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CLASS

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Introduction: Two Different Traditions of Thinking about Class

The classical liberal (CL) tradition has a long history of thinking about class analysis (CA) which goes back at least to the English proto-liberals known as the Levellers in the 1640s, but this tradition is either not well known or has been dismissed because people have associated CA with the left, in particular with Marxism (Hart 2018; 2016).

This older CL tradition predates Karl Marx (1818–1883) and in fact influenced him during the 1840s and 1850s, which he acknowledged in a letter to Weydemeyer in 1852 (Raico 1992; Palmer 2009; Marx 1987, 58). In Marx’s view the exploitation which lay at the heart of his theory of class was essentially economic in nature and was inherent in the free market system in which there was wage labor and profits. On the other hand, the CL view of exploitation was essentially political in nature, where those who had access to the coercive power of the state exploited those who did not by means of taxation, regulation of the economy, and the granting of monopolies and other privileges to certain favored groups.

The heyday of classical liberal class analysis (CLCA) not surprisingly coincided with the heyday of CL thinking and political activity during the 150 years between 1750 and 1900 which embraced the Anglo/Scottish and French Enlightenment, the American and French Revolutions, the liberal reforms of the nineteenth century and the 1848 Revolutions, and petered out as the CL tradition itself gradually petered out in the decades leading up to the First World War, but not before it produced four very important theorists, Gustave de Molinari (1819–1912) with his distinction between “la classe gouvernante” (the governing or ruling class) and “les classes gouvernées” (the governed or ruled classes) (Molinari 1880; 1884), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) with his distinction between the “militant class” and the “industrial classes” (Spencer 1898), William Graham Sumner (1840–1910) on “the Forgotten Man and Woman” (Sumner 1918) and “the plutocratic class” (Sumner 1913), and Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) on “la classe eletta di governo” (the governing elite class) (Pareto 1900) and “la classe soggetta” (the subject or governed class) (Pareto 2013, 2479/3258; Pareto 1935, 1788). Later, both CL and CLCA went into a deep sleep during the first half of the twentieth century before enjoying a renaissance in the post-Second World War period when a new group of thinkers emerged under the aegis of Murray Rothbard (1926–1995) and his Circle Bastiat in NYC which built upon what had gone before but incorporated a number of new insights

drawn from the Austrian school of economics, inter-war American individualist thinking (such as Albert J. Nock), late-twentieth-century libertarian political thought, and aspects of New Left historiography, in what might be called the “Rothbardian synthesis.”

Some Common Threads within the CL Tradition

The Central Role Played by State Coercion

What makes CLCA different from other approaches is the central role given to the exercise of coercion by the state in determining who belongs to what class. According to CLs there are two mutually exclusive ways in which wealth can be acquired, either by voluntary means such as trade, exchange, or gifting; or by means of force and coercion such as taxation, coerced labour (such as serfdom and slavery), monopoly, and other government granted privileges (Constant 1822, 31; 2015, 16; Dunoyer 1825 331; Bastiat 1848a, 114; Spencer 1898, vol. 2, 568). This notion was given its classic formulation in 1907 by the German sociologist Franz Oppenheimer (1864–1943), who distinguished between “das ökonomische Mittel” (the economic means) and “das politische Mittel” (the political means) of acquiring wealth, with the state being defined as “die Organisation des politischen Mittels” (the organization of the political means) of acquiring wealth (Oppenheimer 1907, *Der Staat*, p. 15; *The State*, p. 27) .

Thus those who acquire their wealth by these different means constitute two different “classes”: there are those who are “unproductive” of wealth and use the power of the state and the coercion it controls to benefit themselves (called “the ruling few” by James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, “la classe spoliatrice” (the plundering class) by Bastiat (1850c)) at the expense of those who are “productive” or “industrious” and who are the victims of the use of that force by the state (called “the subject many” by Mill and Bentham, or “les classes spoliées” (the plundered classes) by Bastiat (1850a)). As a consequence, it is not one’s economic occupation, one’s social position, or the amount of wealth one has *per se* which determines one’s “class” in this conception, but how one acquired that occupation, position, and wealth, either by voluntary exchange and cooperation with others (the market) or by taking “other peoples’ stuff” by the use of state power and coercion (taxation, regulations, privileges).

Sometimes this “taking” is done by individuals (such as thieves, robbers, pirates), or what Frédéric Bastiat (1801–1850) termed “la spoliation extra-légale” (extra-legal plunder, i.e., plunder which is done outside and in opposition to the law) and sometimes by groups of individuals organized for that very purpose, or what Bastiat termed “la spoliation légale” (legal plunder, i.e., the taking of other peoples’ property under the aegis and protection of the state (Bastiat 1850a, 115–116)). CLs argued that when this legal and state-sanctioned “taking” of property becomes institutionalized or systematized over time, the people who are involved in this activity become a “class” of exploiters. This persistence over time and its bureaucratic institutionalization turns what might in the short term be regarded as “vested interests” seeking temporary or one-off political rents (the Public Choice view) into what is better referred to as a more permanent institution or “class” with long-term private interests which they pursue.

Some of the terms used by CLs to describe these two classes are quite colorful and varied greatly from historical period to historical period. On the “productive” side of the ledger some examples include the productive “mill horse” (vs. the unproductive “war horse”) (an anonymous Leveller pamphleteer, Anon. 1644); the productive and industrious “Bees” who work in the hive vs. the “Knaves” and “parasites” who live off the labour of their neighbors (Mandeville 1988, 19); “la classe productive/industrielle” (the productive or industrious class) vs. “la classe stérile” (the barren or unproductive class) (Turgot 2011); Charles Comte

and Augustin Thierry's distinction between "la classe industrielle et productive" (the industrious and productive class) (Thierry 1817, 6) and "la classe oisive et dévorante" (the idle and devouring class) (Comte 1817, 28); Jeremy Bentham's distinction between "the industrious and frugal, slaves toiling for others: the idle and prodigal, lords and masters, enjoying for themselves" (Bentham 1820a, 364); Richard Cobden's "the middle and industrious classes" (Cobden 1908, 175); "the industrial classes" of Spencer (1898, vol. 2, 158); and Sumner's "the Forgotten Man and Woman" who pay their taxes and quietly go about their own business (Sumner 1918).

On the "non-productive" side of the ledger (in addition to those mentioned above), we have the "caterpillars" which consumed the wealth of the country (Overton 1641); the "court parasites" (Trenchard 1995); the "unproductive hands" described by Smith (1981, II.iii.30, 342); the "tax-eaters" of William Cobbett (1815, 46); the many references to parasites and vermin in Bastiat's writings (1840s); "la classe budgétivore" (the budget-eating class) and "le gouvernement-ulcère" ("ulcerous" government) described by Molinari (1859, 332; 1853a, 261); and the "swarms of Jacobin locusts" described by Hippolyte Taine (2002, 1130).

The Antagonistic Relationship between These Two Classes

The Idea of Class Struggle

CLs believed that these two different groups or classes are inevitably in conflict with each other. The peaceful and industrious wealth-producing class wishes to protect its justly acquired property from the violence-wielding, non-productive, and wealth-consuming class. Over time, CLs thought that a small group of people, usually organized in some way in an army, state, or church (sometimes summarized as "throne" and "altar"), used force or threats of force to take "other people's stuff" without their permission, or to force them to do certain things (like buy goods and services from some legally privileged group of suppliers) or not do certain things (like attend the church of their choice, or to engage in whatever trade or profession they liked). Thus societies came to be divided into two antagonistic groups which engaged in a "struggle" ("la lutte") for control of the state, with "the rulers" attempting to protect or extend their privileges, and "the ruled" attempting to stop or at least impose limits on the former's power by means of "charters" like Magna Carta (1215), the charters of the Free Cities of the middle ages like Magdeburg (1261), the Leveller's "An Agreement of the People" (1647), or written constitutions like the American one (1789).

For CLs there were three paradigmatic types of exploitation with their related class antagonisms or conflicts to which they referred repeatedly in their writings, namely the conquerers vs. the conquered, the slave owners vs. the slaves, and the tax-consumers/receivers vs. the taxpayers.

The Conquering Class vs. the Conquered Class

In its most extreme form, the exploitation of one class by another took the form of the military conquest and subsequent subjugation or even enslavement of one group of people by another (Thierry 1825; Bastiat 1848a; Burckhardt 1950, 36; Molinari 1880; Spencer 1898; Oppenheimer 1907; Rüstow 1980). A group of "conquerors," who were skilled in military matters (Spencer's "militant class") and sought to plunder the wealth of others, conquered by force another group of people, who were usually peaceful, productive farmers and sometimes of a different race than that of their conquerors (such as Saxons conquered by the Norman French, or Gauls and other Germanic tribes conquered by the Romans). This kind of exploitation

began as intermittent acts of plunder but gradually evolved into a more permanent relationship whereby the “roving bandits” (to use Mancur Olson’s phrase) settled down in the conquered territory to become “stationary bandits,” such as the emerging European noble class, who either enslaved the conquered population or forced them to pay annual tributes, or “taxes” (Molinari 1853b).

In the late nineteenth century Molinari, Spencer, and Pareto were concerned that there was a resurgence of “conquest” going on with the European drive for colonies in Africa and the American drive to seize Spain’s colonies in the Pacific and Caribbean. Spencer viewed this as a last effort by the “militant class” to retain control of the British state and to ward off the rising “industrial classes.” Sumner argued that “earth hunger” was an integral part of the human character which could take the form of “economic land hunger,” which was felt by poor European immigrants who came to the New World to improve their lot in life, and “political earth hunger,” which was the desire by the state to increase the extent of the territory it controlled and the number of tax-payers in order to maximize its revenue (Sumner 1913). As a leading member of the Anti-Imperialist League, he viewed the American war against Spain as an attempt by the “military interests” to maintain their “jobbery” (state-funded jobs and contracts) at the expense of the tax-paying “forgotten man.” By engaging in Old World-style colonialism, America was figuratively being “conquered by Spain,” not the reverse (Sumner 1919).

The Class of Slave Owners vs. the Class of Slaves

Opposition to various forms of coerced labour, whether outright chattel slavery or serfdom, was a major goal of the liberal Enlightenment (Davis 1999; Blum 1978). CLs opposed coerced labour on moral grounds because it violated the slave’s or serf’s right to property (especially self-ownership) and liberty, and on economic grounds because, although it might be profitable for the individual slave owner or feudal lord given the state’s support and subsidies to maintain the practice, it was inefficient for society as a whole. Given its ubiquity in Europe and its colonies, the class system created by slavery was of great interest to CLs.

For example, Charles Comte (1782–1837) and Charles Dunoyer (1786–1862) made their detailed analysis of slavery the basis of a more general theory of class in a series of works published in the 1810s and 1820s (Comte and Dunoyer 1815–1819; Dunoyer 1825; Comte 1827) which would become very influential among mid- and late-nineteenth-century French liberals (such as Bastiat and Molinari) and later among Rothbard’s circle in the 1950s (Raico and Liggio).

In *Traité de législation* Comte developed an extensive language of class which would become very influential (Comte 1827). He talked about “la classe des maîtres” (the class of masters or slave owners) and “la classe des esclaves” (the class of slaves), but also generalized this class relationship to include broader categories such as “une classe d’opresseurs et une classe d’opprimés” (a class of oppressors and a class of the oppressed), “les classes privilégiées” and “les classes non privilégiées” (the privileged classes and the unprivileged classes), and most importantly “la classe industrieuse” (the industrious or wealth-producing class) which lay at the heart of their understanding of class in modern society. The key insight was the idea that all societies, not just slave-based ones, were divided into two antagonistic groups, those who worked and produced the wealth, and those who did not work or produce but who lived off those who did by enslaving them, enserfing them, or taxing them.

Three decades later the Irish economist John Elliott Cairnes (1823–1875) made very similar statements about the class structure of slavery in America in *The Slave Power: Its Character, Career,*

and *Probable Designs*, in which he described the Southern slave owners as a “ruling class,” “a compact oligarchy,” “the ascendent class,” and the system they created as the “despotism of the wealthy few” (Cairnes 1862).

The English political philosopher John Stuart Mill (1801–1873) did not often talk about class in the political sense described here, but he did in his late work *The Subjection of Women*, in which he used the language of class to denounce the “legal slavery of women” (Mill 1984, 296). Like many CLs, he thought that “mankind” was divided into two classes, “a small one of masters and a numerous one of slaves,” where the latter comprised a “subject-class” which also included most women (Mill 1984, 268–269). The mechanism or “superstructure” of government (Mill 1984, 292) which held them in subjection was a “system of privilege,” and “the law of force” granted by the government gave men despotic power over their wives and daughters, or what Mill called the “legal slavery of women.”

A similar view was expressed by Dunoyer in 1825 when he described women as “the slaves” and “the working class” in the earliest stage of human development (Dunoyer 1825, 146).

The Class of Taxpayers vs. the Class of Tax-Consumers

If chattel slavery was the paradigmatic form of exploitation of one class of people by another where the *entire* product of one’s labour was forcibly taken, then by extension, CLs thought, “slavery” also existed when *part* of one’s labor was forcibly taken by another person, as in taxation by the state. Hence the idea that there was an antagonistic relationship between those who were forced to pay taxes to the state – the “tax-payers” – and those who were the beneficiaries of this tax money – the “tax-receivers or consumers.”

One of the clearest expressions of this idea was put forward by the American southern politician, and ironically a defender of slavery, John C. Calhoun (1782–1850) in 1849 in *A Disquisition on Government*, where he believed there was a zero sum relationship between these “two great classes” where the gain of one had to be at the detriment of the other (Calhoun 1992, 18).

The antagonism manifested itself in the resistance of the tax payers to paying for “services” which may or may not have been real or wanted, and the desire of the tax receivers to maintain or increase taxes for their own benefit or the benefit of their friends and allies. The French historian Augustin Thierry (1795–1856) explored the growing resistance to taxes of “the bourgeoisie” (literally “town dwellers”) – also known as the “Third Estate” – in the “Free Cities” of medieval Europe. The rising class of the bourgeoisie made agreements with their feudal lords for tax mitigation and considerable freedom in the form of Charters for their cities and an early form of self-rule, in return for more fixed payments (Thierry 1853). The persistent tax revolts which have appeared throughout history testify to this ongoing antagonism between tax-payers and tax-consumers (Tilly 1986; Burg 2003), and for CLs the most important example of this was the American Revolution (Rothbard 2011).

As governments in all the major European powers began to increasingly tax and regulate economic activity in the late nineteenth century, it was not surprising that CLs would make the connection between that and traditional “slavery.” The best examples of this were Herbert Spencer and Auberon Herbert (1838–1906), both in England. Beginning in the mid-1880s, Spencer began to criticize what he called “the coming slavery,” by which he meant rule by a “despotic controlling agency” (Spencer 1898, vol. 2, 608) which was run by “a disciplined army of civil officials” or what he called “officialism” (Spencer 1884, 47, 67). Herbert in turn warned about the coming “state slavery” if policies were not quickly reversed (Herbert 1978).

The Idea of “Class Struggle” through History

Charles Comte returned to the class struggle inherent in slavery to make a broader point about class struggle in more general terms. The oppression and pillage which lay at the heart of the system of slavery created an entrenched system of class conflict (“la lutte”) between the two classes which put them “en état de guerre” (in a state of war) with each other (Comte 1818, 2–3). This state of war had continued up until the present and now had been extended to a war between all those who wished to live off the fruit of their own labor and all those who wished to live off that of others.

A similar use of the expression “la lutte” (fight or struggle) between these two classes can be found in the writings of Bastiat (1840s) and Molinari (1849a, 37; 1884), in particular Bastiat’s belief that class struggles had been endemic for centuries and that history was punctuated by alternating periods of “les temps de luttes” (times of struggle or conflict) in which different classes contended for control of the state, and “les temps de trêve” (times of truce) when one class dominated over the others until another period of conflict inevitably broke out when the state began to grow again (Bastiat 1850d).

CLs also identified a second kind of struggle and conflict which was between contending groups or “factions” within the ruling elite for control over the state or the “political machine” and the resources it had access to. Adam Smith, for example, talked about “the violence of faction” (Smith 1982a, VI.iii.13, 242) between rival individuals (the politically “ambitious man” and the “party man”) or privileged groups (either “civil” or “ecclesiastical”), which generated great “animosity” and “turbulence and disorder” in society (Smith 1982a, VI.ii.2.15, 232).

One of the more detailed discussions of the internal struggles which were fought between the various factions and interest groups for control of the state was provided by Molinari, firstly in *Les Révolutions et le despotisme* (Molinari 1852) and then in *L’évolution politique et la révolution* (Molinari 1884). In the former he discusses the coalition of interests which was forged between the senior government bureaucrats and the military, which made it possible for Emperor Napoleon III to come to power in 1852. In the latter he discusses “la lutte engagée entre les partis politiques pour l’exploitation de l’État” (the struggle undertaken between the political parties (groups) for the exploitation of the state) (Molinari 1884, 317) and “les luttes pour la domination, c’est-à-dire pour la possession et la gestion de l’État, des profits et avantages qu’elles confèrent” (the struggles for domination, that is to say for the possession and control of the state, and the profits and benefits which it confers) (Molinari 1884, 256).

Pareto also thought that conflicts within the ruling class occurred. In general there was a constant process of new elites trying to push their way forward in order to shoulder aside older elites who had been in power for some time, a process which he called “la circolazione della classe eletta” (the circulation of the elite class) (Pareto 1900; 2013, 2042, 263). In addition, within the ruling elite there was also a structure of power and privilege within the state. Pareto thought that at the highest level, given the number of people involved, there was a “class within a class.” The ruling class was not homogeneous and was effectively controlled by a much smaller group within it which decided on how things were to be run (Pareto 2013, 2254, 2939; Pareto 1935, 2254, 1575).

The Evolution of Societies through Stages

Many CLs thought that societies evolved over time as technology changed and trade and production increased, resulting in new kinds of wealth and new ways in which that wealth might be “exploited” by a ruling class. These stages could be relatively simple, as with Benjamin

Constant's two stages of "ancient" and "modern" societies with their very different notions of liberty and productive economic activity (Constant 1980); or with Herbert Spencer's distinction between "the militant" and "the industrial" types of society, each with their own "military class" or "industrial class" (Spencer 1898). Spencer added a third possibility in order to describe the class structure of late Victorian England, which he thought of as "compounded," by which he meant an unstable mixture of "militant" features from the old order and new "industrial" features from the new order (Spencer 1898, vol. 2, 499). A similar view was held by the mid-twentieth-century German liberal Alexander Rüstow with his theory of "die Überlagerung" (over-layering or "superstratification") of classes (Rüstow 1980, 5). See also the modern historian Arno Mayer on "the persistence of the old regime" in Europe (Mayer 1981).

More typically, CLs thought societies had evolved through multiple stages. In the eighteenth century many thinkers adopted a "four stage" theory (Meek 1976) such as Adam Smith (1982b) and Adam Ferguson (1782) in Scotland, and Turgot (2011) in France, where societies moved through the stages of small groups or bands which hunted and fished, communal or tribal-based agricultural societies, then the private ownership of land and more sophisticated agricultural production, and finally the stage of "commerce." Smith and Ferguson believed that in the current stage of development, that of agriculture and commerce, the "rank" of different groups within society played a very important role in determining access to political and economic privileges (Smith 1982a).

Later theorists like Comte, Dunoyer, Bastiat, and Molinari added additional stages such as the era of "slave production," since they thought that this had been so important in the development of the state and of class rule in Western societies; the stage of "privilege" (or mercantilism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), where favored groups ("la classe privilégiée" – the privileged class) in agriculture, trade, finance, or manufacturing got subsidies or monopoly privileges from the state; and the stage of "place-seeking" (la recherche des places) (Dunoyer 1825), where getting jobs in the state bureaucracies under the Old Regime and the Napoleonic Empire became a kind of "industry" in its own right and created a large class of government bureaucrats ("une classe de gens à places") (a class of people with government jobs), who had a vested interest in expanding government regulation and intervention in the economy (Comte 1818).

In the late 1840s Bastiat planned to write a *History of Plunder* in which he wanted to show how European society had moved through six stages, each of which had its own kind of plunder and unique class of plunderers (Bastiat 1979, 554–555). These were the stages of war, slavery, theocracy, monopoly, governmental exploitation, and socialism (or what he called "false fraternity") (Bastiat 1851, 335). Three of these stages were unique to his theory, that of "theocracy," where a monopolistic established church established a system of "theocratic plunder" to benefit the interests of the priests (Bastiat 1979, 321); "l'exploitation gouvernementale" (exploitation by the government), where the state and its employees ("une classe de fonctionnaires") (a class of government bureaucrats) (Bastiat 1979, 448) used the power of the state to further their own self-interests either independently or in alliance with other privileged groups; and a possible sixth and final stage of "la fausse fraternité ou communisme" (false (or counterfeit) fraternity or communism), which would have been the result if the socialists had been able to come to power in 1848 and build their planned welfare state of compulsory state-funded charity. This would have created an entirely new form of plunder, namely "la spoliation réciproque" (reciprocal or mutual plunder), whereby the people seeking welfare benefits from the state ended up plundering each other as taxpayers (Bastiat 1850c, 275; 1850a, 117), or, as he famously put it in "The State," where "everyone endeavours to live at the expense of everyone else" (Bastiat 1848c, 97).

In the 1810s Comte, Dunoyer, and Thierry also introduced a new final stage to economic and political development to replace that of “commerce,” which they called “l’industrialisme” (industrialism). This was an economic and political order where everyone engaged in some kind of non-violent, productive, “industrial” activity (“la classe industrielle” or “les industriels”) and thus contributed to the creation of wealth of whatever kind (Hart 1994; Leroux 2015). Dunoyer, for example, thought that in the coming “era of industrialism” which would be populated by “les peuples purement industriels” (people who were purely or entirely industrious) the central nation state might be eventually broken up into much smaller political units which would have minimal power and be radically decentralized along the lines of the United States, or what he termed “municipaliser le monde” (the municipalization of the world) (Dunoyer 1825, 366).

Spencer had a similar vision of a world without political “classes” where the “militant class” would gradually be replaced by the “industrial class” and all human interaction would be based upon “voluntary cooperation” instead of “compulsory cooperation” (Spencer 1898, vol. 2, 286, 608). As did Molinari, who believed that societies were evolving toward a political system where individuals would exercise “self-government” (he used the English word) in all matters, where “la servitude politique” (political slavery) would be eliminated, and replaced by “la concurrence universalisée” (competition made universal) (Molinari 1880, 459), which included “la liberté de gouvernement” (freedom of government, i.e., competing governments), thus bringing an end to “class rule” for good (Molinari 1884, 379).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century these optimistic hopes began to fade as state intervention in the economy began to increase under the influence of utilitarian “liberal” demands (the so-called “new liberalism” in England and “progressivism” in the United States) as well as those of the rising socialist and labour parties. CL theorists began to postulate that the world was entering a new stage of the regulatory and bureaucratic state, or what Spencer called “the new slavery;” Sumner “democratic absolutism” (Sumner 1913, 290), the French politician and economist Yves Guyot (1843–1928) “la tyrannie socialiste” (socialist tyranny) ruled by a “class of officials” (Guyot 1893), or, as the economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu (1843–1916) put it in 1884, a “new class” of government officials and intellectuals (Leroy-Beaulieu 1884, 316ff.). A number of CLs began to talk about a new kind of socialism which they saw evolving, namely “bureaucratic” or “state socialism” (Bamberger 1900).

Molinari had the bleakest outlook of the aging group of CLs. In a pair of essays written at the turn of the nineteenth century he had a very pessimistic view of the dire consequences of increasing militarism, socialism, protectionism, colonialism, and statism which he predicted would gradually impoverish the world and lead to wars, revolutions, and economic stagnation during the twentieth century (Molinari 1902). The nineteenth century had seen class warfare between conservative elites and “le parti libéral” (the liberal party or group), which had often been bloody at times but had achieved significant liberal reforms like the abolition of slavery and serfdom, and a policy of free trade. He predicted even more brutal and bloody class warfare between conservative elites and the socialists, with the CLs split into those who joined forces with the conservative elites and those who joined the socialists, and with a rump of radical CLs who were largely sidelined until they could regroup many decades into the future.

Murray Rothbard and the Rediscovery of CLCA

The reappearance of classical liberalism and libertarianism after the Second World War coincided with a rediscovery of CLCA, especially in North America. During the Second World War Ludwig von Mises (1881–1973) had written on bureaucracy (von Mises 2007), the total state

(von Mises 2007), and the theory of interventionism (von Mises 2011), in which he identified powerful groups and vested interests who benefited from the institutions and policies which he discussed in these works, but he refused to embrace the idea of “class,” preferring instead to use the older term “caste” or “group interests,” which he admitted might “clash” over dividing up the benefits of their rule (von Mises 1981; 1978; 2005).

Crucial to this rediscovery was the work of a group of thinkers who attended von Mises’ seminar at New York University and who were also members of Murray Rothbard’s Circle Bastiat in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s (Raimondo 2000). The most important members of this group were Murray Rothbard (1926–1995) and his close friends the historians Ralph Raico (1933–2014) and Leonard P. Liggio (1936–2016).

Rothbard played the central role in what I term the “Rothbardian synthesis,” which combined modern Misesian Austrian economic theory; the older tradition of CLCA, especially the work of the early-nineteenth-century French CLs Comte, Dunoyer, Constant, and Bastiat (Rothbard 2006), as well as the nineteenth-century American political theorist John C. Calhoun and the early-twentieth-century thinkers Franz Oppenheimer and Albert Jay Nock; and 1960s New Left historians such as Gabriel Kolko and Ronald Radosh. Rothbard was assisted by Raico, who was interested in the French CLs, especially Benjamin Constant (Raico 2010); and Liggio, who was interested in the work of Comte and Dunoyer, as well as the anti-war movement which was active in NYC in the 1960s. Both Liggio and Rothbard attempted to link the emerging libertarian movement with the New Left, believing that they shared similar views in opposing the war and their class analysis of American history. This they did in a journal they edited called appropriately *Left and Right: A Journal of Libertarian Thought* (1965–1968), in which Rothbard presented a clear statement of his views on class in the introductory essay “Left and Right: The Prospects for Liberty,” in which he described history as a “race” or struggle between the “Old Order” (or feudalism), which was controlled by “the ruling classes” who imposed “tyranny, exploitation, stagnation, fixed caste, and hopelessness and starvation for the bulk of the population” (Rothbard 1965, 8), and the new liberal order of free markets and “the producers in society (including free businessmen, workers, peasants, etc.)”

In his 1965 essay “Anatomy of the State” Rothbard made an important refinement to Calhoun’s distinction between “tax-payers” and “tax-consumers” with his idea that in the modern, more complex world of the welfare state it made more sense to talk about “net” tax-payers and “net” tax-consumers” since everyone, even those who paid most of the taxes, was forced to use government roads, the postal system, and other “services” provided by the state (Rothbard 1974). He made the same argument in a more formal manner in *Power and Market* in his discussion of the different categories of “hegemonic intervention”, but prefers to use the Misesian term “caste” and so refers to the two groups so created as “the taxpaying caste” and the “tax-consuming caste,” and argues that this state intervention inevitably leads to “caste conflict, coercion, and exploitation” (Rothbard 2006, 19).

Rothbard would later use libertarian CA to discuss in considerable detail the nature of the political and economic elites who controlled the modern American state in several essays and books (some co-edited with New Left historians), such as “War Collectivism in World War I” (Rothbard 1972a), “Herbert Hoover and the Myth of Laissez-Faire” (Rothbard 1972b), and “From Hoover to Roosevelt: The Federal Reserve and the Financial Elites” (Rothbard 2002).

With the assistance of Liggio, Rothbard also used CLCA in his history of the American Revolution, *Conceived in Liberty* (1975–1979). He saw the revolution as truly “radical” in nature, where opponents of the existing imperial and colonial governments reacted against “increased

oppression by the existing State apparatus” (Rothbard 1975, 1, 555) both internal (“Tory elites” and “internal oligarchs”) and external (the British Empire). It should be noted that even at this stage Rothbard was still a bit hesitant about using the phrase “class conflict” (which he put in quotes), preferring to use terms like “a ruling oligarchy” or “the privileged clique” or a “ruling caste” (Rothbard 1975, 95). He addressed his theoretical concerns about the Marxist “economic” notion of class in a separate chapter “Mercantilism, Merchants, and ‘Class Conflict’” in which he makes it clear that his notion of class is “political,” something that is created by actions taken by the state to privilege some at the expense of others, for example where peasants and ordinary tax-payers were at the bottom of “the state-organized pyramid” and were “exploited by the ruling groups” (Rothbard 1975, 250). However, by the time his *History of Economic Thought* appeared in 1995 Rothbard had abandoned his reticence about using the word “class” in quote marks and now fully embraced using the term.

The version of CLCA which emerged from the Circle Bastiat was explored in more detail in a series of papers given at the Libertarian Scholars Conference, especially at its second meeting in 1974 (Liggio 1977; Raico 1977, Grinder and Hagel 1977) and its fourth in 1976 (Weinburg 1978; Salerno 1978) at which the French CL theory of class was much discussed. The interest in French CLCA continued with the Center for Libertarian Studies publishing translations of essays by Gustave de Molinari on “The Production of Security” (Molinari 1977) and Augustin Thierry on “Industrialism” (Thierry 1978). Rothbard’s synthesis of Austrian economics and CLCA inspired two younger scholars, Walter Grinder and John Hagel, to take his ideas further with an Austrian-inspired class analysis of “state capitalism” and “Interventionism” (Hagel and Grinder 1975).

Conclusion

Some Recent Work by Libertarians

Since the work of Rothbard and the Circle Bastiat there has been continued interest in the topic, both by libertarians and other free market theorists, and by some Marxist-inspired theorists who have rediscovered the importance of the state.

The economic historian Robert Higgs (1944–) in his book *Crisis and Leviathan* (Higgs 1987) examines the dynamics behind the growth of the modern American state in the twentieth century. He does not adopt an explicitly CL theory of class but frequently refers to “elites,” private vested interests in government, business, and lobby groups of various kinds, against which he contrasts “the masses.”

The economist Hans-Hermann Hoppe (1949–) applied Austrian economic theory to the development of what he has called “Austrian exploitation theory” (Hoppe 1990, 59ff.), which is based on the idea that any claim to property which is not based on “the homesteading principle” of just acquisition is a form of exploitation of one person by another. When exploiters come together to create an organization to protect and further their joint interests, governments and states are created, and the leaders of this “exploitation firm” are called “the ruling class.”

The philosopher Roderick Long (1964–) distinguishes between two sub-classes within the ruling elite, namely “those who actually hold political office within the state, and those who influence the state from the private sector” (Long 1998). He calls members of the former group “the stateratic class, or stateratic” and the members of the latter group “the plutocratic class, or plutocracy,” and discusses the various versions of CA which might follow from four different power relations between the two classes.

The economist Jayme Lemke argues that a key insight of Austrian economic theory, namely methodological individualism, is not violated by incorporating CA into a broader Austrian economic framework. She explores the way that “preferential rules” which exist in government institutions can benefit one group of people (a class) over others (Lemke 2015).

Related Work by Others

Public Choice economists like James Buchanan (1919–2013) and Gordon Tullock (1922–2014) studied rent-seeking, the politics of bureaucracy, the “Leviathan” state, and the “Exploitative State” without adopting an explicit class interpretation, preferring to see them as involving a series of *ad hoc* acts of rent seeking by particular vested interest groups. Nevertheless, their approach provides important insights for CLCAs who might ask, if organized vested interests persist over time, do they eventually become a “class” (Buchanan 1999; Tullock 2004)?

Margaret Levi uses a Rational Choice perspective to analyze the state and what she appropriately called “predatory rule” (Levi 1988). She argues that “rulers” are rational and self-interested actors who attempt to maximize “state revenue production” while facing “constraints” on their bargaining power and “transaction costs” in negotiating agreements with other parties. She is one of the left-wing theorists who wish “to bring the state back in” to the analytical framework (Skocpol 1985).

The economist Mancur Olson (1932–1998) argues that in the absence of a state “roving bandits” have an incentive to steal as much as they can from peasants and farmers before moving on to return at some future date to do it again. “Stationary bandits” learn that if they remain and settle among the peasants and farmers and only take enough to satisfy their immediate needs and leave a small surplus for the farmers and peasants to continue to produce they will maximize their “long term” opportunities for looting and plundering. Hence, the “stationary bandits” become an early form of the state which offers “protection” to the peasants and farmers from other roving bandits and a guarantee of steady, more limited, and predictable looting from themselves (Olson 1993).

In the 1980s some Marxist-inspired social theorists began to realize the inadequacies of traditional Marxist notions of class for explaining the new kinds of states and policies which had emerged in the post-Second World War period, especially the more activist policies inspired by Keynesian economic theories. Historical sociologists like Theda Skocpol (1947–) argue that the state was an “autonomous actor” with its own interests and was not just a “reflection” of the dominant social class (“the capitalists”), thus her call “to bring the state back in” to the discussion (Skocpol 1985).

The historian and sociologist Charles Tilly (1929–2008) argued that states were “made” as a result of waging war with each other and that they operated as a “protection racket” or organized crime on a very large scale. These “racketeer governments” (Tilly 1990, 171) sought to make profits through the use of “legitimate” violence by which they “extracted” wealth from the citizens they ruled over.

Areas for Further Research

The History of Ideas

There is still much to be learned about the rich tradition of CLCA and what insights it might still have for present-day scholars. Also, from the other side of the fence, one could study the ideas which have been used to justify “class rule” by traditional leaders or “experts” and how

these ideas have been spread to the broader public via the press, public education, and popular culture (like film).

Developing the Theory of CLCA

Various schools of thought have insights which CLs could profitably incorporate into their theory, such as *public choice* insights into the study of the inner workings of representative political bodies, political parties, and bureaucracies; and the application of *von Mises' theory of "the dynamics of interventionism"* to explain the often chaotic and "unplanned" nature of government policies and institutions.

Scholars also need to know more about:

- the unintended and often negative consequences of the impact of the *regulatory state* and the *welfare state* on the very people they were designed to help but in fact turn into a new "dependent class."
- the tensions which exist within "ruling elites" as various factions and different groups of vested interests jostle for power within a political party, representative body, or bureaucratic organization.
- the greater complexity of class relations than just "taxpayers" vs. "tax-consumers," such as the composition of the ruling elite, the "political class" broadly understood, the bureaucratic class, the plutocratic class or "crony capitalists"; state-dependent firms and their employees, the dependent class (such as welfare recipients).

Applying CLCA to the Study of History

Marxist-inspired historians have done some very good work but are handicapped by their false understanding of how markets operate. CLs need to use their theory of CA to explore:

1. the actual historical origins of the state.
2. the history of important "turning points" such as revolutions, crises (such as economic depressions), and wars which have led to the increase in the size and power of the state, and the rise of new groups who exercise political power.
3. the inevitable resistance to heavy taxation and government regulation, such as tax revolts, black market activity, secessionist movements.
4. the class structures which emerged within the supposedly "classless" societies under communist rule.

Applying CLCA to the Study of Contemporary Politics

There is a role for detailed journalism which would explore:

- what political power certain individuals and groups currently have, how they influence the course of events, and how they benefit from these changes.
- the activities and interrelationships of powerful, politically well-connected families (or "dynasties").
- the activities (such as lobbying) of powerful and influential corporations ("crony capitalism") and industrial sectors which are dependent on taxpayer-funded projects (such as the military-industrial complex, Big Pharma, agricultural interests).

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