work theory, policy and practice” (IFSW, 2020)

# DEFINING TERMS: INEQUALITY

Inequality: is the condition in which members of society have different amounts of income, wealth, prestige or power.

It is the actual results of not having equality.

Early sociologists explored inequality of **income** and **wealth** sometimes known as **economic inequality** or resource inequality.

The economy is the way that resources get distributed. This means that we need to focus on the ways that resources are distributed by our current economic system.

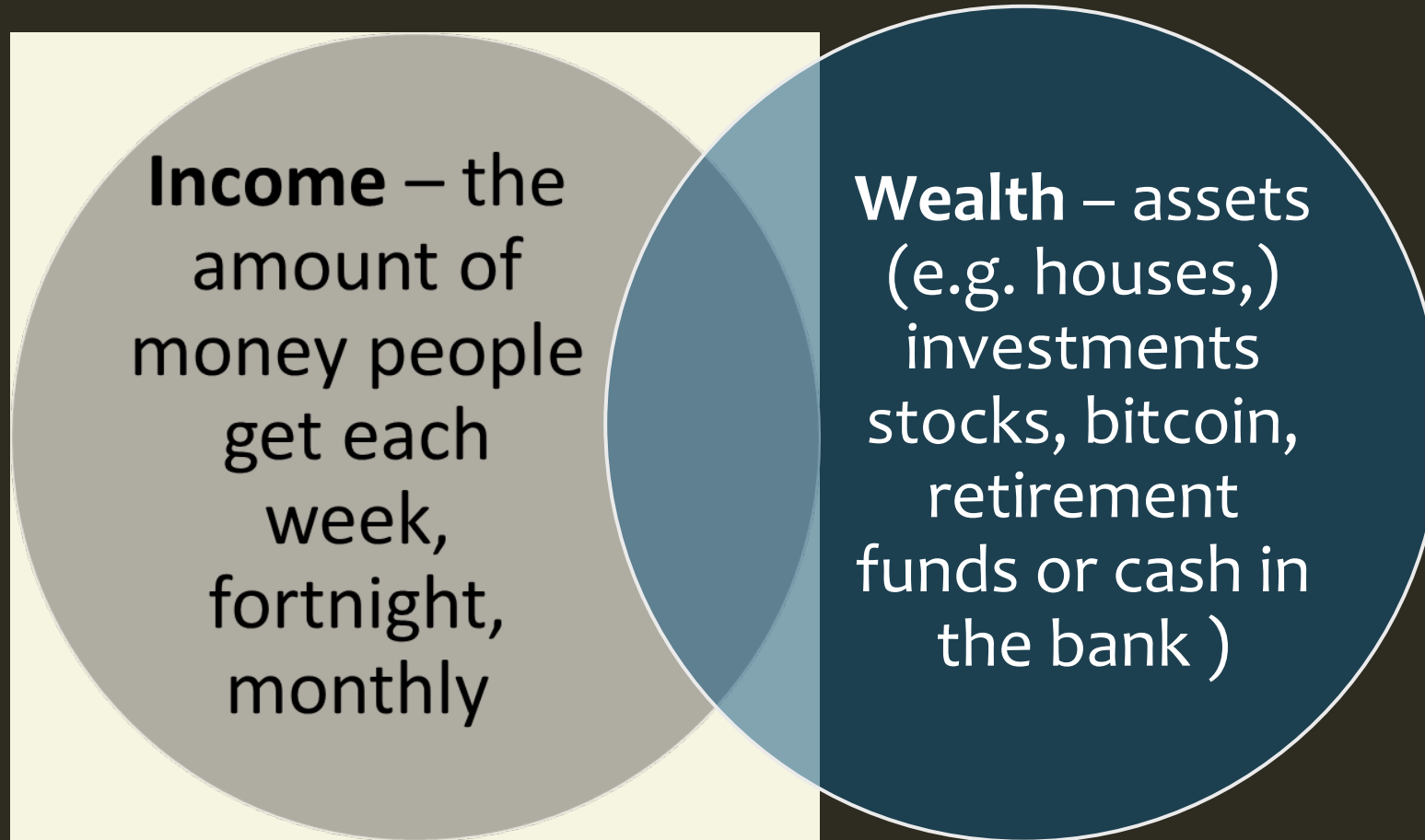
The concepts of class and stratification help us understand how certain groups have advantages over other groups.

Ps. There are many kinds of inequality – of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc



# DEFINING TERMS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INCOME AND WEALTH?

Key concepts>>>>>



# WEALTH INEQUALITY

Wealth is typically much more unequally distributed than income: while the richest 10% of income earners have 27% of all after-tax income, **the wealthiest 10% of asset holders have 59% of all wealth.**

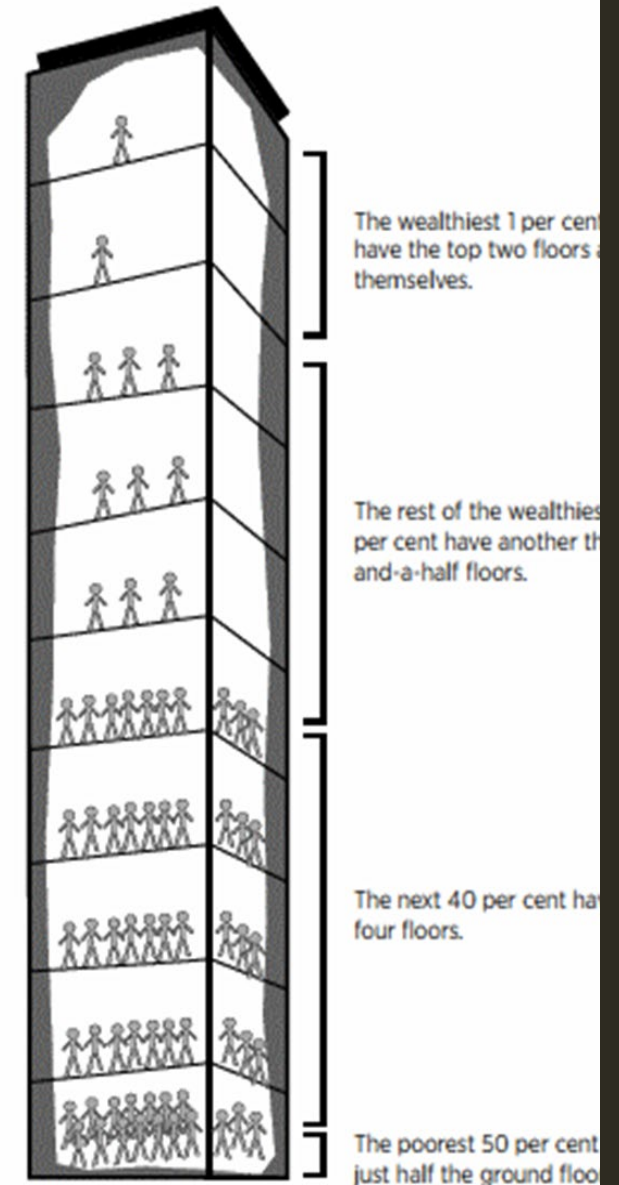
- Note that these are not necessarily the same people: those with high wealth may have low incomes, (e.g. an Auckland pensioner living in a \$2 million house but relying on New Zealand Superannuation for income).

The intergenerational transfer of wealth, power, social position and status creates a legacy of **historical (and contemporary) privilege** long after the historic acts of acquisition have taken place.

This allows for certain advantages

- Inheritance
- Class advantages (e.g. health, education, housing)

Figure 3.5 Wealth-gap tower



# WEALTH INEQUALITY

The distribution of economic resources has been a perennial concern of developed societies because of its effect on individual life chances and the wider social fabric (Rashbrooke, Rashbrooke & Chin, 2021).

Having sufficient income and wealth is essential to an individual's ability to lead a fulfilling life and pursue their goals (Rashbrooke, Rashbrooke & Chin, 2021).

Conversely, a lack of income and/or wealth may severely hamper an individual's prospects (Rashbrooke, Rashbrooke & Chin, 2021).

Large inequalities of income and wealth may also lead to negative social outcomes and raise profound ethical questions (Rashbrooke, Rashbrooke & Chin, 2021).

Question: how can we understand inequality in a capitalist society?

# CLASS

Answer: one way is to explore class.

Working definition: A division of social types

- Historical: Kings/Queens, Lords/Ladies, surfs or peasants

With Capitalism (especially industrial capitalism) things change.

Two different ways of explaining class.

Marx: The bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (workers) classes

Weber: Class, Status and Power.

# DEFINING TERMS: CLASS

The concept of class is one of the most significant ideas in sociology.

Class: the division of a society based on social and economic status (e.g. the expression “people from different walks of life”, the haves and the have nots)

Class is the social divisions within a society based on access to income, wealth, status, and power.

The life experiences of each “class” will be different (often very different) .

What are some of the words that you have heard to describe this difference?

Class becomes **stratified** and social mobility limited.

Key concepts >>>>>

[Watch: Comedy sketch on class](#)



# STRATIFICATION

Stratification is metaphor drawn  
from geology

the study of rock layers (strata)  
and layering (stratification)



# DEFINING TERMS: STRATIFICATION

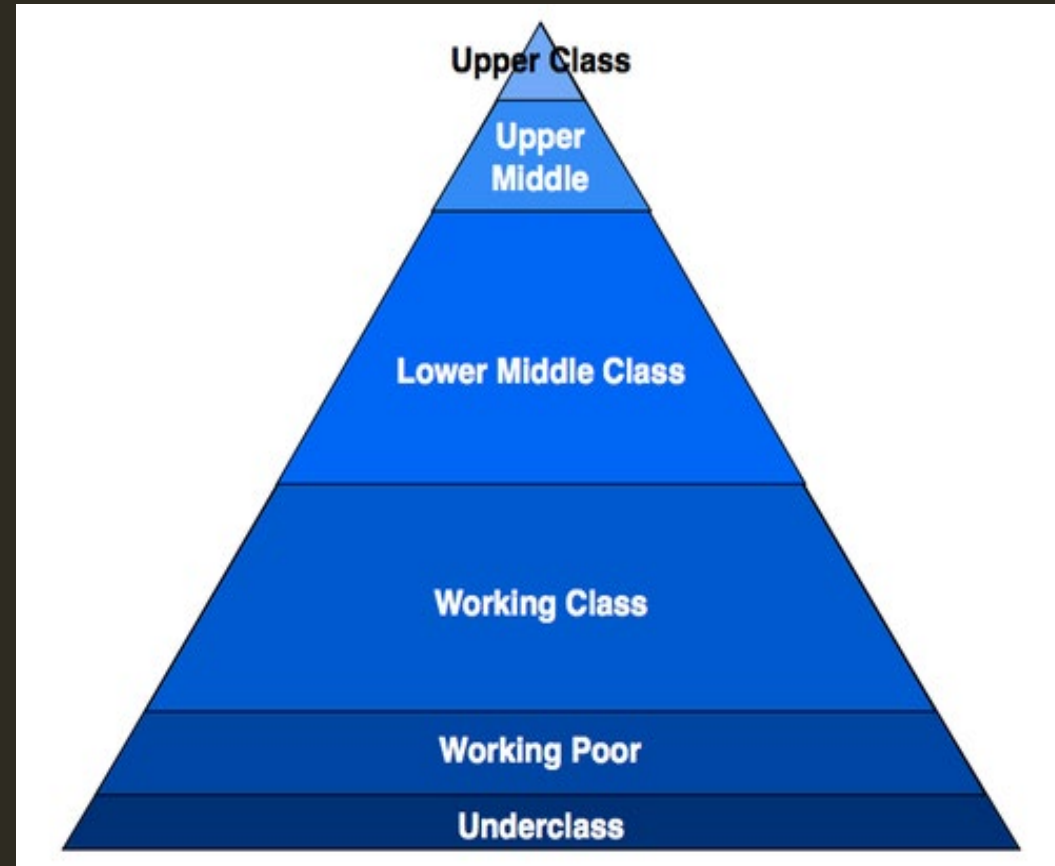
Put simply **social stratification** refers to the ways that groups of people are organised unequally within a broad social hierarchy

With this system a smaller number of people sit comfortably on the top while those below, increase in number (size of population) and experience more inequality the lower down the hierarchy.

The words used to describe these different strata and the amount of layers depends on different interpretations.

It is both a process (e.g. class reproduction) and a condition (relative inequalities)

Ps. There are many kinds of stratification – of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc



# STRATIFICATION IS CREATED!

“this hierarchal characterisation of society is a process in that it does not simply exist. Rather it is something that has been created and maintained...

it is a condition in that inequality is **hardened** or institutionalised and where there is a system of social relationships that determine who gets what and why” (Mayeda, 2013, p.80)

# SOCIOLOGY: CLASS, INEQUALITY, STRATIFICATION, AND CAPITALISM

Sociology has focused on Class, Stratification and Inequality within a context of Capitalism

Class and stratification identify what position people may occupy within a Capitalist system, but also, and importantly, how they come to occupy this position.

It is NOT seen as natural, but rather a product of social, economic, and political relations.

To understand class stratification and inequality we need to also understand Capitalism



# CAPITALISM

Capitalism is an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit.

“A system of wage labour and commodity production for sale, exchange, and profit, rather than the immediate need of the producers” (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p.59).

Capitalism has been around for a long time, but modernity (particularly industrialisation) allowed it to be more productive (destructive?) than ever before.





# CAPITALISM

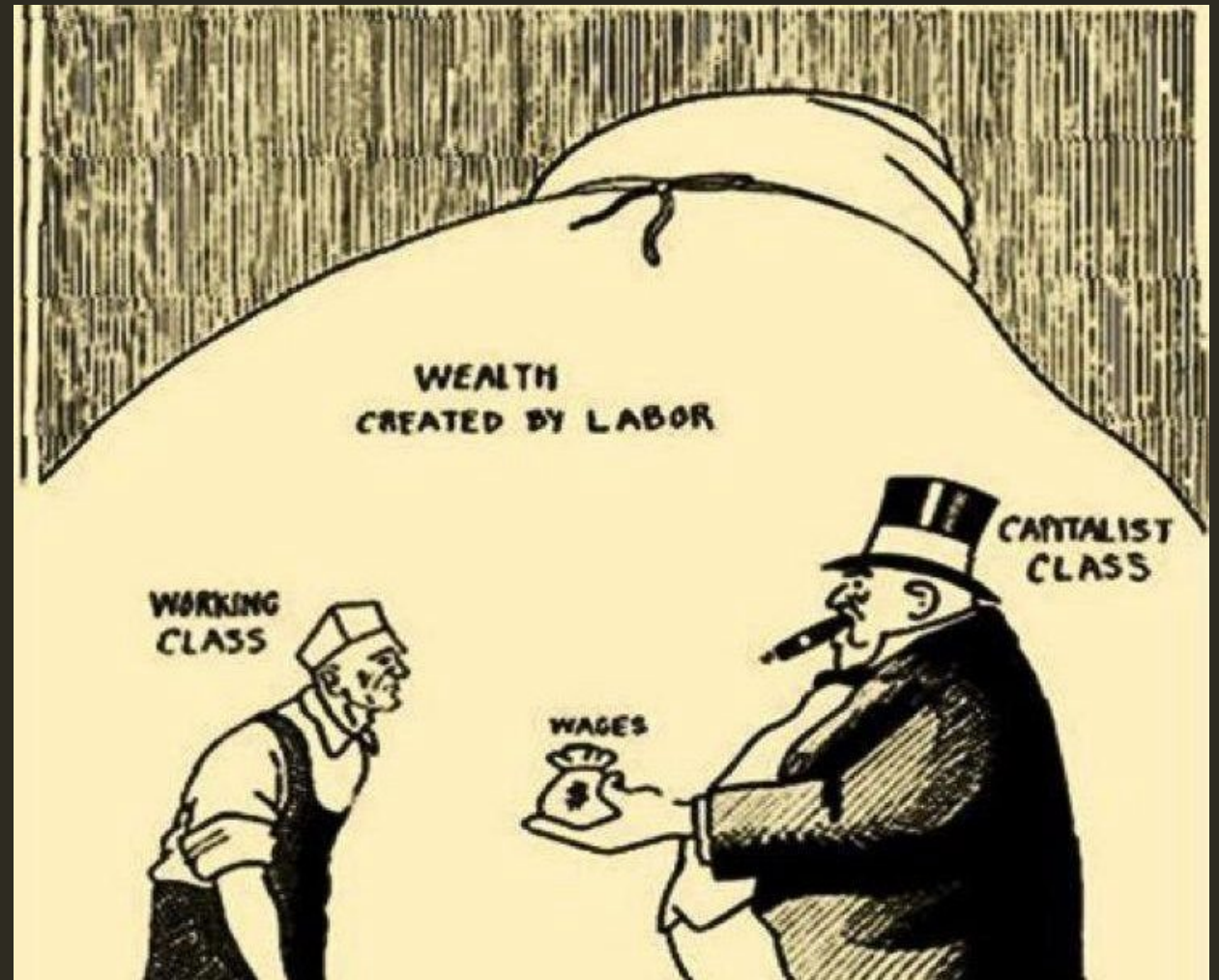
## Capital creates Capital

Capital is created by purchasing commodities (raw material, machinery, labour) and combining them into a new commodity with an exchange value higher than the sum of the original purchase

This is made possible by labor power/workers (which themselves are turned into a commodity by capitalism, think about the term “human resources” department)

Workers earns a wage (exchange value) that is less than the value that is produced for the capitalist

The difference is termed “surplus value” and is retained by the capitalist (profit). This profit can be paid to business owners or reinvested to make more profit.



# CAPITALISM

Is supported by a capitalistic ideology (private property, profit motive, also ideas like work-hard (work ethic), consume, “the rich are rich because they **earned** it”)

Capitalism requires social institutions, including: private property laws and enforcement, “free”/available labour, an extensive monetary system, market networks (for both raw materials and produced commodities), education, laws and legal systems and systems of policing.

These institutions present an ideology (a set of ideas about the world) that supports the status quo, and reflects the interests of the dominate (oppressor) class.

Subordinate classes take exploitative relations of production for granted, as something solid and unchangeable.

Hegemony describes the ways social institutions convince us that there is no alternative.



# IDEOLOGY AND HEGEMONY

With rising inequality, and a system that advantages the few over the many, how does capitalism continue to be supported?

Gramsci identified the ideological tool called hegemony.

Institutions, such as religion, schooling and the media, reflect and establish a particular view of the world; one which favours and reinforces the dominant ideology (and dominating ideologies) (Kellner, 2001; Mullaney, 1997).

The dominant attitudes (and existing structures e.g. wealth inequality) become internalised and accepted as “common sense” resulting in a false consciousness in the subordinated classes (Lewy, 2011).

Rather than needing to be coerced into an acceptance of the status quo, hegemony results in **DOMINATION BY CONSENT**



# MARXIST/ CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CAPITALISM

**Capitalism contains inherent conflicts (contradictions).**

**Watch: [David Harvey on The Contradictions of Capitalism](#)**

**Class antagonism, the interests of capital vs. the interests of the worker**

**Boom and Bust**

**Constant growth**

**Rising inequality**

**Capitalism needs unemployment**

Reserve army of labour

- The unemployed or under employed
- a relative surplus-population is necessary for the demand and supply mechanism of the labour market.
- The availability of labour influences wage rates and the larger the unemployed workforce grows, the more this forces down wage rates; conversely, if there are plenty jobs available and unemployment is low, this tends to raise the average level of wages—in that case workers are able to change jobs rapidly to get better pay, or to argue for better pay in their current job.



# MARXIST ANALYSIS OF CAPITALISM

Marx predicted the end of capitalism from (mostly) internal contradictions.

The competitive nature of capitalist property relations undermines capitalist development from within, leading to crises of production.

This is because the pressure for profits causes both a downward pressure on wages and the overproduction of goods. Effectively, the poverty of the workers undercuts the market for the goods, meaning that they cannot be sold, leading to economic slumps.

Marx argued that capitalist relations of production (private property) were holding back economic development and, eventually, this would lead to their overthrow.



# MARXIST ANALYSIS OF CLASS.

**Conflict:** Wage workers and capitalist employers are involved in constant struggle over the rate of exploitation. I.e. wages vs profit

The separation of workers from each other (the division of labour) and from any control over what and how things get produced (the ownership of the means of production) hide from view the actual process of exploitation (i.e. the appropriation of surplus value (profit) by the bourgeoisie/capitalists and paying workers the lowest amount possible).

This creates alienation (from the work itself and from other workers) and a **false consciousness** for workers (they may imagine they are lucky to have a job and do not see the relationship as one of exploitation)

Class relations are caused by the way society is Structured

# WEBERIAN ANALYSIS

## Elements of Structural

agreed that capitalist society was best defined as a class society.

Classes as economic categories offering/giving similar life chances

Class was not as ridged as Marx described, but rather 2-way  
Mobility was possible

- Class is fluid — people move up and down — up mostly as a result of being sensible and increasing their SHARE of the market.  
Down through poor decisions 😞
- (does anyone remember YUPPIEs)
- Increasing market share by acting rationally (logically and in their own best interests).





# WEBERIAN ANALYSIS

Class (says Weber) is more than just an economic relationship. There are other forces involved

“Status” and “Party” also need to be considered.

## Class

- Class groups have similar economic interests , material wealth, and opportunities for income
- These similarities provide members comparable life chances
- A class group is characterised by labour market conditions.
- Classes within class

# WEBER AND STATUS

- Status is based on evaluations of honour or prestige within society
- We value things other than economic resources
  - These value judgements can relate to things such as:
    - Linenage, Education, Ethnicity, Religion, Gender, Ability...
    - We may value some work more than other forms of work
- There may be some opportunity to gain prestige/status
- There may be some social restrictions on inter status relationships.
- Status may be displayed or hidden. (can you think of examples?)

# WEBER AND PARTY

Membership of groups that seek power or influence

Parties mobilize members and resources to achieve common goals and membership gives individuals access to contacts, resources and a collective organization, increasing their ability to achieve their ends.

Networks

Clubs

Associations

Unions

Political parties

# GROUP EXERCISE.

Discuss class in groups.

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