

# Marx vs. weber in today's society

Politics, Communism



Marx vs. Weber in today's society Marx and Weber have not lived within the same social conditions we are facing today, and one question that may arise is, whose approach to social class and inequality is more compatible with today's society? Taking a closer look at Weber's analogy, and the concept of "life chances", one may attempt to conclude that his approach is more flexible and fitting in today's society. Weber offers a micro level analysis of inequality at the individual's level, which makes his approach more versatile. Furthermore this approach can explain the changes in regards to class determination by the market situation over time through the concept of life chances. Marx is known for putting forth a theory of classes that is centered on economical grounds where "society [...] is [...] splitting up into two great hostile camps [...]: bourgeoisie and proletariat" (Marx, 1978, p. 474). Belonging to either class will depend on whether you own the means of production or not; from this system stems inequality. Weber takes a step further than Marx, and discusses other social forces than economical one, that influences social class and inequality. Weber put central importance to the concept of power, "the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of other who are participating in the action" (Weber, 2003, p. 95). The way power is distributed creates "three discrete but interrelated realms [classes, status groups and parties]" (Weber, 2003, p. 94). These three dimensions in relation to power are used to explain inequality. Distribution of power among classes leads to unequal access to material resources since classes are "purely economically determined" (Weber, 2003, p. 99). As for status power, one's "social estimation of honor" (Weber, 2003, p. 99) determines the

capacity to exercise power upon those who view him or her as a superior. Class and Status power “ influence one another and they influence the legal order and are in turn influence by it” (Weber, 2003, p. 99). Parties on the other hand, focus on gaining social power that enables them to have influence on decision-making. From Marx’s Manifesto of the communist party (1978) one can concluded that the Bourgeois and the proletariat are mutually dependent on one another, but this does not make them equal in a capitalist society. Weber does agree that the capitalist society and the “ economy has a particularly determinative impact on the social order and power” (Weber, 2003, p. 94). However Weber points out that individual still have agency and “ a relative autonomy to culture and politics” (Weber, 2003, p. 94). Hence, the determination of class-situation by the market situation cannot be exclusive to Marx view based on the relationship to the means of production. Weber’s puts forth a concept of “ life chances” which entails that even the dominated still have a scoop of choices. In today’s society, these choices have expanded and become more equal. For example, today’s market is seen to be a knowledge-based market, where higher education and skill set is given more value. Those in lower classes also have a possibility to compete in the labour market since higher education is becoming more accessible to everyone. Weber’s approach gains versatility by looking at the role of social action and therefore takes into consideration an individual’s “ rationally motivated adjustments of interest” (Weber, 2003, p. 97). Marx’s approach focuses too much on the economical conditions, and although it may still be relevant today economy, it fails to accurately predicted other dimensions of life that have influenced social class and

inequality. A shift to a knowledge base labour market and increase in higher education accessibility has improved individuals " life chance". However upon putting forth the argument that individuals have more choices now than before, one may question the true intention of these choices. It could be, as Marx may suggest, an illusion of choice set forth by the dominant classes to prevent a revolution from the dominated class. Reference: Marx, K. and Friedrich E. (1978). Manifestation of the Communist Party. The Marx-Engels Reader, (2nd ed), edited by Robert C. Tucker. 473-483. Weber, M. (2003) Class, Status, Party. Social Theory: the Roots and Branches, edited by Peter Kivisto. 95-100.