Psychological Theories and Revolution
Material Factors as Drivers

Economic conditions ... first transformed the mass into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle ... this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests.

Karl Marx (1847)[1]

Revolution, in the narrow sense of the term is an acute struggle, and only in the course of the struggle and in its outcome is the real strength of all the interests, aspirations and potentialities displayed and fully revealed.

Vladimir Lenin (1906)[2]

Materialist conditions shape the psychological characteristics and experiences of collectives and individuals – this claim presents a major challenge to psychological science because on the surface it seems to place psychology as dependent on, and shaped by, material factors. But an alternative assessment of this claim leads to a different perspective, one that gives central place to the psychological interpretation of the material world, to how the world is subjectively understood. For example, Jane and John have just got married, own a car, and together they earn $75,000 a year. From a psychological perspective, the key question is: How do Jane and John feel about their situation? Do they feel well off, or do they compare themselves to couples who earn $175,000 a year and feel relatively deprived? Thus, on the one hand we might focus on the subjective interpretations made by Jane and John, but on the other hand the materialist perspective could argue that how Jane and John feel about their situation will be highly influenced by those who control resources and shape the ideologies and belief systems dominant in society. The materialist claim is that, ultimately, how Jane and John feel about their situation will be shaped by material conditions. This is in line with interpretations of revolutions

15

from economists and others, giving priority to macroeconomic features of revolutions.[3]

The materialist perspective in psychology that bears on revolutions, particularly as represented by realistic conflict theory, resource mobilization theory, the Five-Stage Model, and system justification theory, is directly or indirectly influenced by the Marxist tradition.[4] First, and most importantly, this tradition conceives of material conditions, and the struggles and conflicts people experience in their everyday lives, as eventually leading them to become conscious of different social classes, competing social class interests, and also of their own social class membership and identity. The recognition among workers that social classes exist and have competing interests, and that they themselves belong to a particular social class, eventually leads them to act as members of a class "for itself," in defense of their own social class interests.[5] In this way, the consciousness of workers, their understanding of the larger political world and their place within it, emerges through their practical everyday experiences within their material conditions.

It is through workers clashing with the capitalist class, the owners of the means of production, that they gradually become conscious of their collective interests as a distinct social class. Workers come to see themselves as having collective interests that are different from the collective interests of the capitalist class. Class consciousness emerges through repeated and increasingly serious clashes between social classes with competing interests, and in this way psychological experiences are shaped by material conditions.

Second, the Marxist tradition has influenced psychologists to give importance to, and to research, *false consciousness*, the lack of psychological awareness of one's own true social class membership and interests.[6] According to the Marxist tradition, the dominant ideology in society is shaped by the capitalist class. The explanations and justifications provided by all social classes, including the working class, stem from the ideology shaped by the capitalist class. The control of ideology by the capitalist class derives in large part from capitalist ownership of all major media and communications systems, including television, radio, electronic communications systems, newspapers, magazines, and film production, as well as social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. But this control also derives from the enormous influence of capitalists in the education system, for example through their influence on funding for training and research (the direction of twenty-first-century university research is shaped largely by research funding).[7]

The dominant ideology propagated by the capitalist class justifies the status quo, with its group-based inequalities, and it leads poor people (in particular) to ignore their own true social class membership and interests. In this way, the working class functions without experiencing and benefiting from class consciousness, and it acts in the interests of the capitalist class (the concept of false consciousness has also been used to explain the situation of women and other minorities, who can misperceive their own group membership and collective interests[8]). System justification theory and other theories in the materialist tradition are strongly influenced by these ideas.

The materialist perspective in psychology, particularly social dominance research and evolutionary psychology, is also strongly influenced by evolutionary theory (evolutionary psychology is the new term for sociobiology[9]). The focus in the social dominance theory approach is on surplus-producing societies and their group-based hierarchies, such as those based on (1) age, (2) sex, and (3) various constructed groups (such as ethnicity, social class, caste, and religion). The question is asked as to why these hierarchies are reproduced over time in different societies, so that consistently some groups enjoy greater status, power, and resources than other groups. However, proponents of social dominance theory take considerable pains to argue that they are not biological determinists, nor are they justifying group-based hierarchies as inevitable or natural. Social dominance theory is further discussed later in this chapter.

In the first section of this chapter, then, I further examine the perspective that psychological experiences arise out of material conditions. In the second section, I address the influence of evolutionary theory on materialist accounts of intergroup relations in psychological science. The common theme of all these perspectives is the proposition that material conditions shape psychological experiences.

Psychological Experiences Arise out of Material Conditions

The idea that material conditions shape psychological experiences might seem to pose a challenge to psychologists because at a superficial level this perspective seems to give a secondary role to psychological factors. However, as I explain in the following discussion, this perspective actually gives a central role to psychological factors and processes, but not as direct drivers of collective action.

We begin our discussion by assessing realistic conflict theory, which was largely developed by the highly innovative Turkish-American psychologist

Muzafer Sherif (1906–88).[10] Sherif's initial research[11] exploring this theory has inspired a solid body of scholarship by other researchers.[12] Sherif postulated that "functional relations between groups" determines inter-group relations,[13] including the psychological outlook of each group toward the other. Because people are motivated to maximize their rewards, they will cooperate with and be positively disposed toward outgroups who share their material interests, but will compete against and be negatively disposed toward outgroups who have opposing interests. The competitive or cooperative nature of relations between groups also has implications for the dynamics of behavior within groups, such as the kind of leadership that emerges within each group – a topic discussed further later in this chapter.

Sherif's conceptualization of intergroup relations has had far-reaching influence. For example, he conceived of intergroup relations as taking place when individuals who belong to one group individually or collectively interact with another group or its members "*in terms of their group identification.*"[14] This emphasis on subjective identification with a group influenced social identity theory, which has become the most influential psychological theory of intergroup relations in the twenty-first century,[15] as we will explore in Chapter 3. This emphasis on subjective identification is also influenced by the Marxist concept of false consciousness: In some situations, group members do not identify with their "ingroup," even though on objective criteria they belong to that group. An example is working-class individuals who fail to recognize that they are members of this social class and act in ways that work against the interests of their own social class (e.g., when poor people vote for political parties and leaders that adopt tax policies against the interests of the working class and in favor of the rich). Thus, psychological identification is given the highest import-ance by Sherif, even though his explanation is functional.

The primary empirical support for Sherif's realistic conflict theory account of intergroup relations initially came from field research con-ducted in 1949, 1953, and 1954 by him and his associates in the context of summer camps for boys. Sherif and his associates played the role of summer camp personnel. The boys who were selected to serve as participants were healthy and well-adjusted, and they were all similar in terms of age (eleven or twelve years old), sex (male), ethnicity (white), and religion (Protestant). This ensured that naturally existing differences between the boys did not influence the study outcomes.

The development of groups at the summer camp evolved in four stages. The boys did not know one another before arrival at the camp. First, during the stage of *friendship formation*, they became acquainted. Sherif

and his colleagues noted the friendship patterns that emerged between the boys. In the second stage of *group formation*, the boys were separated into two groups, with those who had made 'best friends' being placed into *different* groups. This was to ensure that friendship patterns would not explain the study outcomes (this was different in the 1954 "Robber's Cave" study, where the two groups of boys arrived at the summer camp in two separate buses and were kept apart, so they could first independently develop group culture before directly interacting with one another). Each group of boys carried out a series of activities, through which group norms, social roles, group leaders, nicknames, and the basics of a group culture and cohesion emerged. In the third stage of *intergroup competition*, the two groups were placed in direct competition with one another (by taking part in competitive games, such as tug-of-war and treasure hunt), in zero-sum situations where a victory for one group necessarily meant a loss for the other group. The groups were now competing for material rewards, as well as the prestige and status associated with winning group competitions.

Direct competition for scarce resources between the two groups of boys resulted in a number of psychological changes within each group. For example, attitudes toward the outgroup became highly negative and intergroup stereotypes hardened, so the outgroup were now accused of being "cheats" and "sneaks." This was despite former best friends being in the outgroup. Very importantly, the more aggressive boys rose in popularity and influence, so that a boy who had been labeled a "bully" before the intergroup conflict now gained a more positive status because his aggression was now seen as very useful against the outgroup. Less aggressive boys lost influence, as the main goal of each group became fighting against and defeating the outgroup. An attitude of "the ends justify the means" developed within each group, with the ends being victory against the outgroup.

Having created a context in which two groups engaged in direct and destructive intergroup conflict, the challenge for Sherif was to influence the two groups to once again become peaceful toward one another. He achieved this transformation by introducing *superordinate goals*, which are goals desired by both groups but not achievable by one group acting alone. A superordinate goal can only be achieved when both groups cooperate. For example, Sherif and his associates arranged for a truck bringing food to the summer camp to (supposedly) break down, so all the boys had to help pull the truck into the camp in order to gain access to food. In another situation, a water pipe (supposedly) broke, and the cooperation of all the boys was needed to restore the water supply. These

cooperative activities resulted in the development of positive intergroup attitudes and friendships.

The concept of superordinate goals also suggests ways in which revolutions can be prevented. In order to mobilize the working class to act to overthrow the capitalist class, revolutionaries need to focus working-class minds on how their group interests conflict with that of the capitalist class. But authorities can also adopt an opposite policy, focusing on the common interests of different social classes – including the rulers and the groups representing them. For example, superordinate goals can be introduced to bring labor unions and business company management together. This conflict reduction approach to applying superordinate goals was adopted soon after Sherif introduced the concept and continues today.[16] In domains such as global warming, there is an urgent need for humanity to adopt superordinate goals and pull together toward the same unifying goals.

Resource Mobilization and Revolutions

In his summer camp field studies of intergroup relations, Sherif and his associates possessed the resources (such as expertise, power, knowledge, and so on) to shape the relationships between the groups of boys, moving them to experience friendship, then conflict, then cooperation, through to the introduction of superordinate goals. The possession of resources is the starting point for resource mobilization theory, which proposes that those who control the resources, as Sherif did in the setting of his field research, are able to mobilize people to take collective action, for example against the ruling regime.[17] Like realistic conflict theory, resource mobilization theory ascribes high importance to psychological experiences, but gives higher priority to how these experiences can be shaped by those who control resources. From this perspective, revolutionaries must make people feel deprived, angry, unjustly treated, and ready to take risks to overthrow governments – but all of these feelings can be brought about through the effective mobilization of resources (as Sherif mobilized resources in the context of his studies). The highest priority, then, is given to resources and the question of who controls resources.

The claim of resource mobilization researchers is that there is always present the *potential* for people to feel relatively deprived, angry, and unjustly treated. For example, there is always the potential for mine workers, factory workers, construction workers, or any other groups of workers, to feel underpaid and overworked. After all, the company

management always receive larger salaries and better benefits. There is a strong potential for ordinary people to feel deprived and to be angry at the government. After all, government leaders invariably enjoy higher power, status, and material benefits than do ordinary people. Why is it that anti-government revolutions do not take place more often? What explains revolutions that do take place? According to resource mobilization theory, those who control resources are able to shape psychological feelings, such as relative deprivation, in order to manufacture and direct a social movement, involving a set of opinions and beliefs in a population "which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of society."[18]

In order to better understand the resource mobilization perspective, it is useful to consider how resource mobilization functions in the domain of consumer products. For example, consider how we come to believe we have a need to purchase certain products, such as a deodorant. When I first conducted international research in the 1980s, I traveled to low-income countries where the vast majority of people did not purchase or use deodorants. This was not a readily available product in many low-income countries. How is it that forty years later, many middle-class people in those same non-Western countries now consider deodorants as essential? What led to this new perceived "need"? Resource mobilization researchers argue that this need was created through varieties of advertisements produced by people with resources in order to *create a market* for a product and make profits. In a similar way, needs, feelings and other psychological experiences, such as deprivation and perceived injustice, can be influenced through communications campaigns, with the potential result being seen in mass mobilization and revolution.

Consider the example of the women's liberation movement in the post–World War II era, particularly from the 1960s. Were women in Western societies treated worse in 1960 than they were in 1860 or 1760? Obviously not on the basis of objective criteria, such as women's legal, political, and financial status: Women were better off in 1960 than in 1860 and 1760. Then why did the women's liberation movement not mobilize in the 1860s or the 1760s? One answer is that it was in the 1960s that the elite with control over resources in Western societies saw it as beneficial to their own interests to have women work outside the home in large numbers. This was the time of the Cold War, and the Soviet Union and its communist allies had incorporated women into their economies. The capitalist West needed to harness the full power of women in the workforce in order to defeat the Soviet empire. Resources were mobilized to dramatically expand the

participation of women in higher education and the larger workforce, with highly beneficial consequences for Western economies and the eventual economic defeat of the Soviet empire.

From a resource mobilization theory perspective, then, collective mobilization leading to revolution happens when resources are used to influence people to experience deprivation, injustice, and other psychological characteristics that lead to collective action. In the twenty-first-century context, new social media resources such as Twitter have become particularly important in mobilizing people to take collective action.[19] A study of digital activists and internet users leading up to the Tunisian Revolution in 2010–11 that toppled the dictator Ben Ali (1936–2019) showed the power of social media to achieve extensive mobilization among the mass population.[20] This study gave importance to "emotional mobilization" and the idea that people involved in social movements often are moved by emotions and irrational feelings. This is in contrast to researchers who adopt a purely rationalist interpretation of resource mobilization.[21]

Given that group-based inequalities and wealth concentration characterize major human societies,[22] and given the argument that it is through resource mobilization that collective movements come about, one conclusion is that revolutions only come about when they are backed by the small elite who own the major resources. But there are alternative interpretations because resources are conceived very broadly by resource mobilization researchers. In addition to material resources (e.g., financial and physical capital), there are human resources (e.g., leadership, expertise, skill sets, labor), moral resources (e.g., integrity and legitimacy, celebrity and sympathetic support), cultural resources (e.g., technical and tacit knowledge and skills about how to organize protests), and social-organizational resources (e.g., social networks and organizations, such as the Church and religious networks). Thus, even a group that is deprived of material resources and does not have the backing of the rich elite might be able to bring about mass mobilization against authorities by having access to other resources. For example, revolutionary movements in Poland in the 1980s and in Iran in the 1970s used the networks of the Catholic Church and Shi'a mosques, respectively, to mobilize the masses to overthrow the ruling regimes. In these cases, religious faith and religious networks represented valuable resources and played a central role in mass mobilization and revolution.

But if resources are of a wide variety and spread across groups, why are there so few revolutions? This question is taken up next, in a discussion of system justification theory.

System Justification and the Scarcity of Revolutions

Why are there so few revolutions against the ruling elite? Given that the modern era has been characterized by enormous group-based inequalities, and wealth is increasingly being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands,[23] why do the disadvantaged masses not revolt and overthrow governments more often? Indeed, why do the disadvantaged masses often endorse and support the status quo, which works against their own collective material interests? Why do the disadvantaged masses support politicians who lower taxes for the super-rich and for major corporations, but cut funds for programs that provide support for the poor? It is puzzling that the disadvantaged masses often show bias in favor of the outgroup (the rich) rather than the ingroup (the relatively poor); but why does this happen? What mechanisms explain why people support an outgroup that exploits them? The Marxist concept of false consciousness and the psychological theory of system justification which stems from the concept of false consciousness directly address this puzzle.[24]

In explaining "why so many members of disadvantaged groups reject egalitarian alternatives to the status quo,"[25] system justification theory builds on two highly influential psychological theories. The first is cognitive dissonance theory, which proposes that people are motivated to rationalize and justify their actions by resolving inconsistencies between their thoughts, feelings, and actions.[26] For example, Jane works extremely hard and for long hours, but her wages are tiny compared to the enormous salary and benefits of the CEO at the company where she works. How does she cope with the potential anxiety and unhappiness of working so hard, but having such a relatively very low income?[27] There are many different ways in which Jane could resolve this anxiety, but why is it that she resolves it in a way that leads her to accept her own situation? Why is it that Jane convinces herself that although her CEO is very rich, he has an unhappy family life, and that in comparison she is personally better off? Why does Jane *not deal* with her anxiety and dissatisfaction with her relatively tiny income by joining other employees in collective action against the company owners to force them to improve her salary and benefits? These questions are also at the heart of the *just-world hypothesis*, which proposes that people are motivated to see the world as just and fair (discussed further in Chapter 3).[28] But there are many different ways in which we could interpret the world as fair; why does this motivation to see the world as fair lead to the adoption of certain interpretations of events that favor the rich rather than the poor?

System justification theory argues that from among the many different ways Jane could interpret and explain her own situation, she is likely to be influenced by the ideologies that are dominant in her society. In capitalist societies, these ideologies are shaped by extremely wealthy people who influence the content of mass media, education, and the major forms of communications. The dominant ideologies result in interpretations of the world that tend to be victim-blaming rather than system-blaming – particularly when it comes to explaining the behavior of the poor and the disadvantaged. For example, if Mary and her husband David are both working very long hours, but still barely able to pay the rent and feed their three children, then explanations for this situation center on the characteristics of these two individuals (e.g., "Mary and David are low in skills, education, and talent") rather than the characteristics of the larger system (e.g., "The tax system and government policies should be used to make sure there is a far more financial support for people like Mary and David and their children, and a far smaller gap between the super-rich and the poor").

In response to the question, "Why are there so few revolutions?" system justification theory points to the power of the dominant legitimizing ideologies in society. On the one hand, these ideologies lead to victim-blaming in line with individualism and reductionism: Individuals are assumed to be the master of their own fate. In a self-help society, the rich deserve to be rich and the poor deserve to be poor. On the other hand, it is a just world, after all, because rewards are distributed in complex and balanced ways. The rich have more material resources, but the poor are happier.[29] There are all kinds of subtle ways that the poor are interpreted as being better off than the rich, and this is motivated by a need to justify the system and to "reduce any existential anxiety or fears about the dangers the world may hold for them."[30]

In addition to the motivation to justify the existing system, system justification theory proposes that people are motivated to justify their own personal thoughts and actions (ego justification) as well as the ingroup's ideas and actions (*group justification*). However, the dominant ideologies influence people to give priority to system justification, even when it is at the expense of ego justification and group justification. This perspective is very much in line with what I have described as looking at behavior "from societies to cells" (rather than "from cells to societies"), giving highest priority to macro rather than micro processes.[31] That is, the beliefs and actions of individuals are explained by looking "from societies to cells," from the legitimizing ideologies that justify the status quo to individual-level actions and processes.

Evolutionary Theory and Social Dominance Theory

Evolutionary approaches, including social dominance theory, have a special place in the materialist explanations of intergroup conflict and revolutions. These approaches are similar in that they are influenced by (their own interpretations of) Charles Darwin's (1809–82) theory of evolution.[32] However, they differ both in what they take to be the implications of Darwin's theory for human social behavior and in the extent to which they rely on genetic explanations of intergroup conflict and revolution. Even before the seminal genetics research of Gregor Mendel (1822–84) finally became known decades after his death, so-called social Darwinists, such as Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), were making claims about "racial differences" between human groups based on their interpretations of Darwinian evolution theory.[33] After the development of modern genetics research in the twentieth century, the field of sociobiology more directly took on the challenge of explaining human behavior through a genetic perspective.

The turn to the genetic level of explanation came through the influence of E. W. Wilson (1929–2021)[34] and Richard Dawkins,[35] but took a new twist in two ways. First, the focus turned to the reproductive consequences of social interactions.[36] Favoring and disfavoring others has implications for how genes spread, and individuals are motivated to spread their own genes – so they favor others who (they perceive to) have similar genes. Second, as a leading advocate of explaining social behavior through sociobiology argues, ethnic and racial sentiments are interpreted as "extensions of kinship sentiments. There exists a general behavioral predisposition, in our species as well as many others, to react favorably toward other organisms related to the actor. The closer the relationship is, the stronger the preferential behavior."[37]

This line of thinking led to the view that people are inclined to be more competitive, aggressive, and even destructive toward those who are genetically dissimilar to them, but more helpful and cooperative toward those who are genetically more similar to them. This is assumed to explain patterns of behavior in intergroup conflicts: that is, the tendency to maximize the spread of ingroup genes by killing men in the outgroup and stealing and/or raping outgroup women.[38] The implication is that revolutions will also be shaped by genetic similarity, so that both the rulers and those attempting to overthrow the government will become organized in such a way that those they are fighting alongside are genetically similar to them, and those they are fighting against are genetically dissimilar to them.

The genetic-based approach works best when tackling trends in revolutions that concern families and ethnic groups. That is, first when political leadership during and after the revolution is based on family ties and, second, when collective mobilization against a regime and governance after the revolution is in significant ways based on ethnic allegiances. There are some examples of the first of these phenomena, when power gained through revolution is kept and passed on within families. For example, Napoleon Bonaparte made his brothers Joseph, Jérôme, and Louis at different times kings of Spain, Westphalia, and Holland. There are many other examples of such nepotism in ruling families, but most examples do not qualify as involving revolutions – such as Saddam Hussein (1937–2006) and Muammar Gaddafi (1942–2011) governing Iraq and Libya through their families, giving enormous power to their own sons. Examples of rule through tribal allegiances are also numerous, such as the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin (1925–2003) and his loyalty to the Nubian tribe that helped him rule, and Bashar Assad ruling Syria through his reliance on the Shi'a minority (and Shi'a Iran, as a key external supporter). But, again, these cases do not qualify as involving revolutions – although the leaders in question have no hesitation in describing themselves as revolutionary.

On the surface, at least, examples of rule through tribal alliances do not work as well in the Western context because power is not tribal based in Western societies. However, in the sense that the American Revolution brought to power white males and excluded other ethnic groups (e.g., Black people, Chinese, and so on), the sociobiological perspective might be applied in the American case (but I do not include the American Revolution as one of the great revolutions, for reasons discussed in Chapter 1).

A shortcoming of the sociobiological and other genetic-based approaches to explaining revolutions is that certain assumptions are made concerning the relationship between phenotype and genotype. This is less relevant to family relationships because (very often, but not always) people with familial ties can correctly assume they have close genetic similarities. However, tribes and ethnic groups tend to number in the tens or even hundreds of thousands and millions, and it is impossible to personally know every other person in the tribe or ethnic group. In these cases, the assumption on the part of sociobiologists is that phenotype accurately reflects genotype: that someone who looks like a person in your tribe is genetically more similar to you than a person who looks like a member of another tribe. But the relationship between phenotype and

genotype is more complex, and phenotype is not always a good indicator of genotype.[39]

Social Dominance and Group-Based Hierarchies

Although the particular interpretations that social dominance theorists make of Darwinian evolution theory lead them to highlight group-based hierarchies and group dominance,[40] they are at pains to argue that they are not endorsing oppression, but paving the way for "morally driven intervention."[41] But what leads to particularly heated criticisms of the social dominance theory approach is the apparent claim that group-based inequalities are inevitable and are "genetically mandated," as one set of critics argue.[42] To point out that group-based inequalities are universal, as others have done (a topic I discuss later in this section), is to highlight aspects of the world that many revolutions have attempted to change and improve upon, but to argue that there is a genetic mandate for group-based hierarchies is to wave a large red flag in front of the egalitarian bull.

The most ardent criticisms of social dominance research probably revolve around the issue of gender. Social dominance theory argues that there is a human predisposition to form group-based social hierarchies, and hierarchies based on sex and age are common to all societies (including those that do not produce a surplus). That is, in all human societies males and older people hold more power and resources. This arrangement arises in part from temperament, implying it is inbuilt. Moreover, social dominance theory claims that the roots of male–female differences in behavior are differences in the best possible strategies available to females and males to pass on their genes, stemming from biological differences between the sexes.

The point of departure for this explanation of human gender differences is the ability of males to have far higher numbers of offspring than females. According to social dominance theory, this results in differences in the best possible strategies for females and males to pass on their genes: Females are more conservative in selecting partners because they have to invest more highly in fewer offspring; males adopt a strategy of having as many partners as possible, but investing minimally or not at all in each offspring. Out of this biologically determined behavioral difference, there arises the female preference for males with high status and resources and the male motivation to acquire and monopolize status and resources, resulting in "exploitative social, economic, and political systems in which patriarchy and arbitrary-set stratification among males are assortative: adaptive for those

who enjoy more social and economic resources and power, and maladaptive for those who do not."[43]

On the one hand, the social dominance theory position on sex differences can be severely criticized because it seems out of touch with twenty-first-century trends. Women now outperform men in many areas of higher education in most major societies, and have competitive earning power in the marketplace; they do not need to rely on males for resources.[44] Second, women and men use contraceptives to limit the number of their offspring, and cooperate to maximize the chance of their offspring becoming successful. Thus, parents now use bipartisan investment to maximize the success of a small number of children – a trend that contradicts the social dominance account. On the other hand, social dominance theory claims are in line with the continued dominance of men in leadership positions in business, politics, and other key areas related to power. For example, only about 5 percent of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies are women, and after close to three centuries a woman has yet to become US president – with important implications for policies.[45] Men still dominate political and economic leadership and material resources.

Thus, social dominance theory has correctly pointed to stable patterns of group-based inequalities across human societies, as well as individual differences in support for egalitarianism and group hierarchies.[46] This is the world of inequalities we inhabit. Revolutionaries and others can use this picture of the world characterized by inequalities as their point of departure, accepting the challenge to transform the world to achieve greater justice. However, critics do not accept the social dominance theory claim that these group-based inequalities, including those concerning females and males, are in part derived from temperament and inbuilt human characteristics. Skepticism toward such claims is in part based on a history of psychologists using so-called science to explain the status of females and males, including accounts of the supposed "lower intelligence of women" and their "inability to deal with the pressures of higher education." As the last half century has shown, after the contextual conditions were changed and women gained access to higher education, they excelled. It was not their supposed "lower intelligence" that held them back; it was the restrictions and hurdles places around them.[47]

Materialist Accounts and Linear versus Cyclical Models of Historical Change

The classic Marxist model of historical development assumes linear progression: Just as feudalism led to capitalism, capitalism will lead to

socialism and, eventually, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the classless society. These changes will be punctuated by revolutions, such as the proletariat revolutions that (are assumed to) eventually bring an end to capitalism. However, an alternative materialist model of historical development assumes *cyclical* rather than linear changes. The most influential alternative cyclical model was developed by Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), who is well known as an economist, but has also contributed important ideas in social and political psychology.[48] The alternative cyclical model is reflected in some psychological accounts, the most prominent example being Donald Taylor's (1943–2021) Five-Stage Model of intergroup relations.[49]

Pareto adopts a psychological approach to explaining historical development as a series of cyclical changes. He begins by noting that humans have a range of talents in each domain of activity. For example, there are highly talented lawyers who should receive an evaluation of 10 out of 10, but there are also out-and-out idiot lawyers who should receive a zero.[50] He gives the term "elite" to those individuals who have the highest level of talent in each field of activity. The non-elite consists of everyone else. But elite individuals can have children who are of non-elite quality, and non-elite individuals can have children who are of elite quality. In a perfectly open meritocratic society, elite individuals born to non-elite parents would still rise to the top and join the ruling elite, just as non-elite individuals born to elite parents would be allowed to drop down to lower levels in society and become part of the non-elite. However, in practice societies are not perfectly open and meritocratic because the rulers set up all kinds of barriers to prevent the rise of talented individuals born to non-elite parents, and to help non-elite individuals born to elite parents (i.e., their own children) to remain in power as part of the privileged elite.

Because talented individuals born to non-elite parents are blocked from rising to join the elite, after some time they come to feel deprivation and injustice, and they organize as a counter-elite and take action in support of their own interests. Having failed to move up as individuals, they organize as a collective. But they are a small group and not able to overthrow the ruling elite by themselves. The counter-elite recognize that in order to succeed, they must mobilize the non-elite masses and lead them to overthrow the ruling elite. Thus, the revolution is led by the counter-elite, but the muscle and power driving the revolution is provided by the non-elite masses.

In order to harness the power of the non-elite masses in support of the revolution, the counter-elite and in particular its leader adopt

a revolutionary rhetoric that is persuasive to the non-elite masses. Repeatedly in successful revolutionary movements, we find a special bond between a revolutionary leader and the non-elite masses. At the heart of this bond is the language used by the revolutionary leader, which is often ridiculed by the elite as simplistic, unsophisticated, and even crass, but is highly effective in communications with the common people. Napoleon Bonaparte was ridiculed by the French elite as a crude Corsican, but again and again he was able to persuade the common French foot soldiers to follow him, most miraculously after his escape from exile on the island of Elba in February 1815. Napoleon persuaded the French troops sent to capture him to follow him into battle once again. He managed to recapture Paris, but only for 100 days before a vast European army defeated him at the Battle of Waterloo (1815). I witnessed the same persuasive power wielded by Khomeini in Iran in 1979: the educated Iranian elite mocked Khomeini for his communication style, his simplistic language, and his common phrases, but lower-educated Iranians were moved by his speeches – enough to risk their lives in dangerous anti-Shah demonstrations.

But according to Pareto, revolutions involve cyclical rather than linear changes. After the counter-elite use the non-elite masses to overthrow the ruling elite, they simply take over as the governing elite and continue to rule and enjoy superior wealth and status. The result of revolutions, according to Pareto, is the replacement of one elite by another, without real change in the intergroup relationships and inequalities between the elite and non-elite.

As to when and how revolutions take place, the determining factor according to elite theory is circulation of talent. Pareto believed that all ruling elites make the same mistake of blocking circulation of talent, resulting in a lethal concentration of talented individuals among the non-elite and individuals with lack of talent among the ruling group. Because their path to individual mobility is blocked, talented potential-elite individuals come to see collective action as the only path open to them, and they lead the non-elite in a revolution (for a much earlier version of the essential role of circulation of talent in keeping society stable and free from revolution, see Plato's writings from 2,500 years ago[51]). Through this process, according to Pareto, history has become a "graveyard of the aristocracies,"[52] with one elite after another falling victim to revolutions led by counter-elites. As to why there are not more revolutions, elite theory explains it by pointing to the role of talent circulation in preventing revolutions.

The circulation of talent is also central to the Five-Stage Model, a recent social psychological account of intergroup relations which incorporates ideas from social comparison theory and social attribution theory. Like Pareto's elite theory, the Five-Stage Model proposes that when circulation of talent is thwarted, this leads to collective mobilization in support of a revolution to overthrow the ruling regime. Also similar to elite theory, the Five-Stage Model divides society into two groups, but uses the labels "advantaged" and "disadvantaged" (rather than elite and non-elite). In stage 1, groups are based on ascribed characteristics, such as sex and race. Groups are closed and there is no circulation between them. Group members make within-group (but not between-group) social comparisons. For example, consider a feudal system where there is a huge gulf between the aristocracy and the peasants, and the members of each group make social comparisons within, but not across, their ingroups. As a result of modernization and the growth of a middle class, in stage 2 group characteristics are assumed to be based on individual achievement and merit rather than group membership. In comparing themselves with others, individuals are influenced by legitimizing ideologies and come to believe that they are getting what they deserve. If they are in the advantaged group, they exaggerate their input and minimize their outcome, so the higher resources at their disposal become justified. Those in the disadvantaged group exaggerate their outcome and minimize their input, and this justifies their lower status (this interpretation is in line with system justification theory[53]).

The most talented members of the disadvantaged group attempt social mobility in stage 3. The Five-Stage Model assumes that individual mobility is preferred over collective action: Members of the disadvantaged group will first try to move up to the advantaged group on their own. This is consistent with the ideology of meritocracy and self-help individualism of Western capitalist societies, as well as evidence from experimental research in the Western context.[54] In stage 4, those few individuals who succeed in moving up to the advantaged group serve as tokens to endorse the legitimacy and openness of the social system. In addition, the talented individuals who move from the disadvantaged to the advantaged group become strong endorses of the system: "The fact that I made it shows the system is open and fair." But those talented individuals who fail to move up to the advantaged group make self-serving attributions and come to believe that their "failure" is because of their group membership and the structure of society rather than their personal shortcomings. Their explanatory framework moves from individual to group characteristics.

Those talented disadvantaged group members who are kept out of the advantaged group respond in a variety of ways, but the response that is most relevant to our discussion of revolutions is the attempt to instigate collective action. According to the Five-Stage Model, this path of collective action will only be taken after individualistic mobility has been blocked and talented individuals attribute this blocking tactic to group-based discrimination rather than their individual characteristics (such as lack of individual talent and hard work). The research evidence suggests that in the Western context, at least, as long as there is even a small chance of people moving up the status hierarchy by themselves individually, they will prefer this individualistic option over attempting collective action.[55]

The key role of circulation of talent, then, is agreed upon by thinkers from as far back as Plato 2,500 years ago to contemporary researchers such as Don Taylor in his Five-Stage Model. These thinkers all agree that the circulation of talent will work to prevent collective action and revolution. The underlying assumption is that people are naturally motivated to try to move up the status hierarchy on an individual basis. Only if their individual paths to upward mobility are blocked because of their group characteristics will they feel compelled to join collective movements to try to achieve regime change.

But why do people give priority to individual and not collective mobility? Rather than seeing this preference as inbuilt and part of human nature, Marx has influenced an interpretation through the concept of false consciousness: People give priority to individual mobility because this is part of the legitimizing ideology propagated by the rulers, and the result is false consciousness. People are influenced to misperceive their group membership and their true collective interests. This results in, for example, poor white men voting for right-wing politicians such as Donald Trump, who when they get into positions of political power lower taxes for the super-rich and weaken social support systems for the poor. For example, this alternative perspective is reflected in system justification theory.

The cyclical versus linear characteristic of social change is also interpreted differently by the above two traditions. One set of theories, in Pareto's elite theory tradition, propose that change is cyclical, and revolutions are part of a cycle ending in more group-based inequalities (but with a different set of slogans and revolutionary rhetoric). From this perspective, the most talented individuals will *always* lead revolutions that benefit themselves, using the non-elite masses as fodder to achieve regime change. But after coming to power, the new elite uses a new system

justification ideology to continue to rule with the same group-based inequalities and injustices – until the next revolution. Alternatively, the Marxist tradition proposes that this cyclical pattern is a result of false consciousness, and *change will become linear* after the masses overcome legitimizing ideologies and come to accurately recognize their social class membership.

In essence, different explanations of a preference for the individualistic mobility option are at the heart of differences between capitalists and socialists, as well as between different groups of researchers. Underlying capitalism is the assumption that the preference for individual mobility is inborn and "natural" in humans. Underlying socialism is the assumption that the preference for individual mobility is a result of socialization and reflective of false consciousness, in conditions where individuals are taught to neglect their own social class memberships and interests. This account based on false consciousness has influenced system justification theorists, among other researchers. The elite theory account of cyclical evolution of intergroup relations, and the "inevitability" of elite rule and continued group-based inequalities, has influenced social dominance theorists, among other researchers.

Concluding Comment

The materialist perspectives we have considered in this chapter lead to the conclusion that the driving force in revolutions are material conditions, which shape psychological experiences. It is the functional relations between people, such as competition over resources, that lead to psychological experiences, such as relative deprivation, anger, and frustration. These psychological experiences move people to recognize an outgroup as the legitimate target of aggression. For example, in Sherif's summer camp studies, after the groups of boys entered competition for material resources, they developed hostile attitudes toward the outgroup and intergroup conflict arose. Competition for resources was the necessary precondition for intergroup conflict.

But careful analysis of Sherif's three summer camp studies reveals that in conditions where the groups of boys were not initially brought into direct contact with one another, as soon as they learned of the existence of a second group they became hostile toward them – without direct intergroup interactions taking place. Sherif notes that after the ingroup took shape, there was "a tendency to consider all others as out-group"[56] and to be antagonistic toward outgroups, even before intergroup competition for

resources began.[57] This suggests that the mere categorization of people into an ingroup and an outgroup can result in intergroup biases, a possibility we examine in the next chapter. The broader focus of the next chapter is research that proposes psychological factors to be the primary driving force in intergroup relations and revolutions.