

What's Still Valid in Marxist Thought?

Stephen K. Sanderson

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Although Marxian theory was essentially dead among Western sociologists throughout much of the twentieth century, it came to be revived in Western Europe and North America in the 1960s and 1970s. A variety of different versions were created, some of which were quite critical of other versions.

Basic Principles of Marxian Theory

What are the central notions of Marxian theory, ideas that all or virtually all Marxists share? To my mind, they are the following:

1. *Materialism*: Nearly all Marxists see themselves as materialists, but there are some significant variations. In the 1970s and 1980s the idea became popular that Marx was not an “economic determinist,” and that he gave a great deal of freedom of the superstructure to influence the base. Some so-called Marxists argued that Marx saw a two-way rather than a one-way relationship between base and superstructure. A few even gave up materialism for idealism, while still thinking of themselves as Marxists. I myself, however, regard Marx as a strong materialist (even an “economic determinist,” if you like), and regard abandonment of this doctrine in favor of a two-way concept or any form of idealism as eviscerating the theoretical core of Marxism and thus killing it.
2. *Dialectics*: Nearly all scholars calling themselves Marxists accept this, and many Marxists seem to see it as an almost sacred concept.
3. *Class struggle*: All Marxists accept this as an essential tool for analyzing modern capitalist societies, and all class-divided precapitalist societies.
4. *The “evils of capitalism”*: Virtually all Marxists, if not all, blame the capitalist class and its profit motive for all or at least most of the problems and difficulties of modern capitalist society.
5. *The superiority of socialism*: Virtually all Marxists agree that socialism – not necessarily any actually existing socialism, but at least some future form of socialism – will overcome most of the limitations of capitalism.
6. *The doctrine of the unity of theory and practice*: Virtually all Marxists regard intellectual life and political life as inseparable, and believe that political practice is absolutely essential. “Ideas for the sake of ideas” is thus unacceptable. Moreover, for most Marxists practice is to guide theory rather than the other way around.

We need to recognize, however, that contemporary Marxist theory is extraordinarily diversified, and so much so that Immanuel Wallerstein barely exaggerates when he says that we live in “the era of a thousand Marxisms.” Perhaps the three most important versions of neo-Marxian theory since the 1960s are structural Marxism, analytic or rational choice Marxism, and world-system theory. Structural Marxism fused basic Marxian principles with Lévi-Straussian structuralism, primarily under the direction of the French philosopher Louis Althusser. What was created was an extremely rigid form of Marxism in which the capitalist system had its own logic utterly apart from acting individuals. Structural Marxism collapsed and was more or less abandoned after a relatively short life. In sociology some of the most important

structural Marxists have been Nicos Poulantzas and Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst. Two of the most prominent structural Marxists within anthropology have been Maurice Godelier (1975, 1977, 1978) and Jonathan Friedman (1974).

Analytic Marxism is sometimes called rational choice Marxism, but it may be more appropriate to view the latter as a subtype of the former (Carver and Thomas, 1995). Rational choice Marxism represents an attempt to insert the principles of rational choice theory, especially methodological individualism, into Marxism. In my view it is one of the most promising of the current Marxisms. It is highly active and growing.

To show how diverse contemporary Marxism can be, some Marxists have actually produced an idealist version of Marxism, what might be called “cultural Marxism.” I have in mind E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* and Eugene Genovese idealist interpretations of American slavery.

Critical Assessment

Before considering and evaluating a number of specific neo-Marxian theories, let us see what can be made of Marxism and neo-Marxism as a whole.

1. Because of its insistence that theory must be devoted to and informed by politics, it takes on a serious political bias. Let's face it: Marxists see what they want to see, and their intellectual conclusions are tremendously guided by this political bias. My view is an old-fashioned one: Social scientists should try to be as “objective” and “value-neutral” as possible, and politics should be informed by theory, not the other way around.
2. Marxism goes much too far in laying the blame for the many problems of modern capitalist society on the capitalist class and its incessant search for profits. Certainly some of the problems of modern society have their roots in the capitalistic profit motive, but the Marxists greatly overdo it in their emphasis on class domination. Capitalism certainly has some things to answer for, but it has also had some notable successes too, and Marxists are inclined to sweep these under the rug. Anthony Giddens mentions two in particular: creating a very high level of general affluence, and the establishment of liberal democracy. These themselves have their limitations, but their positive side cannot be overlooked.
3. Then there is the horrendous failure of Marx’s predictions. Workers have not become more impoverished, but quite the contrary. The working class within capitalism is not revolutionary at all. Socialism has never emerged in the most advanced capitalist societies, but, on the contrary, in the most backward agrarian regions of the world, and it was the peasantry rather than the proletariat that was the revolutionary class. And since the late 1980s we are living in a world that is experiencing the “transition from socialism back to capitalism,” the very opposite of what Marx predicted.
4. Marxists have a very strong tendency to romanticize the working class – seeing in it everything that is good and liberating – and socialism as an economic system. But actually existing forms of socialist society have been for the most part a disaster, and these forms give little reason for optimism about any future form of socialism. Indeed, looking at what is happening in Russia and Eastern Europe, China, Cuba,

etc. today, what rational and objective person could any longer be a Marxist in a political sense? Even in the Third World, socialist societies have shown little developmental potential, and less-developed capitalist societies such as Taiwan and South Korea have performed much better. Capitalism has shown much more resilience than Marx ever anticipated, and it has solved many of its earlier problems. It has far more life in it than Marx ever imagined.

5. One of the things that has gotten Marxism into one difficulty after another is its unrealistic conception of human nature. Despite its conflict orientation, it assumes that conflict is socially created rather than natural. Humans are nonegoistic beings who are simply shaped by the demands of their society. What we need is a conflict theory that abandons this nonegoistic assumption in favor of one emphasizing that all humans everywhere naturally pursue their self-interest. We can get there partially with Weber, and cultural materialism and sociobiology, especially the latter, will take us further in this egoistic direction. The Marxist-oriented philosopher Peter Singer stresses the need for Marxists to shed their antipathy toward Darwin – their irrational fear of biology – and unite Marxism with Darwinism: “It is time to recognise that the way in which the mode of production influences our ideas, our politics, and our consciousness is through the specific features of our biological inheritance.”
6. The Marxian theory of history, as an evolutionary scheme, is very seriously, if not fatally, flawed. Its stages of evolutionary development are seriously misidentified, and it greatly oversimplifies history by seeing it as the outcome of a dialectic of class struggle. Important factors, such as population growth and environmental depletion, are ignored as causal agents in historical change. One can find a much more adequate account of social evolution in the work of such modern anthropologists as Marvin Harris (1977), and, if I may be bold enough to say so, in my own *Social Transformations*.
7. Anthony Giddens points out that there are three major forms of social conflict that are analyzed poorly by Marxism: *conflict between states*, *ethnic conflict*, and *conflict between the sexes*. Marx had an incredibly naïve, almost childlike, view of the state as simply (or at least largely) the agent of the dominant class. To a substantial extent it is, but it is much more than that. The state did not wither away under socialism, but in fact was strengthened. And Marx did not give any serious consideration to the international military role of states in the world order. With respect to ethnicity, ethnic conflict emerged far earlier than capitalism and is rampant all over the world, including in actually existing socialist societies. Although ethnic conflict may be significantly exacerbated by economic forces, there is more to it than that. And one of the modern expressions of ethnicity, nationalism, was never appreciated by Marx. With respect to gender conflict, male domination is far older than capitalism, and many social scientists regard it as a true human universal. Marxist theories of gender are some of the worst theories ever developed, what with their simplistic notion that the exploitation of women is rooted in class exploitation. In fact, women have fared far better under capitalism than under most types of precapitalist society.

And yet it would be a grave mistake to be dismissive of Marxian theory, its serious deficiencies notwithstanding. Marxism has achieved a number of extremely important insights. Its conflict orientation is clearly moving us in the right direction.

Class domination is a reality in modern capitalism, and in many precapitalist societies, and states are very significantly controlled by capitalists. Neo-Marxian theories such as Wallerstein's world-system theory give much insight into the inequalities of the world economic order, despite its limitations. And much of Marxism's theoretical foundation is in general right – the material base does largely shape the rest of society. Marxism's materialist orientation needs to be revised and built upon, but it has pointed us in the right direction. And it is no doubt the case that capital accumulation is the driving engine of capitalist development and thus of the overall historical trajectory of modern capitalist society, indeed of the modern world as a whole.

We can improve on many of the deficiencies of Marxism by turning to two great thinkers, Weber and Darwin. First, let's look at Weber and the similarities and differences between Weber and Marx.

Weber and Marx

The fundamental differences between Marxian and Weberian conflict theory can be summarized in terms of the following points:

1. *Methodological individualism vs. holism*: Nearly everyone agrees that Weber was a methodological individualist, and most would agree that Marx was a holist. Consider, for example, the following passages from the work of each. In the first volume of *Economy and Society* Weber says that “for sociological purposes there is no such thing as a collective personality which ‘acts.’ When reference is made in a sociological context to a state, a nation, a corporation, a family, or an army corps, or to similar collectivities, what is meant is, on the contrary, *only* a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons.” This is an obvious warning that sociological concepts should not be reified. By contrast, in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx takes a classically holist view: “Here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.” I think it is fair to say that most contemporary Weberians and most contemporary Marxists are true to these methodological dicta. In my view, the methodological individualism of Weberian theory is an excellent antidote to the reifications engaged in by most, but certainly not all, Marxists.

2. *The nature of social stratification*: Marxians and Weberians differ in at least four basic ways with respect to the stratified structures of society: (a) the Marxists hold a unidimensional view of stratification whereby class is the central phenomenon, whereas the Weberians hold a multidimensional view in which two other dimensions of stratification, status groups and parties, are regarded as just as important as, and sometimes more important than, class; (b) Marxists conceptualize class as an objective structure of social relations; Weberians, on the other hand, conceptualize it from the perspective of individual social action; (c) for Marxists, class relations and class conflict are all about exploitation, and political and ideological domination are largely mechanisms for achieving exploitation; however, for Weberians domination is regarded

as an end in itself quite apart from the aim of exploitation; (d) for Marxists, classes emerge from relations of production, but for Weberians classes emerge primarily from market relations.

Concerning the nature of stratification, I side with the Weberians regarding the multidimensionality of stratification and class as a structure of individual action. With regard to the relationship between exploitation and political and ideological domination I think that each side is partially right: Political and ideological domination are often means to secure exploitation and to rationalize it, but they can often be sought in their own right. Concerning whether classes arise from production or the market, again I think that each side is partially right.

3. Class struggle and other forms of struggle: Just as class is the central sociological variable for Marxism, the Marxian position holds that class struggle is the most fundamental form of struggle and that it underlies all other forms of struggle. This position has been called, mostly by critics of Marxism, “class reductionism.” Thus, in feudal societies, for example, the class struggle between landlords and peasants underlay struggles that went on in the areas of the state, religion, etc. In capitalist societies, it is the class struggle between capitalists and workers that forms the foundation for the existence of other forms of struggle, such as political, racial, religious, or ideological struggle. Weberians argue that Marxian class reductionism is an overstatement and oversimplification. They claim that class struggle, while an important form of struggle in many societies, is not necessarily the most important form of struggle, nor is it necessarily the foundation for other forms of struggle. For contemporary Weberian conflict theorists, struggles in the areas of politics, ethnicity, or religion are just as important as, and in some instances more important than, class struggles, and these other forms of struggle have to be explained in their own right, not just by relating them to class struggle. Nonclass forms of struggle have a high degree of autonomy from class struggle.

I take a halfway position regarding the Marxian and Weberian views of class struggle and its relation to other forms of struggle. I would argue that often other forms of struggle are rooted in class struggle, but perhaps just as often these other forms of struggle have their own logic quite apart from class struggle. Class struggle is more important than the Weberians claim, but less important than the Marxists claim. The whole issue has to be treated as an empirical question and examined on a case-by-case basis.

4. The inevitability of conflict, domination, and inequality: Despite their hostility to capitalism, Marxists are highly optimistic – even today after the upheavals in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991 – that socialism is capable of eliminating the capitalist class struggle and ending fundamental social inequalities. There is nothing inevitable about class antagonisms and the other forms of antagonism that flow from it. The Weberians, by contrast, are much more pessimistic, arguing that social conflict is an inevitable and thus permanent feature of human societies. Try as you might, you cannot get rid of basic social conflict. If you rid society of one type, others will remain and might even intensify. Weber is famous for his argument against the Marxists that socialism would intensify the power of the state rather than lead to its withering away, and thus would increase the conflict between the state and the citizenry. Here is the way that Weber phrases his argument: “The struggle, often latent, which takes place between human individuals or social types, for advantages and for survival, .

. . . will be called 'selection.' . . . It is only in the sense of 'selection' that it seems, according to our experience, that conflict is empirically inevitable, and it is furthermore only in the sense of *biological* selection that it is inevitable in principle. Selection is inevitable because apparently no way can be worked out of eliminating it completely. Even the most strictly pacific order can eliminate means of conflict and the objects of and impulses to conflict only partially. Other modes of conflict would come to the fore, possibly in processes of open competition. But even on the utopian assumption that all competition were completely eliminated, conditions would still lead to a latent process of selection, biological or social, which would favor the types best adapted to the conditions, whether their relevant qualities were mainly determined by heredity or environment."

This cynical, hardheaded realism of Weberian conflict theory is an extremely positive attribute. This is where Weberian theory has it all over Marxism. For Weberians, society is fundamentally a struggle for power that is inevitable and unending. Weberianism has a much more realistic view of the nature of the state, of the permanence of conflict and inequality, and thus of the deeper motives that impel human behavior. However, Weberians seem to stop short on this whole matter. The issue I am speaking of is the fundamental question of human nature. Did Weber have a theory of human nature, if only implicitly? The preceding quote suggests that he did, the language being almost Darwinian. Be that as it may, it must be pointed out that the contemporary Weberian Randall Collins explicitly disavows the need for any theory of human nature. Moreover, he has said the following: "For conflict theory, the basic insight is that human beings are sociable but highly conflict prone animals. Why is there conflict? Above all else, there is conflict because violent coercion is always a potential resource, and it is a zero-sum sort. *This does not imply anything about the inherence of drives to dominate.*" But why not such drives? If conflict is everywhere, it would seem obvious that this must have something to do with the kind of animal humans are. Collins only refuses to take that step because he has been inoculated against any sort of biological argument during his training and tenure as a sociologist and conditioned to accept Durkheim's dictum that social facts can only be explained in terms of other social facts. The profound irony is that Collins's own theory is for the most part highly consistent with, and subsumable within, Darwinian principles. Collins does not seem to realize that his version of Weberian conflict theory, as it now stands, is profoundly incomplete and lacks "first principles." If humans are conflict prone, it is essential to explain why. Otherwise, one's theoretical perspective is oddly suspended in mid-air without anything to ground it.

5. *The nature and role of the state:* Marx himself, and the majority of Marxists, have by and large viewed the state in largely class reductionist terms, i.e., as the political agent of the ruling class (although in recent decades this position has been modified considerably by some Marxists, especially by Poulantzas and other structural Marxists, so that the state has more autonomy). Weberians think that the state is usually tied to the ruling class to some extent, but that any sort of class reductionism is a great oversimplification. Weberians hold that the state is a force in its own right, and that the personnel of the state have their own interests. These interests are not reducible to the interests of the dominant class, and may often conflict with those interests. For Weberians, the state is another conflict group, another group seeking domination. Weberians also give special emphasis to the international role of states, especially their

military roles. States not only seek domination of their own subject populations, but carry out incessant diplomatic and military relations with other states and often seek to dominate them as well. For Weberians, the international states system and geopolitics are due major consideration.

Concerning this question, I once again take a position halfway between the Weberians and the Marxists. There is considerable evidence showing that, in both capitalist and precapitalist societies, the dominant economic class exerts a great deal of influence on the actions of the state. On the other hand, the Weberians are right when they emphasize that the state is often autonomous and its interests often conflict with those of the dominant economic class. As in the case of the relation between class struggle and other forms of struggle, the Marxian view goes a little too far in one direction and the Weberian view a little too far in the other.

6. The role of ideas in history: Marx argued that history was guided by a dialectical process in which changes in the forces and relations of production were fundamental and led to changes in the superstructure, including consciousness or ideas. Weber thought that the Marxian model in this regard was only partially correct. Marxian materialism, he said, was only a half-truth. Ideas, Weber argued, could be and often were causal forces in their own right. Weber did not claim that the proper corrective to the one-sidedness of Marxian materialism was an equally one-sided idealism, but rather that one should be open to both points of view. In fact, Weber argued for a much more multidimensional view of causation than Marx, arguing that ideas, economics, politics, etc., could all mutually determine a given social outcome. The idea of multidimensionality was a critical one for Weber.

However, I disagree with the Weberian compromise on the materialism/idealism debate. For at least 25 years now I have vigorously defended a materialist view of human society. Ideas may sometimes be important, but I think they pale in significance in comparison with material forces. I do not accept, for example, Weber's argument about the role of the Protestant ethic in the rise of capitalism, nor do I agree with his more general sociological argument about the relationship between types of religious orientation and economic systems. Just as strong a case can be made for the reverse argument – that it was the rise of capitalism that was responsible for the spread of Protestantism throughout the Western world, if not for the origins of Protestant ideas themselves. Collins has vigorously defended the Protestant ethic thesis, and has tried to extend the logic of this sort of argument by claiming that Buddhist monasteries in Japan during the early centuries of the second millennium AD contributed in a very significant way to the development of Japanese capitalism. He claims that the significance of the monasteries is that they were centers of vigorous economic activity and that they helped provide the discipline needed for a healthy capitalist economy. But Collins fails to provide any argument or evidence to show how the economic activity of the monasteries got beyond itself and came to be transferred to the larger society. I have always been puzzled by claims for the impact of religious ideas on economic behavior, which seem to me intuitively implausible. Frankly, I am at a loss to understand why they have been proposed at all.

7. Capitalism vs. socialism: Closely related to this point is the whole issue of capitalism vs. socialism as desirable economic systems. Marx, of course, was intensely hostile to capitalism and thought that its eradication would greatly ease the plight of workers. Weber, by contrast, was much more pessimistic about the possibilities

inherent in socialism. As Mommsen (1985:254) has noted, “Weber did not hide the defects of capitalism, yet he was unable to imagine any workable alternative. . . . Despite all of capitalism’s shortcomings, he preferred it to every conceivable form of socialist economy. He was convinced that socialists, insofar as they wished to be serious about realizing their moral principles, would either have to accept considerable regression in both technology and civilization or else be compelled to create gigantic bureaucracies in the face of which the people, including the workers, would be unable to accomplish anything. Compared to any form of socialism, capitalism appeared to offer far better conditions for the survival of free societies in the age of bureaucracy.”

Marxism has failed terribly in its prediction of the collapse of capitalism and the transition to a socialist society. In the twentieth century state socialism has emerged in various parts of the world, but mostly in very underdeveloped societies, not, as Marx predicted, in the most advanced capitalist societies. Moreover, since 1989 we have been witnessing the reverse trend: the transition back to capitalism from socialism. In view of these failures, and of organizational and technological changes in the last century, Weber’s argument that increasing rationalization is the main trend of modern history seems much more plausible. Capitalism has a lot to answer for, but socialism so far has been an overwhelming failure, and on most criteria of human well-being one would choose capitalism comes out the winner. The Weberian view that we should stick with capitalism and try to improve it seems the clear victor on this count at this point in history.

The Need for Darwin

Weber has it all over Marx in seeing conflict as an inevitable feature of human society. But Weber could not, and contemporary Weberians like Randall Collins seemingly cannot, account for conflict. If humans are conflict-prone organisms, then why are they. Here is where we need to go beyond both Marx and Weber to Darwin. I have tried to do this by building what I have called Darwinian conflict theory. In Point #5 above I speak of the need to establish first principles. Here are my first principles:

Principles Concerning the Deep Wellsprings of Human Action

1. Like all other species, humans are organisms that have been built by millions of years of biological evolution, both in their anatomy & physiology and in their behavioral predispositions. This means that theories of social life must take into consideration the basic features of human nature that are the products of human evolution.
2. The resources that humans struggle for, which allow them to survive and prosper, are in short supply. This means that humans are caught up in a struggle for survival and reproduction with their fellow humans. This struggle is inevitable and unceasing.
3. In the struggle for survival and reproduction, humans give overwhelming priority to their own selfish interests and to those of their kin, especially their close kin.
4. Human social life is the complex product of this ceaseless struggle for survival and reproduction.

5. Humans have evolved strong behavioral predispositions that facilitate their success in the struggle for survival and reproduction. The most important of these predispositions are:
 - Humans are highly sexed and are oriented mostly toward heterosexual sex. This predisposition has evolved because it is necessary for the promotion of humans' reproductive interests, i.e., their inclusive fitness. Males compete for females and for sex, and females compete for males as resource providers. Humans do these things in order to promote their reproductive success.
 - Humans are strongly predisposed to perform effective parental behavior, and the female desire to nurture is stronger than the male desire. Effective parental behavior has evolved because it promotes reproductive success in a species like humans. The family as a social institution rests on a natural foundation.
 - Humans are naturally competitive and highly predisposed toward status competition. Status competition is ultimately oriented toward the securing of resources, which promotes reproductive success. Because of sexual selection, the predisposition toward status competition is greater in males than in females.
 - Because of the natural competition for resources, humans are economic animals. They are strongly predisposed toward achieving economic satisfaction and well-being, an achievement that promotes reproductive success.
 - In their pursuit of resources and closely related activities, humans, like other species, have evolved to maximize efficiency. Other things being equal, they prefer to carry out activities by minimizing the amount of time and energy they devote to these activities. A Law of Least Effort governs human behavior, especially those forms of behavior that individuals find burdensome or at least not rewarding in and of themselves. The Law of Least Effort places a major limit on the behavior of humans everywhere; much behavior can only be explained satisfactorily by taking it into account.
6. None of the tendencies identified above are rigid. Rather, they are behavioral *predispositions* that move along certain lines rather than others but that interact in various ways with the total physical and sociocultural environment. The behavioral predispositions tend to win out in the long run, but they can be diminished or even negated by certain environmental arrangements. At the same time, other environments can amplify these tendencies, pushing them to increasingly higher levels.
7. From the above it follows that humans' most important interests and concerns are reproductive, economic, and political. Political life is primarily a struggle to acquire and defend economic resources, and economic life is primarily a matter of using resources to promote reproductive success. However, at the experiential level, individuals have no conscious recognition that their behaviors are driven by these motives. People often experience economic and political behaviors as valuable in themselves and are often highly motivated to continue and elaborate such behaviors in their own right.
8. Many, probably most, of the features of human social life are the adaptive consequences of people struggling to satisfy their interests. The following provisos concerning the notion of adaptation are in effect.
 - Adaptation must be sharply distinguished from its corollary, adaptedness. Adaptation is the process whereby individuals originate (or inherit or borrow)

social forms that are devoted to serving their interests and fulfilling their needs and wants (it refers to the origin or persistence of a social form). Adaptedness, on the other hand, involves the extent to which a social form actually benefits the individuals who originated (inherited, borrowed) it. Adaptedness, in other words, refers to the consequences of a social form that originally arose as an adaptation.

- Although adaptations frequently lead to adaptedness, there are numerous instances in which this is not the case. Although adaptations must logically lead to adaptedness (or at least the perception of adaptedness) in the short run (otherwise they could not exist as adaptations), in the longer run this adaptedness may disappear and even lapse into maladaptedness. Individuals create and re-create society through intentional actions, but the consequences of such actions are often very different from what the intenders intended.
- The extent to which adaptations lead to adaptedness varies greatly from one set of individuals and from one time period to another. The more complex a society, the more this rule of thumb applies. What is adaptive for some individuals and at some times may be maladaptive for other individuals and at other times.
- Adaptation is a process pertaining to individuals and not to units larger than the individual. Social groups and societies in and of themselves cannot be adaptational units – i.e., cannot be the units on which selection operates – because they cannot and do not exist apart from concrete flesh-and-blood individuals and because groups cannot have a critical trait of individuals, viz., consciousness and a brain. Although social groups may be said to have needs and wants, these needs and wants are ultimately only the needs and wants of their constituent members. Any social form that is said to be adaptive for any group or society as a whole is so only because it is adaptive for all (or nearly all) of that group's or society's constituent members. Any so-called adaptation at the level of a group or society is but a statistical aggregate of individual adaptations.
- Adaptation is not necessarily an optimizing process. Individuals often satisfice rather than optimize, i.e., they remain content with a satisfactory rather than an optimal way of meeting their needs and wants.

Principles of Group Relations

1. Individuals pursuing their interests are the core of social life. The pursuit of interests leads to both highly cooperative and highly conflictive social arrangements.
2. Many cooperative forms of behavior exist at the level of social groups or entire societies. Cooperative social relations exist because they are the relations that will best promote each individual's selfish interests, not because they promote the well-being of the group or society as a whole. The selection of cooperative social forms occurs at the level of the individual, not the group or society.
3. Cooperative forms of interaction are found most extensively among individuals who share reproductive interests in common, i.e., among kin and especially close kin. This is the basis for the family as a fundamental social institution.
4. Outside of kinship and family life, cooperative relations are most likely to be found among individuals who depend heavily on each other for the satisfaction of their basic interests.

5. When conflictive behavior will more satisfactorily promote individual interests, cooperative relations will decline in favor of conflictive relations.
6. People are unequally endowed to compete in the social struggle (i.e., some are bigger, more intelligent, more aggressive or ambitious, more clever, more deceitful, etc.), and as a result social domination and subordination often appear as basic features of social life.
7. Members of dominant groups benefit disproportionately from their social position, and frequently they are able to make use of subordinate individuals to advance their interests. Their use of these individuals frequently takes the form of economic exploitation or social exclusion.
8. Because they benefit from their situation, members of dominant groups are highly motivated to structure society so that their superior social position can be preserved or enhanced.
9. Social life is therefore disproportionately influenced by the interests and actions of the members of dominant groups.
10. The primary forms of social domination and subordination in human social life relate to gender, ethnicity, social class, and politics, although other forms of domination and subordination occur as well. These forms of domination and subordination are most basic because they stem directly from the deep wellsprings of human action.