Driving Impulses

David Lockwood began his sociological career at a time when it was Parsonian functionalism and its complement – what C.W. Mills called abstracted empiricism – that dominated sociology. Going against the prevailing orthodoxy, Lockwood tried to introduce into the empirically oriented sociological research issues derived from the work of Karl Marx, the great absentee from the early postwar sociological canon. His whole oeuvre can be seen as an imaginative and critical engagement with Marx’s thought, his major aim being not a scholastic preoccupation with what the German philosopher ‘really said or meant’ on various issues, but creatively to use basic Marxist concepts and substantive theories in order to show the inadequacy of Parsonian conceptual tools for understanding the constitution, reproduction and transformation of modern societies; and explore empirically the social structure of modern Britain.

Whether one looks at Lockwood’s theoretical contributions or his empirically oriented analyses of class, the constant, all-pervasive theme of his work is the idea that the type of Durkheimian sociology that Parsonian functionalism mainly represents needs to be brought nearer to a Marxist way of conceptualizing the mechanisms of social order and disorder.

Key Issues

White-collar Workers: Becoming Proletarian?

Lockwood’s first major empirical contribution, *The Blackcoated Worker*, was in the sphere of white-collar work.¹ He was one of the first social scientists to show in an empirically concrete and at the same time theoretically adequate manner that, as far as the work situation is concerned, white-collar workers in our day are experiencing the type of routinization and bureaucratization of their jobs that blue-collar workers underwent during the emergence and dominance of the modern factory system. In fact, the growing importance of the large office, where a great number of employees were brought together under the same roof, had organizational effects similar to those of the factory two centuries ago. It increased the anonymity and impersonality of the employee–employer relationship, while creating favourable conditions for the development of white-collar unions.
From the above point of view, Marx was quite correct when he argued that the further development of capitalism would spread the process of proletarianization beyond the factory gates. But if in terms of the work situation, there was a certain homogenization between blue- and white-collar workers, in other respects, Lockwood pointed out, the differences between the two social categories were still significant. In terms of market chances, for instance, office workers – due to greater opportunities for promotion as well as to a variety of fringe benefits – still keep an important advantage. This in turn is one of the main reasons why, in terms of status, clerical work still entails higher prestige than manual labour.

The Affluent Worker: Becoming Middle Class?

This type of problematic was further developed by J.H. Goldthorpe et al. in the now classical study of a number of affluent skilled manual workers in Luton. In this context, a somewhat similar issue was examined from the blue-collar perspective. Contrary to the embourgeoisement thesis, which argued that the affluent working class was increasingly becoming middle class, Lockwood, Goldthorpe and their collaborators posited that such a notion of the assimilation of the working class into the middle class was unduly simplistic. Rather, both groups were changing in such a way that it was a particular kind of convergence rather than assimilation or merger that characterized the overall situation. For if the white-collar worker had moved from non-unionized, personal relationships between employee and employer to one of instrumental collectivism (that is, a context where white-collar workers join unions so as to promote their individual interests), the blue-collar worker was reaching the same position by a very different route. From the solidaristic collectivism of the traditional working-class community, he or she had come to view the unions in as instrumental/individualistic a manner as his or her white-collar counterpart.

According to Goldthorpe and Lockwood, what is common to both groups is privatization, a type of home-centred existence where the joys of consumption or newly acquired gadgets and private family life become more important than class struggles and the expression of collective sentiments and interests in the public domain.

The Interviews showed that the sample of affluent manual workers shared a predominately ‘instrumental orientation’ to their employment, irrespective of differences in skill, occupational status, or the technology with which they were involved. By an instrumental orientation, the authors mean that workers were attracted to their jobs because of ‘extrinsic’, that is, mainly economic, considerations. For example, 87 per cent of skilled men and 82 per cent of those semi-skilled explained their work attachments wholly or partly in terms of the level of pay, degree of security, or extent of the fringe benefits available. Only 29 per cent of the former and 14 per cent of the latter mentioned ‘intrinsic’ attractions such as job satisfaction. Consistent with this, few participated actively in work-based societies or clubs, and few were members of solidary work groups. Nor did they base their social lives outside the factory on associations with workmates. Home and factory were psychologically and socially isolated from each other. Thus, for example, 76 per cent of skilled men and 66 per cent of the semi-skilled reported they would be ‘not much bothered’ or ‘not bothered at all’ if they moved away from their present workmates to another job.
Technology, Workplace, Community, Society: A Holistic Approach

In a further creative engagement with Marxism, Lockwood and Goldthorpe have argued that if one tries to explain the two major features of the convergence trajectory, that is, instrumental collectivism and privatization, neither technology nor the organization of the workplace can provide a satisfactory answer. The workers’ instrumental orientation towards their jobs (for example the fact that they are more interested in higher wages than in work satisfaction and self-fulfilment on the job) was shaped less by factors within the workplace itself and more by broader communal and societal factors.

Contrary to Robert Blauner, therefore, who was trying to establish one-to-one linkages between technology/work conditions and ‘alienation’ at work, Goldthorpe and Lockwood argued that such rather crude technological determinism was misleading. Although subsequent studies have shown that workers’ orientations are influenced by both workplace and related conditions, there is no doubt that the empirical studies in Luton have shown the risk inherent in arbitrarily extracting isolated concepts (such as that of Marx’s notion of work alienation) from classical theories in order to ‘operationalize’ them and establish correlations between so-called variables.

What is valuable and enduring in Lockwood’s empirical research is that, although he is greatly influenced by Marx’s writings, he takes the holistic character of Marxist theory seriously. Unlike Blauner, he does not reduce it to an aggregate of statements and disconnected hypotheses from which the modern researcher picks and chooses at will for purposes of ‘operationalization’ and empirical testing. In other words, whereas Blauner’s excursus into classical theory was rather decorative (in the sense that he could present his research without once referring to Marx’s theory of alienation), Lockwood’s engagement with Marxism was and is on a more serious and fundamental level.

Social and System Integration

The same can be said of Lockwood’s more theoretical writings, where the focus is less on substantive issues and more on the basic conceptual tools that prepare the ground for the construction of substantive theories. On this level, Lockwood, in order to show the basic differences between Marxism and Parsonian sociology, made the seminal suggestion of distinguishing between social and system integration – a distinction that came to play a leading role in various theoretical debates in the social sciences.

The social/system-integration distinction makes it possible to look at a social system (whether this is a small group, a formal organization, or a whole society) from two analytically distinct but complementary perspectives. The social-integration perspective focuses on agency, on the way in which social actors view and relate to each other in specific social contexts. So for Lockwood, social integration refers to ‘the orderly or conflictual relationships between actors’; whereas system integration focuses on the compatible or incompatible linkages between the ‘parts of the social system’. In this latter case, therefore, the social system and the mechanisms that integrate it are not seen from the ‘inside’ (not from the actors’ point of view), but from the outside, so to speak, from the point of view of the system and its requirements for reproduction/survival. Given this
systemic, ‘externalist’ perspective, the mechanisms leading to integration/disintegration are no longer those of conflict/cooperation, but those of logical compatibility/incompatibility between systemic parts.

Lockwood’s Critique of Parsons: An Overemphasis on System Integration

If we look at Parsonian functionalism (which Lockwood identifies with normative functionalism) from the above perspective, systemic parts are seen to be conceptualized in institutional terms. For example, Parsons subdivides a societal system into four basic institutional subsystems: the adaptation subsystem (which refers to economic institutions), the goal-achievement subsystem (political institutions), the integration subsystem (legal and communal institutions), and the latency subsystem (kinship and religious institutions). Since Parsons overemphasizes system and underemphasizes social integration, his only mechanisms of change are internal to the system and refer to incompatibilities between the social system’s different subsystems. So, for example, in a late-developing country, introducing western technology and modes of management into the economic subsystem (adaptation) might render the values/norms of this subsystem logically incompatible with those still prevalent in the religious or kinship subsystem (latency).

This systemic contradiction or incompatibility between institutional subsystems constitutes the major mechanism of social transformation for Parsonian modernization theorists. For Lockwood, this conceptualization of social change is misleading because of its overemphasis on system integration. Its exclusive focus on systemic incompatibilities between normative orders peripheralizes actors, and prevents one from asking who-questions about social change. For example, which specific interest groups (entrepreneurs, workers, women, priests and so on) experience the contradiction between the instrumental rationality of the economic subsystem and the ‘expressive’ rationality of the religious subsystem, and how do these groups deal with those incompatibilities? Are they aware of them? Do they try to set up formal organizations so as to handle the growing contradictions in one way or another? Such agency questions are peripheral or completely absent from the Parsonian analysis of the modernization process. It is as though a mysterious entity called ‘society’, or ‘societal system’, were handling the contradictions so as to bring about social change in the direction of greater differentiation and higher adaptive capacity.

Advantages of Marx over Parsons

Now, according to Lockwood, if one looks at the conceptual framework underlying Marxist approaches to social change, two basic differences from Parsonian functionalism can be identified.

First, on the level of system integration, systemic parts are not only normative/institutional, but also non-normative/material. For example, the basic Marxist contradiction between material base (forces of production or technology in the broad sense of the term) and institutional core (institutions of private property) is a type of systemic
incompatibility that is not found in Parsons’ purely normative/institutional conceptualization of systemic subsystems.

The second major difference between Marx and Parsons is that the former (if one looks at his work as a whole) puts equal emphasis on social and system integration. Unlike Parsons, Marx does ask social-integration, who-questions, such as: What do actors do about growing systemic incompatibilities? Are they aware of the growing contradiction between the increasingly collective character of the forces of production, and the still private character of the institutions regulating the ownership of the means of production? And if so, what are the chances of building up class organizations capable of transforming the prevailing relations of production?

According to Lockwood, regardless of the fact that some of Marx’s substantive theories about the development of class consciousness and class struggles in late capitalism were wrong (such as his thesis on the growing pauperization of the proletariat), the basic conceptual framework is pretty sound. It combines in a highly ingenious manner the social- with the system-integration perspective. It succeeds in viewing capitalist societies from an agency/internalist as well as a systemic/externalist perspective; both in terms of the strategies and conflicts of the main protagonists, as well as in terms of the basic incompatibilities/contradictions of a mode of production based on the private ownership of the means of production. Marx’s theory raised the fundamental question that Parsonian sociology fails to raise: given growing systemic contradictions, what happens on the level of social integration, that is, on the level of actors’ consciousness, strategies, struggles? How do their strategies and struggles affect systemic contradictions and vice versa?

It is precisely because it combines system and social integration more effectively that Marxism offers us tools useful for the explanation of both stability and change. Parsons’s underemphasis of social integration, his peripheralization of actors, makes them appear as mere puppets of the system’s requirements. In consequence, social order and disorder in normative functionalism are, at best, described, but cannot be explained.

The Dynamics of Social Change

Let us now move from Parsons to his major mentor Durkheim who, according to Lockwood, takes social integration rather more seriously. However, here again there is an interesting contrast between Durkheim’s and Marx’s attempts to explain social order and disorder.13

Durkheim views social structure in status terms. For him, social structure consists of hierarchically organized status groups whose rights and obligations are legally defined and legitimized by the prevailing societal values and norms. This type of distribution of rights and obligations Durkheim calls ‘social classification’, and it is social classification that confers cohesion and order on society. As for social disorder, this comes about when this hierarchical structure of normatively regulated groups is undermined by processes Durkheim defines vaguely as ‘sudden changes in the economy’, ‘changes in wealth and power’, changes in the ordering of ‘men and things’ and so on, changes which (when
properly theorized, lead to the Marxist concepts of class structure and class struggles) disrupt the existing system of classification. They bring about ‘declassification’, a state of affairs characterized by such anomic phenomena as moral deregulation, egoism, social schism, moral polarization and so on.

For Lockwood, therefore, Durkheim’s theory of disorder or social change is based on a notion of discrepancy between a status hierarchy and a vaguely defined class-power situation – the latter term referring to circumstances where ‘life chances are minimally conditioned by legal status defining entitlements’, and status hierarchy to circumstances where such entitlements are dominant. This means that status for Durkheim entails a de jure distribution of rights and privileges, whereas class entails de facto power relationships based on the differential control of situational facilities.

According to Lockwood looking at Marx, there the situation is exactly the reverse: what is central to Durkheim becomes peripheral for Marx, and vice versa. At the centre of the Marxist view of social structure are power, rather than status, groups, that is, groups struggling over the control of the means of production and over the benefits such control bestows. From this perspective, social disorder or social transformation occurs when there is a discrepancy between class and status – status contra Durkheim, being defined by Marx only nebulously. For Marx, when power relations between social classes no longer correspond to the distribution of rights and obligations as defined by law, that is, when there is a discrepancy between de facto power relations and de jure formal arrangements, then we witness processes leading to social change. So while both Marx and Durkheim base their theories of disorder on a discrepancy between status and power relationships, the one considers as the core and conceptualizes carefully what the other considers peripheral and conceptualizes vaguely.

Marx choosing to emphasize power rather than status relations makes sense in view of the fact that his social-action schema is fundamentally utilitarian. And if in classical utilitarianism the ends of action are random, in Marxism they are ‘objectively’ determined by the prevailing relations of production. For example, given the fact that the worker in capitalism does not own the means of production, this situation automatically entails ‘objective’ interest: that is, the overthrow of an exploitative system in which the worker must sell his or her labour power in order to survive, while the capitalist, via labour-market mechanisms, profits from surplus value. Given, moreover, Marx’s utilitarian assumption about the economic rationality of actors, the workers will tend to adopt revolutionary, anti-capitalist strategies. If they do not, it is because of false consciousness; because the dominant classes, by means of various ideological mechanisms, prevent them from seeing their situation objectively. According to Lockwood, the introduction of the false-consciousness argument results in Marxists veering between a positivist position (objective class locations more or less automatically bring about certain class practices), and an idealist one (whenever there is a discrepancy between objective interests and class practices, it is due to the adoption of ‘false’ ideas).
Linking the above considerations with an earlier critique he had developed of certain aspects of historical materialism, Lockwood stresses the fact that the positivist/idealist oscillation in Marxism is a result of it not being possible to identify ‘objective interests’. Interests cannot be automatically derived from a given class position; they are constructed by processes that always entail normative considerations. For Lockwood, therefore, Marx’s action schema does not seriously take into account that class interests are shaped not only by the relations of production and/or the work situation. In the workers’ ‘definition of the situation’, extra-work and extra-class societal values and norms may, or rather do, play a crucial role.

Another major conclusion Lockwood derives from the Durkheim–Marx comparison is that the tension (or lack of it) between de facto power relations and de jure status is a fundamental factor for understanding social order and disorder in capitalist societies. In that sense, investigations of social change must seriously consider both Durkheim’s theorization of status hierarchies and Marx’s conceptualization of class/power.

Seeing Things Differently

Lockwood has not tried to construct a metatheory to bring together the status and power approaches, just as in his earlier work he avoided any theoretical synthesis of the social- and system-integration perspectives. However, what is crucial for empirical research is that his theoretical distinctions do clearly demonstrate the necessity of studying social stability and change in both a Durkheimian and Marxist manner, in terms of both status hierarchies and power struggles over the control of scarce resources.

Similarly, his seminal social/system-integration dichotomy encourages the study of changing social systems (micro, meso or macro) from both the systemic/functionalist perspective and that of action/agency. Any one-sided emphasis on system to the exclusion of social integration leads to teleological explanations that portray ‘society’ as a mysterious entity pulling all the strings behind the actors’ backs. As Lockwood has shown, one finds such teleological explanations not only in Parsonian functionalism, but also in those Marxist theorists who underemphasize the voluntaristic dimension of social life (for example the Althusserian school).

On the other hand, overemphasis of agency at the expense of systemic considerations – as seen in the various interpretative sociologies that developed spectacularly in the 1960s and 70s – takes us from reification to reductionism: where complex macrostructural developments are reduced to interpretative understandings and actors’ face-to-face interactions. Therefore, if an imbalance in favour of system integration leads to mechanistic/deterministic explanations of social order and disorder, an imbalance in favour of social integration leads to social myopia and to the elimination of crucial issues that cannot be fully accounted for by an exclusive focus on actors’ orientations and definitions of the social world.\textsuperscript{15}
I do not think it an exaggeration to claim that the neglect of the social/system-integration balance has been at the root of a lot of confusion and numerous false starts and sterile debates in the social sciences. The same can be said about more recent efforts to ‘transcend’ the social/system-integration divide. So Elias’s figurational sociology, Giddens’ structuration theory or Bourdieu’s theory of social practice are all part of the repeated attempts to go beyond the agency–system or the ‘subjectivist’–‘objectivist’ divide in the social sciences – attempts that have invariably been unsuccessful, however. Their supposed transcendence has always been rhetorical/decorative rather than substantive. They have ostensibly rejected Lockwood’s more conventional way of conceptualizing the agency–system distinction, while in fact reintroducing it in a different terminological guise.

Giddens, for instance, rejects functionalism and the agency–system distinction, but brings in both by the back door, so to speak, via his distinction between institutional analysis (which is exactly what Lockwood means by the system-integration approach) and analysis in terms of strategic conduct (Lockwood’s social-integration perspective). In similar fashion, Bourdieu claims that his habitus concept transcends the objectivist–subjectivist divide, but reinstates exactly the same divide when he talks about objective locations and actors’ stances or postures vis-à-vis such locations (actors’ prise de position).

Equally unsuccessful are postmodern/post-structuralist attempts, not to transcend but simply to abolish the agency–system distinction. For postmodernists, proceeding to ‘decentre’ the subject, or focusing on discourses or practices rather than actors, the agency–system distinction is at best superfluous, and at worst leads to essentialist
accounts of the social world. This postmodernist/post-structuralist position, however, makes one view the social world reductively, as a chain of discursive practices (Foucault), or texts (Derrida) or signifiers (Baudrillard). From this perspective, there is no possibility of showing how practices are hierarchized and why, for instance, certain practices have greater transformational impact than others. In view of this limitation, there is a tendency in postmodern analyses to explain complex macro-phenomena simplistically in terms of signs, symbols or such ‘disembodied’ notions as desire, power/knowledge and so on.

A Recent Confusion about Social and System Integration: Habermas

If Giddens and Bourdieu have tried to transcend the social and system-integration distinction, and postmodern theorists to abolish it, Habermas accepts its utility but incorporates it with a second distinction that ultimately cancels the heuristic utility of Lockwood’s initial formulation.

More specifically, Habermas accepts Lockwood’s position that one should look at social systems from both an agency (‘internalist’ in Habermas’s terminology) and a systemic (‘externalist’) perspective; but in his later work, when Habermas uses the social/system-integration distinction, he conflates the externalist/internalist perspective with that of his system/life-world. For Habermas, in highly differentiated modern societies, system refers to the economic and political institutional spheres that are coordinated via the systemic media of money and power. Life-world, on the other hand (which Habermas identifies with social integration), refers to such institutional spheres as the family, religion, the public domain and so on, which are supposed to be integrated via non-systemic media (that is, via normative and/or communicative modes of coordination).

When Habermas conflates Lockwood’s methodological distinction (agency/internalist–systemic/externalist) with a substantive distinction between institutional spheres coordinated via systemic and non-systemic media, he creates confusion and counters the heuristic utility of Lockwood’s initial distinction. This diverts attention from the obvious fact that one can view all social systems from an internalist and externalist perspective – whether they are embedded in the economic and political spheres (Habermas’s system), or in a society’s social and cultural institutional spheres.

The Real Weakness in Lockwood’s Conception of Social/System-integration and a Way Forward

The fact that Lockwood’s social/system-integration distinction has stood the test of time so well does not, of course, mean it has no weaknesses. I think that the major one lies in the author’s attempt to show that contradictions between systemic parts in Marxism are ‘qualitatively’ (one could say, ontologically) different from systemic contradictions in Parsonian functionalism on a material–normative continuum. To argue, as Lockwood does, that Marxist analysis, unlike normative-functionalist analysis, focuses on contradictions between a material, non-normative base (forces of production, that is, technology in the broad sense of the term) and a core institutional complex (institution of private
ownership) implies that technology or certain aspects of the economy are not normatively regulated. This necessarily leads to a type of essentialism that is unacceptable to those who think that the social is symbolically constructed and that institutional spheres (economic, political, religious and so on) entail normative regulation.

A way out of this difficulty is for Lockwood to drop the material/normative or material/institutional distinction because in reality they are always intertwined. Social practices involve both. If we want to investigate the nature of systemic contradictions between the forces of production and the relations of production, then we would do better to accept that both aspects of this systemic incompatibility involve both material and normative, institutional elements. It would be better to work instead a distinction between more and less durable institutional arrangements. Marx's contradiction between forces and relations of production can then more fruitfully be conceptualized as a contradiction between more durable, hard-to-change technological structures and the more malleable institutions of private ownership of the means of production. Of course, whether the latter are more malleable than the former is an empirical question, and the degree of durability of the forces and of the relations of production can vary from one case to the next. But to replace 'materiality' with 'durability' renders the whole issue less metaphysical, more amenable to empirical research.

To conclude, Lockwood’s more substantive writings on the changing class structure of modern societies, his crucial conceptualization of the social/system-integration perspectives, and his more recent theoretical analysis of the Marxist and Durkheimian sociological legacies have generated an important corpus of works attempting to criticize, reformulate or reject the author’s basic insights into the mechanisms of social stability and change in modernity. The fact that the debate about the agency–system distinction is still alive, and the fact that, after a rush to transcend or simply reject the subjective/objective divide in the social sciences, this fundamental distinction is still a major organizing principle and a fruitful heuristic device in ongoing research, clearly shows the importance of Lockwood's contribution.

I believe his work will become even more central in the years to come – given the sobering-up process that is gaining strength in both the UK and the USA. This consists of a growing realization that, instead of trying to transcend or abolish the agency–system divide, it might be more fruitful to try, rather more modestly, to build conceptual bridges facilitating two-way communication between the interpretative and systemic/functionalist sociologies.

Further Reading


Lockwood, D. (1965) ‘Some remarks on the social system’, British Journal of Sociology, 7: 134–46. This is most usefully read alongside Lockwood’s 1964 article on social and system integration, see below.


Notes

9. Ibid. Lockwood, p. 244.
15. For a further development of these points and their linkages with the social/system-integration distinction, see N. Mouzelis, *Back to Sociological Theory*, London: Macmillan – now

19. See Mouzelis, op. cit. 1995, Ch. 6. It might be useful to note here that Giddens has not only unnecessarily substituted the distinction between institutional analysis and analysis in terms of strategic conduct for the social/system-integration distinction; he has also used the social/system-integration dichotomy as a substitute for the micro–macro-integration dichotomy, so making the confusion even worse. On this point, see N. Mouzelis, ‘Restructuring structuration theory’, *Sociological Review*, 37(4) (1989), 617–35.

21. For a critique of poststructuralism along such lines, see N. Mouzelis, op. cit. 1995, Ch. 3.
25. For an application of the social/system-integration distinction to the analysis of political transformations in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Greece, see N. Mouzelis, *Post-Marxist Alternatives*, Basingstoke: Macmillan – now Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), Ch. 4.