

BSA Annual Conference 2022: Building Equality and Justice Now

Wednesday, 20 – Friday, 22 April 2022

Paper Session 5 Thursday, 21 April 2022 13:00 - 14:15

Stream: Theory

Classics revisited, once again: Why to read Marx and Weber in addressing today's inequalities?

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When we consider inequality today, we think not only about material standards of living, but also a variety of issues: health, geography, race, gender, or ethnicity, to name a few. Inequalities surrounding such issues shape the chances people have in life, and so become the basis of a variety of social problems. Sociology has undoubtedly been a key contributor to understanding these problems, and so the inequalities, as the politics of inequalities have been addressed by sociologists since the establishment of the discipline. In the late nineteenth century, for instance, the challenges of an unequal world and their reflections on societies were primary concerns within the framework of class and social stratification analysis of many of sociology's founding theorists. In this paper, I argue, although the patterns of current inequalities can differ to various extents from the past, the foundational accounts from classical sociology can still help today's social theorists. To discuss how sociologists can formulate new theories to understand the enduring feature of inequalities with the help of foundational accounts today, I return to classical sociology and, as an example, to the critiques of heavily economic and somewhat deterministic theories of the often-proclaimed founding figures, Marx, and Weber. I (re)explore Marx's perspective on class struggles, Weber's idea of status and party, and the distinction between these two in understanding the unequal structure of the world. I conclude that their significance lies in creating the idea that social science must analyse inequalities within the social contexts in which they occur.