

Part One

Sociological Theories: Classical Perspectives

Part One: The Concept of Sociological Theory and its Origin

Section 1: Definition and Elements of Scientific Theory

1.1. Definition

The term theory came from the Greek word “theoria”- which means a well focused mental outlook at something in order to grasp. Theory refers to explanatory thought. It is more of the contemplation of social phenomena. It usually refers to a preposition or set of propositions designed to express with reference to data and explanation of interrelation.

Since explanation given by any theory can be true or false, mature or childish, professional or non-professional, the term theory by itself doesn't involve only sense of quality .With a scientific concept only scientific explanation considered as a theory rather than religious or others. There are some people who considered scientific theory in relation to scientific methods (empirical observation and logical reasoning). But in sociology the concept of scientific theory related to formal theory. It refers to the degree of conformity to scientific norms. More formal theories usually represent verbal construction and general assumption, hypothesis, independent variable, dependent variables and citation of evidence relating to empirical verification and observed relations.

1.2. Scientific Theory

1.2.1 .The Nature of Scientific Theory

Scientific theories begin with the assumption that the universe, including the social universe created by acting human beings, reveals certain basic and fundamental properties and processes that explain the flow of events in specific contexts. Because of this concern with discovering fundamental properties and processes, scientific theories are always stated abstractly, rising above specific empirical events and highlighting the underlying forces that drive these events. In the context of sociological inquiry, for example, theoretical explanations are not so much about the specifics of a particular economy as about the dynamics of production and distribution in general. Scientific theories always seek to transcend the particular and the time bound, and in so doing, they focus on the generic, the fundamental, the timeless, and the universal.

Scientific theories are stated more formally than ordinary language. At the extreme, theories are couched in another language, such as mathematics, but more typically in the social science and particularly in sociology, theories are phrased in ordinary language. Still, even when using regular language, sociologists make an effort to speak in neutral, objective, and unambiguous terms so that the theory the same thing to all who examine it.

Scientific theories are designed to be systematically tested with replicable methods against the fact of particular empirical setting. Despite being stated abstractly and formally, then, scientific theories do not stand alone from the empirical. Useful theories all suggest the ways that they can be assessed against empirical events.

All scientific fields develop theories. Science seeks to develop abstract and formally stated theories, and test these theories against empirical cases to see if they are plausible. Science is thus a slow process of developing theories, testing them, and then rejecting, modifying, or retaining them, at least until a better theory is proposed. Without attention to stating theories formally and objectively assessing them against the empirical world, they would become self-justifying and self-contained; it would be hard to refute such theories, and indeed, they would tend to reflect personal biases, ideological learning, or religious convictions.

1.2.2. Elements of Scientific Theory

Theory is constructed with several basic elements or building blocks. These are concepts, variables and theoretical statements/formats. Although there are many divergent claims about what theory is or should be, these three elements are common to all the claims.

A. Concepts: the basic building blocks of theory

Theories are built from concepts. Most generally, concepts denote phenomena; in so doing, they isolate features of the world that are considered, for the moment at hand, important. Familiar sociological concepts would include production, power, interaction, norms, role, status, and socialization. Each term is a concept that embraces aspects of the social world are considered essential for a particular purpose.

Concepts are constructed from definition. A definition is a system of terms, such as the sentences of a language, the symbol of logic, or the notation of mathematics, that inform investigators about the phenomenon denoted by a concept. Concepts that are useful in building theory strive to communicate a uniform meaning to all those who use them. Because concepts are frequently expressed with words of everyday language, however; it is difficult to avoid words that cannot varied meanings – and hence point to different phenomena for varying groups of scientists. This is why many concepts in science are expressed in technical or more “neutral” languages, such as the symbols of mathematics. In sociology, expressing concepts in special language is sometimes not only impossible but also undesirable. Hence the verbal symbols used to develop a concept must be defined as precisely as possible so that they point to the same phenomenon for all investigators. Although perfect consensus might never be attained with conventional language, a body of theory rests on the premise that scholars will do their best to define concepts unambiguously.

B. Variables

When used to build theory, two general types of concepts can be distinguished:

- Those that simply label phenomena; and
- Those that refer to phenomena that differ in degree.

Concepts that merely label phenomena would include such commonly employed abstractions as dog, cat, group, social class and star. When stated in this way, none of these concepts reveals the ways in which the phenomena they denote vary in terms of such properties as size, weight, density, velocity, cohesiveness, or any of the many criteria used to inform investigators about differences in degree among phenomena.

Those who believe that sociology can be like other sciences prefer concepts that are translated into variables – that is, into states that vary. We want to know the variable properties – size, degree, intensity, amount, and so forth- of events denoted by a concept. Therefore, some of the concepts of scientific theory should denote the variable features of the world. To understand events requires that we visualize how variation in one phenomenon is related to variation in another. Others, who are less enamored by efforts to make sociology a natural science, are less compulsive about translating concepts into variables.

C. Theoretical statements and formats

To be useful, the concepts of theory must be connected to one another. Such connection among concepts constitute theoretical statements specifically how events denoted by concepts are interrelated, and at the same time, they provide an interpretation of how and why events should be connected. When these theoretical statements are grouped together, they constitute theoretical format. There are, however, different ways to organize theoretical statements into formats.

There are four basic approaches in sociological theory for generating theoretical statements and formats: (1) meta-theoretical schemes, (2) analytical schemes, (3) propositional schemes, and (4) modeling schemes.

The Concepts are constructed from definitions; theoretical statements link concepts together; and statements are organized into four basic types of formats. These four formats can be executed in a variety of ways, however, and so in reality, there are more than just four strategies for developing theoretical statements and formats. Moreover, these various strategies are not always mutually exclusive, for, in executing one of them, we are often led to another as a kind of “next step” in building theory. The main types of theoretical formats will be presented as follows.

I. Meta-theoretical schemes

This kind of theoretical activity is more comprehensive than ordinary theory. Meta-theoretical schemes are not, by themselves, theories that explain specific classes of events; rather, they explicate the basic issues that a theory must address. In many sociological circles, meta-theory is constructed as an essential prerequisite to adequate theory building, even though the dictionary definition of meta emphasizes “occurring later” and “in succession” to previous activities. Furthermore, in most other sciences, meta-theoretical reflection has occurred after a body of formal theoretical statements has been developed. Only after a science has used a number of theoretical statements and formats successfully to scholars being to ask meta-theoretical questions: What are the underlying assumptions about the universe contained in these statements? What strategies are demanded by, or precluded from, these statements and their organizations into formats? What kind of knowledge is generated by these statements and formats, and, conversely, what is ignored? In sociological theory, however, advocates of meta-theory usually emphasize that we cannot develop theory until we have resolved these more fundamental epistemological and metaphysical questions.

II. Analytical schemes

Much theoretical activity in sociology consists of concepts organized into a classification scheme that denotes the key properties, and interrelations among these properties, in the social universe. These are many different varieties of analytical schemes, but they share an emphasis on classifying basic properties of the social world. The concepts of the scheme chop up the universe; then, the ordering of the concepts gives the social world a sense of order. Explanation of an empirical event comes whenever a place in the classificatory scheme can be found for the empirical event.

Some theorists argue that analytical schemes are a necessary prerequisite for developing other forms of theory. Until one has a scheme that organizes the properties of the universe, it is difficult to develop propositions and models about specific events. Without the general analytical framework, how can a theorist or researcher know what to examine? There is some merit to this position, but if the scheme

becomes too complex and elaborate, it is not easily translated into other theoretical formats. Thus, analytical schemes can represent a useful way to begin theorizing, unless they are too rigid and elaborate to stimulate theorizing outside the parameters imposed by the scheme itself.

III. Propositional Schemes

A proposition is a theoretical statement that specifies the connection between two or more variables. It tells us how variation in one concept is accounted for by variation in another. For example, the propositional statement “group solidarity is a positive function of external conflict with other groups” says that as group conflict escalates, the level of internal solidarity among members of the respective groups involved in the conflict increases. Thus, two properties of the social universe denoted by variable concepts, “group solidarity” and “Conflict,” are connected by the proposition that as one increases in value, so does the other.

Iv. Modeling Schemes

At times, it is useful to draw a picture of social events. Some models are drawn with neutral languages such as mathematics, in which the equation is presumed to map and represent empirical process. In reality, such equations are propositions (formal statements of relations among variables) unless they can be used to generate a picture of some form of graphic representation of processes. There is no clear consensus about what a model is, but in general, models array in visual space concepts denoting important social processes.

A model, then, is a diagrammatic representation of social events. The diagrammatic elements of any model include concepts that denote and highlight certain features of the universe, the arrangement of these concepts in visual space so they reflect the ordering of events in the universe, and symbols that mark the connections among concepts- such as lines, arrows, vectors, and so on. The elements of a model may be weighted in some way; they may be sequentially organized to express events over time; or, they may represent complex patterns of relations, such as threshold effects, feedback loops, mutual interactions, cycles, and other potential ways in which properties of the universe affect one another.

In sociology, most diagrammatic models are constructed to emphasize the causal connections among properties of the universe. That is, they are designed to show how changes in the values of one set of variables are related to changes in the values of other variables. Models are typically constructed when there are numerous variables whose causal interrelations an investigator wants to highlight.

The Emergence of Classical Sociological Theories: Background Conditions

2.1. Social Forces in the Development of Sociological Theory

All intellectual fields are profoundly shaped by their social settings. This is particularly true of sociology, which is not only derived from that setting but takes the social setting as its basic subject matter. Some of the most important social conditions of the 19th and early 20th century will be presented as follows.

The social conditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth century's were of the utmost significance to the development of sociology. The chaos and social disorder that resulted from the series of political revolutions ushered in by the French Revolution in 1789 disturbed many early social theorists. While they recognized that a return to the old order was impossible, they sought to find new sources of order in societies that had been traumatized by dramatic political changes.

The Industrial Revolution was a set of developments that transformed Western societies from largely agricultural to overwhelmingly industrial systems. Peasants left agricultural work for industrial occupations in factories. Within this new system, a few profited greatly while the majority worked long hours for low wages. A reaction against the industrial system and capitalism led to the labor movement and other radical movements dedicated to overthrowing the capitalist system. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, large numbers of people moved to urban settings. The expansion of cities produced a long list of urban problems that attracted the attention of early sociologists.

All of these changes had a profound effect on religiosity. Many sociologists came from religious backgrounds and sought to understand the place of religion and morality in modern society. Throughout this period, the technological products of science were permeating every sector of life, and science was acquiring enormous prestige. An ongoing debate developed between sociologists who sought to model their discipline after the hard sciences and those who thought the distinctive characteristics of social life made a scientific sociology problematic and unwise.

2.1 . Intellectual Forces and the Rise of Sociological Theory

The Enlightenment was a period of intellectual development and change in philosophical thought beginning in the eighteenth century. Enlightenment thinkers sought to combine reason with empirical research on the model of Newtonian science. They tried to produce highly systematic bodies of thought that made rational sense and that could be derived from real-world observation. Convinced that the world could be comprehended and controlled using reason and research, they believed traditional social values

and institutions to be irrational and inhibitive of human development. Their ideas conflicted with traditional religious bodies like the Catholic Church, the political regimes of Europe's absolutist monarchies, and the social system of feudalism. They placed their faith instead in the power of the individual's capacity to reason. Early sociology also maintained a faith in empiricism and rational inquiry.

A conservative reaction to the Enlightenment, characterized by a strong anti-modern sentiment, also influenced early theorists. The conservative reaction led thinkers to emphasize that society had an existence of its own, in contrast to the individualism of the Enlightenment. Additionally, they had a cautious approach to social change and a tendency to see modern developments like industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization as having disorganizing effects.

Classical sociological theories are theories of great scope and ambition that either were created in Europe between the early 1800s and the early 1900s or have their roots in the culture of that period. The work of such classical sociological theorists as Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and Vilfredo Pareto was important in its time and played a central role in the subsequent development of sociology. Additionally, the ideas of these theorists continue to be relevant to sociological theory today, because contemporary sociologists read them. They have become classics because they have a wide range of application and deal with centrally important social issues.

Classical sociological theories are important not only historically, but also because they are living documents with contemporary relevance to both modern theorists and today's social world. The work of classical thinkers continues to inspire modern sociologists in a variety of ways. Many contemporary thinkers seek to reinterpret the classics to apply them to the contemporary scene.

Chapter Two: Socio–Economic Context of Classical Sociological Theory

Introduction

1) **Periodization:** the exact period covered by the so-called classical sociological theory is not clear. Some stretch the period forward while others move it backward. Fargonis indicates that CST covers the period from the origin of modern sociology beginning with Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the founder of sociology and ends with Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), author of “Sociology of Knowledge”. Generally, CST is associated with the 19th C which has been concerned with the study of modern society whose full effect emerged in the 19th C.

2) **Classical sociological theorists, as Fargonis says, “Do not speak in the same language”.** So it is difficult to identify common characteristics which unite all of the classical theorists. There are similarities and differences. For example, on,

- **Sociology and Science:** First, the Classical Sociological Theorists wanted to distinguish their work from speculative philosophy and to contribute to a scientific study of society. This is one objective which united science and sociology. However, whether they are more successful than the Enlightenment thinkers in this regard is debatable. This is because despite their best intentions, Classical Sociologists were unable to leave behind their ideological, political, and moral values and presuppositions. Even on the critical question of their commitment to science, Classical theorists had different views of what constitutes science. They were divided over the question of whether the methods of science as developed in the physical sciences were appropriate to the subject matter of the social sciences. Some believed that discovering social laws is not different from discovering the laws of nature. While others thought that human beings are unique in their rational, linguistic abilities, and they are bearers of consciousness and subjectivity. Accordingly, a distinction was made between the natural or physical sciences and on the so-called the cultural, human or social sciences. In general, while the Classical theorists agreed that theoretical systems must be supported or substantiated by evidence; there is little agreement on what constitutes empirical evidence. Despite these disagreements, the value of classical sociological theorists lies as much on their wide-ranging analysis of the forces of modernization and its impact on the human condition as their efforts at a science of society.
- **The Nature of Society (on the relationship between the individual and society):** here there is no consensus even with respect to what constitutes society. Some argued that society can be studied as a totality (as an integrated system which has a life of its own) independent of the

individuals which constitute the society. On the other hand, some believed that individuals are the most important elements or components and the sources of all observable action, and therefore, society cannot be taken as an object of analysis independent of the individuals which constitute it. If the later was the case, some classical sociologists feared that sociology would be reduced to psychology and would make no independent contribution of its own. And if society could be studied as an independent entity, then others argued that there is a danger of inventing a metaphysical group mind, thereby defeating the purpose of scientific investigation.

We can conclude that these major differences arose partly from the different attitudes and reaction of Classical theorists to the legacy of the Enlightenment.

Part Two: Founding Fathers and Sociological Theory

Chapter Three: AUGUSTE COMTE (1798-1857)

3.1. Biographical Sketch

3.2. Comte's Grand Theoretical System

3.3. Comte's System of Sociology: Social Statics and Social Dynamics

3.4. Theory and Practice: New Christianity

3.1. Biographical Sketch

Comte occupies an interesting and problematic position in the history of sociological thought. This is because, on the one hand, and by all accounts, Comte is considered to be the founder of sociology, the first person to coin the term sociology itself. On the other hand, Comte is today, regarded as belonging to the pre-history of sociology and his ideas are taken less seriously by contemporary sociologists as compared with other major figures who came after him.

Comte was born in France in a place called Montpellier in 1798. He was born in a lower-middle class family. He never studied social sciences; he rather studied science in a Technology School. Comte never received a university degree as the other figures except Spencer. There was one major episode which was taken important for the intellectual development of Comte. In 1817, Comte met and became the secretary/junior assistant of a famous intellectual older than him- Henry Saint Simon. They worked together for several years, but later on they quarreled on issues of publication.

The intellectual relationship with Saint-Simon was important. Many historians of sociology argue that all of the major ideas which Comte claimed as his own were first developed by Saint-Simon who was one of the greatest thinkers of the early 19th C. as a result, some argue that it is Saint-Simon who should be considered as the founder of sociology. In 1826, Comte arranged a program to deliver a series of public lectures on his so-called *positive philosophy*. But this was interrupted because he suffered from mental breakdown. He attempted to commit suicide. However, he recovered from his illness. Eventually, in 1842 he published his major six-volume work for which he is still known today. The work is known as “*Cours de philosophie positive*”. Then in 1852, he published another major work, the four-volume work entitled “*System de politique positive*”, which is concerned with the practical application of Comte’s ideas. Towards the end of his intellectual life, Comte became very unstable, isolated, and marginalized in the intellectual environment. He lost hope because he thought that his sociological theory and his practical plans were not accepted seriously. He adopted a habit, ‘cerebral hygiene’; that he stopped reading, studying the works of others. He started developing strange ideas and plans for the reorganization of society, and started to see himself as the high priest of a new religion of humanity; and he believed in a world that eventually would be led and governed by Sociologist-priests, elite intellectuals who design and lead society.

In terms of his personality, Comte is usually characterized as eccentric, shy, and a marginal person. For instance, he never held a secured academic position and never had a secured income in the form of salary. However, in spite of all of his problems, Comte had a considerable number of followers in other European countries, particularly in London.

3.2. Comte’s Grand Theoretical System

Comte’s theoretical system is structured around three basic components. The first one is the idea of positivism; the second, the notion of social evolution; and the third is the problem of order and progress.

Positivism: Comte’s Master Concept

Positivism is the master concept in Comte’s theoretical system. However, there are various meanings attached to positivism in his theoretical system. At least *three* meanings of positivism can be identified in Comte’s theory.

a) Positivism: The Search for Invariant Law

The first and most important is *positivism* as a science of society or a scientific method. By positivism, Comte meant *a study of society based on empirical observation, experiment, and historical comparison of*

societies to discover universal social laws rather than relying on purely abstract moral principles about human nature, social justice and other issues. Comte believed that the social world like the natural/physical world is governed by laws or social regularities. According to the positivist principle, these laws can be discovered by means of empirical research, the application of the scientific method and testing of theory about society. Comte's interest in the idea of positivism is closely related to his interest in sociology. Comte claimed that he discovered sociology in 1822 and this is accepted by sociologists. His commitment to positivism is based on his idea that sociology is and can be a scientific, positivistic discipline. Consequently, when defining sociology, Comte related it to one of the most positivistic sciences of that time namely, physics. He says, "Sociology is the term I may be allowed to invent to designate *social physics*". Not only did Comte declared that sociology can be as scientific as any discipline, he also developed a hierarchy of the positive sciences starting with Mathematics, Astronomy, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, and at the top he put Sociology. This hierarchy descends from the sciences that are the most general (Mathematics) abstract and remote from people to those that is the most complex, concrete and interesting. Sociology is the youngest science and depends upon the knowledge and procedures of the other sciences. Comte argued that Sociology, though the youngest, is the most difficult subject of all.

Although Comte advocated the need for an empirical research and the application of the scientific method, in reality, Comte was engaged in abstract speculation and theorizing, to invent the so-called the '*the invariant laws of the social world*'. In this, he was not different from the Enlightenment thinkers whom he criticized for what he called 'Metaphysical abstraction'.

However, ever since Comte coined the term, the idea of positivism in sociology is strongly identified with the conviction that sociology is and can be as scientific as physics which can construct general laws and theories to be tested through observation and experiment (with a marked preference to measurement, quantification, hypothesis testing and etc...). The controversy about science as a scientific method and sociology as a science continues to this day, thanks to Comte!

b) Positivism as a philosophy

The second meaning is positivism as a philosophy. Comte's positivism as a philosophical system is opposed to the negative philosophy of the Enlightenment. In this sense, Comte's positive philosophy is explicitly polemical tool against with which to combat the negative philosophy of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. According to Comte, the critical and destructive philosophy of the Enlightenment should be discarded and replaced by the affirmative/positive philosophy constructed by him. Comte

characterized the Enlightenment thinkers as metaphysicians whose critical and revolutionary ideas may have contributed to social change and progress but only negatively.

c) Law of The Three Stages

The third meaning is positivism as a stage in the evolution of human thought and society. This is to say that Comte also used the term to represent the last and the newest stage in the evolution of human thought and society, the positive scientific stage.

He identified three stages in the evolution of human thought and society. Comte argued that the human mind, the growth of individuals, all branches of knowledge, the history of the world, and even his own mental illness passed through these three stages of evolution. *Each stage involves a kind of search by human beings for an explanation of their surroundings.* The three stages are the;

i) The Theological Stage: is the first stage. At this stage, the human mind is searching for the essential nature of things in their environment, particularly their origin, and their purpose (why they exist at all?). This is a kind of searching for absolute kind of knowledge. At this stage, all phenomena are assumed to be created, regulated, and given their purposes by supernatural forces.

ii) The Metaphysical Stage; is the intermediate, incomplete stage. At this stage, what Comte called, abstract ideas replace supernatural forces as explanations for the origin and purposes of things in the world. 'Natural law', 'reason'... more or less replaces gods in explaining things.

iii) The Positive Stage; is the final and most important stage. Comte actually sees himself as studying this system. At the positive stage, people gradually give up their hopeless search for original causes and original purposes or give up non-scientific and metaphysical explanations. Instead, they look for regularities or invariable social and natural laws through empirical research and theory. It is the application of scientific methods. But Comte admitted that the three may coexist at the same point in the process of evolution. For example, he believed that his own time was such a period in which the elements of the three stages coexisted and that is one of the major reasons why there is such confusion, disorder, instability existing. He believed that the positive/scientific stage will be victorious in the end.

To summarize, the three stages are strategically important in Comte's theoretical system especially in relation to his problem of integrating order and progress. He wanted the three stages addressing the problem of order and progress.

d) Positivism: The Search for Order and Progress

It is possible to argue that Comte's entire theoretical system was built around the problematic of order and progress, i.e., the idea of positivism, the laws of the three stages, Comte's system of sociology, are all designed to address the problems of order and progress simultaneously. Comte argued that theology offered order, stability but without progress. It is a stagnant kind of system. Metaphysicians (Enlightenment thinking) offered progress but without order. It is an anarchist system. Comte, on the other hand, confidently proclaims that positivism will offer both order and progress simultaneously. Comte thought positivism would bring about order through restrictions/restraints of intellectual and social disorder. On the other hand, it would bring progress through an increase in knowledge and through the perfection of the balance of the relationships among the parts of the social system. So, positivism is the only system. In all these (it is Comte's dream); Comte took an idealist position the causes of conflict are intellectual anarchy, crisis of ideas. He believed that ideas govern the world.

3.3. Comte's System of Sociology

By this, we mean Comte's thinking about the nature of the social world, how the society is organized, and issues of progress and order. The building blocks of Comte's system of sociology are the twin concepts of *social statics* and *social dynamics* (both respectively mean social structure and social change). These concepts relate to social order and to issues of social progress in Comte's way of thinking.

Social Statics: the sociological study of social statics is defined by Comte as *the investigation of the laws of action and reaction of different parts of the social system*. Adopting the organic analogy, he developed the first perspective on society including the parts or structures of society, the function of the parts and the functional relationship of the parts. In addition, Comte stated the primacy of the whole over the parts (known as methodological holism). Comte also viewed the social system in a state of harmony and integration. These rudimentary ideas on society were later modified, elaborated and developed into one of the major theoretical schools of sociology, namely, the idea of structural functionalism. Comte was a pioneer of structural functionalist view of society.

Social Dynamics: the aim of Comte's idea of social dynamics is the study of the laws of succession of social phenomenon. Although social dynamics is about the study of social change, Comte's vision of social change is not something spontaneous, revolutionary, and even not conflict-ridden. Rather, it is something order-controlled evolution. In Comte's view, society follows the law of progressive development, governed by gradual (not spontaneous) evolution.

In summary, order and progress are the static and dynamic aspects of society. Order refers to the harmony and integration that prevails among the various parts of society. Again and again Comte stressed that the scientific method requires that society should be studied as a whole and not separated into its component parts. As to the theory of social dynamics or social change, Comte did not provide a systematic explanation of the mechanisms of social change except the idealist notion of the laws of the three stages.

3.4. Theory and Practice:

Comte wanted his theoretical ideas to lead to practical goals. The idea of positivism is supposed to be both a philosophical/scientific effort as well as a practice. However, more than Comte's grand theoretical system, it was his proposal to put it into practice, which created serious problems. This is because towards the end of his life, Comte started to equate positivism with the idea of a new religious system. He said, *"... thus, positivism becomes in the true sense of the word a religion, the only religion which is real and complete, therefore, destined to replace all imperfect and provisional systems resting on the primitive bases of theology"*.

Based on the exaggerated conception of his positivism, Comte eventually designed a grand visionary plan for the future of the world. It is here we find most of Comte's very controversial ideas. For example, he proposed the following doctrines of positivism as a new religion:

- He proposed the establishment of new positivistic temples;
- He specified the number of priests required in each positivistic temples; he was a kind of a leader. He suggested a new calendar which is to consist of a few months each divided into twenty eight days;
- He created a large number of public holydays to conform positivism and his basic principles;

Chapter Four: HERBERT SPENCER (1820-1903)

4.1. Biographical Sketch

4.2. Spencer's theoretical and Sociological System:

- **Defining the science of Sociology,**
- **Spencer's Conception of Sociological Method**

4.3. Spencer's Theory of Evolution

- **Evolution: General Principles and the Evolution of Society**
- **Social Types: Militant Vs Industrial Societies**

4.4. Social Darwinism: Ideology and Politics in Spencer's Theory

4.1. Biographical Sketch

Spencer is an English scholar born in Derby, England, on April 27, 1820. Like Comte, Spencer was not schooled in the arts and humanities, but rather in technical and utilitarian matters. He never attended regular school. He was taught at home by his parents because he was a sick child. In 1837, Spencer was employed as an engineer in a railway company and he worked until 1846. During this period, Spencer continued to study in his own and began to publish scientific and political works.

In 1848, Spencer was appointed an editor of the magazine known as "The Economist", and his intellectual ideas began to solidify. This gave him an important stage; he became a public figure. By 1850, Spencer published his first work known as "Social Statics". During the writing of this work, Spencer first began to experience insomnia/sleeplessness and over the years, his mental (like Comte) and physical problems mounted. He was to suffer a series of nervous breakdowns throughout the rest of his life.

In 1853, Spencer got a substantial inheritance and this enabled him to quit his job, and live for the rest of his life as a 'gentle-man-scholar'. Spencer, like Comte, never earned a university degree nor occupied an academic position in a university. He was a lifelong bachelor. In many ways, Spencer shared the eccentric character of Comte. He is different from Comte because he was not marginal that he was the famous public figure of the 19th C. Generally, Spencer's intellectual production was immense, he wrote more.

In 1862, he published “First Principle” mainly elaborating his framework, which was a kind of synthetic philosophy. In 1873, Spencer published “**The Study of Sociology**”, and the many volumes of “**Principles of Ethics**” and “**Principles of Sociology**”. In 1884, Spencer published “**The State Versus the Man**” in which he elaborated his laissez-faire view.

Spencer died on December 8, 1903.

The Social and Intellectual Context

Spencer wrote most of his work in the ‘mid-Victorian Age’, the mid-19th C (named after Queen Victoria, which is considered to be the ‘golden age’ in modern British history). The problems associated with the industrial revolution, the radical agitation and conflict, seemed to be over. There was a general prosperity ahead of most other countries. At this period, Britain was characterized as *The workshop of the world*. Britain at that time ‘ruled the waves’, it had the most commanding naval power. While the other major countries (France and Germany) were facing war and revolutions, England was enjoying peace at home and abroad.

The period in which Spencer wrote most of his theory was a very comfortable one for most British intellectuals; and most of the British literature, history, and philosophy reflected this mood of self-confidence. The idea of progress was popular among most mid-Victorian intellectuals. In many ways, Spencer’s theoretical system including the theory of evolution, Social Darwinism and his laissez-faire doctrine reflected the prevailing social and intellectual climate of mid-Victorian age.

4.2. Spencer’s Theoretical and Sociological Method

The idea of evolution was the dominant theme in Spencer’s theoretical and sociological system. His conception of society and sociology was influenced by the idea of social evolution.

Defining the Science of Sociology

Due to his focus on evolution, Spencer simply defined the study of sociology as ‘the study of evolution’. In its most complex forms, sociology is the natural history of societies. According to Spencer, whether sociology focuses on historical or contemporary issues, it should concentrate mainly on macro-level phenomena- what he called social aggregates such as social structure, institutions, and their functions.

Spencer shared with Comte the view that sociology should deal with social phenomena. In the same manner as the natural sciences, Spencer was a ‘mid-positivist’. He insisted that sociology seeks to

discover laws of social phenomena in the same way the natural sciences seek the laws of natural phenomena. He puts his convictions as follows:

Either society has laws or it has not. If it has not, there can be no order, no certainty, and no system in its phenomena. If it has, then, they are like other laws of the universe—sure, inflexible, ever active, and having no exceptions (1850/1954).

Spencer argues that sociologists, unlike ordinary people, need a disciplined habit of thought, and those habits are to be derived from a careful study of other sciences. Spencer gave particular importance to the need for sociologists to be familiar with Biology and Psychology. Especially he saw three basic linkages between Biology and Sociology as mentioned below.

1) Learning the Basic Laws of Life

Here, Spencer believed that all social actions are determined by the actions of individuals and those actions conform to the basic laws of life in general. Therefore, to understand social action, the sociologist must know the basic laws of in general and it is Biology that helps us understand those laws.

2) Powerful Analogies between Biology and Sociology

Here, Spencer strongly believed that society as a whole, like the living organism, is characterized by, among other things, **growth, structure** and **function**. Thus an understanding of the biology of the living organism, which after all is far easier to study than the social organism, offers many keys to understanding society. Biological or organic analogy is the most important methodology in Spencer's analysis of society. Unfortunately, however, Spencer was also a radical individualist. Organic analogy and methodological individualism are contradictory positions and created tension and problem in Spencer's theoretical system, which he was not able to resolve up to the end.

3) Natural Selection and Survival of the Fittest

According to Spencer, a more specific similarity between Biology and Sociology is the operation of the laws of natural selection and survival-of-the-fittest in both living and social organisms. He believed, in other words, that the survival of the fittest occurs in both the biological and social fields and that the lessons of biology from the natural world are that there should be no interference or intervention with this process in the social world.

Spencer's Conception of the Sociological Method

While in principle accepting the view that sociology is a science, which seeks to discover social laws, Spencer raised a number of important methodological problems facing sociology. Spencer discussed in detail a number of objective and subjective methodological problems faced by sociology as compared to the natural/physical sciences. We can summarize Spencer's views in terms of two points.

1) Obstacles to Objectivity: the Nature of the Subject Matter of Sociology

He attempted to show how greatly the advance of sociology is hindered by the nature of its subject matter. The primary difficulty to be unbiased or objective arises from the nature of the subject matter. Social phenomena, unlike natural phenomena, are not directly observable or easily measured. They cannot be easily studied and measured with such precise instruments such as thermometers, scales or microscopes. Social phenomena are not only different from natural phenomena, but are far more complex and difficult to study; and sociology inevitably deals with a wide or enormous range of highly dispersed details both in space and in time. Therefore, Spencer recognized the difficulty arising from the very nature of the subject matter.

2) Obstacles to Objectivity: Biases Emanating from Sociologists

Spencer says that sociologists must also confront the reality that they are the human observers of humanly created phenomena and they have a very different type of relationship to the facts or phenomena they observe than the natural scientists. This fact alone creates biases in sociological theory. For instance, Spencer identified a number of sources of bias such as; an educational bias; the bias of patriotism ("our country, right or wrong"); the class bias; the political bias, and the theological bias.

Spencer has shown a great deal of sensitivity and realistic assessment of the predicament of sociology as a positive science than Comte. Although Spencer himself was unable to free his work from the biases he identified, it is to his credit that we have to appreciate him. It is to his credit to raise the issues and attempt to advance a more realistic assessment of the relationship between sociology and science.

4.3. Spencer's Theory of Evolution

Spencer articulates a series of general truths about the world, including the facts that matter is indestructible, that there is continuity of motion and persistence of force that the relations among forces persist, and that matter and motion are continually redistributed. By a process of *deduction* from these general laws, Spencer articulates a series of ideas that constitute his general *evolutionary theory*. Spencer

seems to have believed that both nature and society are subject to the same principles and laws of evolution. Spencer developed his evolutionary theory in his massive three-volume work, *The Principles of Sociology* (1908).

Spencer believes that all inorganic, organic, and super organic (societal) phenomena undergo evolution and devolution, or dissolution. That is, phenomena undergo a process of evolution whereby matter becomes integrated and motion tends to dissipate. Phenomena also undergo a process of devolution in which motion increases and matter moves toward disintegration. Having deduced these general principles of evolution and dissolution from his overarching principles, Spencer then turns to specific areas in order to show that his theory of evolution (and devolution) holds inductively, that is, that “all orders *do* exhibit a progressive integration of Matter and concomitant loss of Motion.

The combination of induction and deduction leads Spencer to his ‘final’ evolutionary formula:

Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation (Spencer, 1902/1958:394).

Let us decompose this general perspective and examine each of the major elements of Spencer’s evolutionary theory.

First, evolution involves progressive change from a less coherent to a more coherent form; in other words, it involves increasing integration. Second, accompanying increasing integration is the movement from homogeneity to more and more heterogeneity; in other words, evolution involves increasing differentiation. Third, there is a movement from confusion to order, from indeterminacy to determined order, an increase in the distinctness with which these parts are marked off from one another. In other words, evolution involves movement from the indefinite to the definite.

Thus, the three key elements of evolution are increasing integration, heterogeneity, and definiteness. More specifically, Spencer is concerned with these elements, and his general theory of evolution, as they apply to both *structures* and *functions*. At the most general level, Spencer associates structures with ‘matter’ and sees them growing more integrated, heterogeneous, and definite. Functions are linked to ‘retained motion’, and they, too, are seen as growing increasingly integrated, heterogeneous, and definite.

There are three general dimensions in this definition.

- 1) **Integration:** Evolution involves progressive change from a less coherent to a more coherent form. In other words, it involves increasing integration.

- 2) **Differentiation:** This is the movement from homogeneity to heterogeneity. In other words, evolution involves increasing differentiation.
- 3) **Definiteness:** Evolution involves a movement from indefinite to definite, from disorder to order.

The Evolution of Society: Growth, Structure, and Differentiation

- 1) **Growth:** The first principle of social evolution is growth. That is society grows in size. According to Spencer, both organic and social aggregates grow in size. He says, “Societies, like living bodies, begin as germs originate from masses which are extremely minute in comparison with the masses. Some of them eventually reach. Societal growth may come about through two processes: (a) multiplication of individuals via population growth; or (b) the union of groups, or the coming together of unrelated parties.
- 2) **Structure:** an increase or growth in the size of unions is often followed by an increase in the complexities of their structure.
- 3) **Differentiation and Integration:** greater structural complexity requires more differentiation as well as integration of parts. For example, he says, “While rudimentary, a society is all warriors, all hunters, all hut-builder, all tool makers, every part fulfils for itself all needs; but as society grows, its parts become unlike or differentiated. The increasing differentiation of structure is accompanied by increasing differentiation of functions. This notion is part of the original structural functional analysis.

Social Types: Simple Vs Compound, Military Vs Industrial

On the basis of his observation from the evolution of the past and present societies, Spencer developed two different systems of classifying societies: Simple Vs Compound; and Militant Vs Industrial type of societies.

Militant Vs Industrial Societies

The table below illustrates the contrast between Militant and Industrial type of societies.

	Characteristics	Militant Society	Industrial Society

1	Dominant function	-corporate defensive and offensive activity	-peaceful, mutual rendering services
2	Principles of social coordination	-Compulsory cooperation	-voluntary cooperation, regulation by contract and principles of justice
3	The relation b/n the state and the individual	-individuals exist for the benefit of the state, restrictions on freedom, mobility and property	-the state exists for the benefit of individuals, freedom and few restrictions on mobility, property, etc...
4	The structure of the state	-centralized state	-decentralized form/structure
5	Nature of social stratification	-fixity of ranks, occupation, locality, inheritance of positions.	-openness of ranks, occupation, locality, etc...
6	Type of economic activity	-economic autonomy, self-sufficiency, little external trade, protectionism.	-loss of economic independence, interdependence from peaceful trade
7	Values and personal characteristics	-patriotism, loyalty, obedience, faith in authority, discipline.	-independence, respect for others, resistance to force or coercion, individual initiative.

3.4. Social Darwinism: Ideology and Practice in Spencer's Theory

Spencer articulated consistently a moral, ideological and political position which informed his theory. There are two foundations of Spencer's ideological and political ideas: Radical Individualism; and Social Darwinism.

Spencer was different from Comte in his radical individualism. Comte was anti-individualist, because he concentrated on collective entities which the individual is considered as subordinate to society in terms of theoretical principles. Spencer, in contrast, not only viewed the origin of society in individualistic and utilitarian manner but also saw society as an instrument for the enhancement of the purpose of individuals.

In contrast to Comte who wanted to direct society through the power of sociologist priests and visualized a grand plan for the reorganization of society, Spencer strongly argued that society must be free from the interference of the state or reformers. Spencer argued that the intervention of the state in social affairs will distort the necessary adaptation of society to its environment through the natural process of evolution, natural selection.

A good society for Spencer is a society based on contracts between individuals pursuing their interests. Spencer's extremely individualistic, anti-collectivist, anti-interventionist views are related to his theory of Social Darwinism, namely the application of the principles of natural selection and the survival of the fittest to the evolution of society. This has nothing to do with Darwin. Social Darwinism is one version of the many types of evolutionary theories that prevailed in the 19th C. It is a doctrine based on two central assumptions:

- 1) The argument that there are underlying and largely irresistible forces acting in societies, which are like natural forces. One can, therefore, formulate social laws similar to natural laws.
- 2) The social forces produce evolutionary problems through the natural conflict and competition between social groups. The best adapted and most successful social groups will survive from the conflict and raise the evolutionary process forward. So, it is a theory of the survival of the fittest through natural selection. The doctrine of Social Darwinism is directly fitted into the laissez-faire doctrine, the free market ideology. For some writers, the doctrine of Social Darwinism has also a racial overtone/implication with the belief that some races being innately superior to others will succeed over the weaker or the inferior races through the natural evolutionary process of the survival of the fittest. The doctrine of Social Darwinism also legitimized colonial and imperial ventures.

Generally, Spencer is considered as one of the most important proponents of the doctrine of Social Darwinism in the 19th C. Spencer says the following:

Fostering the bad for nothing at the expense of the good is an extreme cruelty. It is a deliberate stirring up of mysteries for the future generations. There is no greater curse to posterity than that of inheriting to them an increasing population of imbeciles and idlers and criminals. The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such people, to clear the world of them and make room for the better. If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die; and it is best they should die.

Chapter Five: Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

5.1. Biographical Sketch

5.2. Social Facts

5.3. The Division of Labor in society

5.4. Suicide and Suicidal Currents

5.1. Biographical Sketch

Emile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1858 in Epinal, France. He was descended from a long line of rabbis and himself studied to be a rabbi, but by the time he was in his teens, he had largely rejected his heritage. From that time on, his lifelong interest in religion was more academic than theological. He was dissatisfied not only with his religious training but also with his general education and its emphasis on literary and esthetic matters. He longed for schooling in scientific methods and in the moral principles needed to guide social life. He rejected a traditional academic career in philosophy and sought to acquire the scientific training needed to contribute to the moral guidance of society. Although he was interested in scientific sociology, there was no field of sociology at that time. His appetite for science was whetted further by a trip to Germany, where he was exposed to the scientific psychology being pioneered by Wilhelm Wundt. In the years immediately after his visit to Germany, Durkheim published a good deal, basing his work, in part, on his experiences there. The years that followed were characterized by a series of personal successes for Durkheim. In 1893 he published his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labor in Society*. His methodological statement, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, appeared in 1895,

followed (in 1897) by his empirical application of those methods in the *Study of Suicide*. The other of his most important works, *The Elementary Forms of religious Life*, was published in 1912.

Durkheim is most often thought of today as a political conservative, and his influence within sociology certainly has been a conservative one. However, Durkheim had a profound influence on the development of sociology.

Durkheim died on November 15, 1917, a celebrated figure in French intellectual circles, but it was not until over twenty years later, with the publication of Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), that his work became a significant influence on American sociology.

5.2.Social Facts

Emile Durkheim's theoretical orientation, unlike that of many other major sociological thinkers, contains little ambiguity. He was deeply concerned with the impact of large-scale structures of society, and society itself, on the thoughts and actions of individuals. His work, as interpreted by T. Parsons and others, was most influential in shaping structural-functional theory, with its emphasis on social structure and culture. In light of this, our objective in this chapter is to describe Durkheim's theoretical perspective, with particular (but not exclusive) attention to its macro sociological concerns.

The development and use of the concept of a social fact lies at the heart of Durkheim's sociology. In modern terms, *social facts* are the social structures and cultural norms and values that are external to, and coercive of, actors. Thus as students, you are constrained by such social structures as the university bureaucracy as well as the norms and values of Ethiopian society, which place such great importance on getting a college education. Similar social facts constrain people in all areas of social life.

In Durkheim's view, sociology was born in France in the 19th century. He recognized its roots in the ancient philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) and more proximate sources in French philosophers such as Montesquieu and Condorcet. To separate it from philosophy, Durkheim argued that sociology should be oriented toward empirical research. In his view, the two other major figures who thought of themselves as sociologists, Comte and Spencer, were far more interested in philosophizing, in abstract theorizing, than they were in studying the social world empirically.

Social Facts

In order to help sociology move away from philosophy and to give it a clear and separate identity, in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim argued that the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be the study of social facts. The concept of social fact has several components, but crucial in separating

sociology from philosophy is the idea that *social facts are to be treated as things*. In that they are to be treated as things, social facts are to be studied empirically, not philosophically. Durkheim believed that ideas can be known introspectively (philosophically), but *things* ‘cannot be conceived by purely mental activity’; they require for their conception ‘data from outside the mind’. This empirical study of social facts as things sets Durkheimian sociology apart from the largely introspective theorizing of Comte and Spencer.

To differentiate sociology from psychology, Durkheim argued that social facts were *external to, and coercive of, the actor*. Sociology was to be the study of social facts, where as the study of psychological facts was relegated to psychology. To Durkheim, psychological facts were basically inherited phenomena. Although this certainly does not describe psychology today, it did allow him to draw a clear differentiation between the two fields. However, by defining a social fact as a *thing* that is *external to, and coercive of, the actor*, Durkheim seems to have done a reasonably good job of attaining his objective of separating sociology from both philosophy and psychology.

We know that a social fact is a thing and that it is external and coercive, but what else is a social fact? Actually, Durkheim differentiated between two broad types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. *Material social facts* are the clearer of the two because they are real, material entities, but they are also of lesser significance in Durkheim’s work. As he put it, “The social fact is sometimes materialized so far as to become an element of the external world”. Architecture and the law would be two examples of what is meant by material social facts

The bulk of Durkheim’s work, and the heart of his sociology, lies in the study of nonmaterial social facts. He said, “Not all social consciousness achieves...externalization and materialization”. What sociologists now call *norms* and *values*, or more generally culture, are good examples of what Durkheim meant by *nonmaterial social facts*. But this idea creates a problem: How can nonmaterial social facts like norms and values be external to the actor? Where could they be found except in the minds of actors? And if they are in the minds of the actors, then are they not internal rather than external?

To clarify this issue, we must refine Durkheim’s argument by contending that while material social facts are clearly external and coercive, nonmaterial social facts are not so clear-cut. To at least some extent, they are found in the minds of actors. The best way to conceptualize nonmaterial social facts is to think them as external to, and coercive of, psychological facts. In this way we can see that both psychological and *some* social facts exist within and between consciousness. Durkheim made this clear in a number of places. At one point he said of social facts, “Individual minds, forming groups by mingling and focusing, give birth to being, *psychological if you will*, but constituting a psychic individuality of a new sort”. At

another point, Durkheim said, “This does not mean that they [nonmaterial social facts] are not also mental after a fashion, since they all consist of ways of thinking or behaving”. Thus it is best to think of nonmaterial social facts, at least in part, as mental phenomena, but mental phenomena that are external to, and coercive of, another aspect of the mental process—psychological facts. This confounds Durkheim’s differentiation between sociology and psychology somewhat, but it does serve to make the differentiation more realistic and as a result more defensible. Sociology *is* concerned with mental phenomena, but they are usually of a different order from the mental concerns of psychology. Durkheim thus was arguing that sociologists are interested in norms and values, whereas psychologists are concerned with such things as human instincts.

Social facts, then, play a central role in the sociology of Emile Durkheim. A useful way of extracting the most important social facts from his work, and for analyzing his thoughts on the relationship among these phenomena, is to begin with Durkheim’s efforts to organize them into *levels* of social reality. He began at the level of material social facts, not because it was the most important level to him, but because its elements often take causal priority in his theorizing. They affect nonmaterial social facts, which are the real focus of his work.

The major levels of social reality in Durkheim’s work can be depicted as follows:

A. Material Social Facts

1. Society
2. Structural components of society (e.g., church and state)
3. Morphological components of society (e.g., population distribution, channels of communication, and housing arrangements)

B. Nonmaterial Social Facts

1. Morality
2. Collective conscience
3. Collective representations
4. Social currents

The levels within the two categories are listed in terms of descending order of generality. It is his focus on macro-level social facts that is one of the reasons why Durkheim’s work played a central role in the

development of structural functionalism. More specifically, drawing on biology and using organismic analogy, Durkheim saw society as composed of “organs” (social facts), or social structures, that had a variety of functions for society. Durkheim urged that we distinguish functions, or the ends served by various structures, from the factors that caused them to come into existence. Durkheim was interested in studying both the causes of social structures and the functions they perform, although he wanted to carefully differentiate between these topics of study.

The logic of Durkheim’s theory can be traced in his analysis of the development of the modern world. This is most clearly shown in one of his most important works, *The Division of Labor in Society*, a work that has been called sociology’s first classic.

5.3. The Division of Labor in society

The Division of Labor in Society (1893) is the first major study of Durkheim. The main problem Durkheim wanted to address in this work is the moral ambiguity in the relationship between the individual and society in the modern industrial world. On the one hand, the development of modern industrial type of society is associated with increasing individualism- the ideology of modern society. On the other hand, the phenomenon of individualism is clearly associated with the growth and expansion of the division of labor which produces specialization of occupations and therefore promotes the development of specific talents, capacities, and attitudes which are not shared by everyone in the society.

The analytical strategy followed by Durkheim was to compare and contrast the traditionally pre-industrial society and the modern industrial society. He characterized the nature of the basis of integration in traditional societies as *mechanical solidarity* and in modern societies as *organic solidarity*.

Mechanical Solidarity: Homogeneity, ‘Collective Conscience’

The idea of mechanical solidarity is shorthand for characterizing the nature of social integration, order, solidarity, cohesion in traditional, pre-industrial societies.

Structural Properties of Pre-industrial Society: Homogeneity

According to Durkheim, traditional/pre-industrial society is based on mechanical solidarity characterized by relatively undifferentiated social structure with little or no division of labor. In other words, such a society has a homogeneous social structure, little differentiation and division of labor. For Durkheim, the division of labor is a kind of a *material social fact* (more objective) that involves specialization and

differentiation of tasks. Accordingly, societies, communities, and individuals in traditional/pre-industrial settings or conditions, people occupy very general/undifferentiated positions. For example, roles and statuses in which they perform a wide variety of tasks and assume different responsibilities mainly based on kinship and religious criteria. The homogeneous character of the social structure means that different tribes and clans, for instance, are very similar to each other in their internal organization and each forms a kind of *mini society*. Thus, any part of such society can break away without much damage to the whole. Why? This is because the unity of such a society is not based on an indispensable/mandatory functional interdependence. For example, property in such society tends to be communal, which is only one aspect of the low level of differentiation and individualism.

Ideational Properties: Collective Conscience

A society based on *mechanical solidarity* is characterized by common beliefs, common sentiments, values, norms, etc... which is a kind of a uniform cultural code of shared meanings which is partly the outcome of the structural property- a homogeneous social structure. Durkheim simply characterized these shared, common beliefs as *collective conscience* which is a non-material social fact. The essential point is that in traditional/pre-industrial societies, the bases of social order, integration, and solidarity is precisely so-called collective consciousness. Since in mechanical solidarity the society is dominated by the existence of strongly formed sets of beliefs and sentiments shared by most members of the community, it follows that there is little scope for differentiation and particularly for individualism. In fact, Durkheim argues that each individual is 'a microcosm' of the whole. Where mechanical solidarity is the main basis of social cohesion, collective consciousness completely envelopes the individual consciousness hence, leading to identity, similarity, and homogeneity between individuals.

Organic Solidarity: the Division of Labor and Interdependence

The idea of organic solidarity simply refers to the type of social order, integration, and solidarity that is supposed to prevail in modern industrial society which is a different principle of social integration than mechanical solidarity. In this type of society, according to Durkheim, solidarity and integration arise not simply from acceptance of common beliefs and sentiments but from *functional interdependence created by the division of labor* itself.

Durkheim's main argument and conclusion is that the expansion of the division of labor and specialization by making the interdependence of individuals, groups, and institutions on each other inevitable and indispensable; it has become a source of a new form of integration in modern industrial society.

Mechanical solidarity is based on similarity, identity/homogeneity of ideas, beliefs. Organic solidarity, on the other hand, is not based on similarity or identity, but on difference and diversity between individuals in their beliefs and actions. The important point is that the growth of organic solidarity and expansion of the division of labor are associated with increasing individualism, which becomes the principal ideology of modern industrial societies- the cult of individualism. In other words, organic solidarity is associated with the declining importance of 'collective conscience'. In these circumstances, can the division of labor alone be a significant basis of moral solidarity in modern industrial societies? Durkheim's answer was not satisfactory. He argued as follows:

Although organic solidarity is associated with the declining importance of collective consciousness, it does not mean that commonly held beliefs, values, and norms completely disappear in modern industrial society.

In relation to this issue, Durkheim, for example, criticized the liberal theory of utilitarian individualism and he attacked Spencer for his radical individualism. Durkheim argued that a society in which each individual follows his own interests will disintegrate within a short time. He says, "*There is nothing less constant than interest. Today, it unites me to you; tomorrow it will make me your enemy*".

Contractual relations are the basis of modern society. However, they presuppose the development of norms and values which govern contractual relations. This is the basis of Durkheim's famous principle of the non-contractual basis of contract; that modern industrial society has an element of moral foundation in spite of the decline of collective consciousness (shared beliefs and ideas).

5.4. Suicide and Elementary Forms of Religious Life

5.4.1. Suicide

In his book "Suicide", Durkheim tried to show how sociology forced to establish significant correlation by using statistical data, how inferences can be generated from the data or results and how broader generalization are formulated from empirical data which lead to theory.

He used official statistics to explain variation of suicide rates in different countries. He was interested in social rates of suicide rather than individual suicide rate. He was argued for a shift from psychological explanations of suicide, i.e., what motivates individuals to commit suicide. Individual social actions have social causes. In his view looking only at this individual motivation is reductionist. So instead of psychological explanation, we have to look explanations of suicide rate in the larger social context.

Suicide rate increases as the degree of integration and regulation of the individual by the group decreases. In other words the more the free individual from external restraints and the more isolated from group life the more likely he/she to commit suicide.

According to Durkheim there are four types of suicide (egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic suicide) and summarized as follows.

A. Egoistic Suicides

Egoistic suicides are the results of a weakening of the bonds that normally integrate individuals into the collectivity: in other words a breakdown or decrease of social integration. Durkheim refers to this type of suicide as the result of "excessive individuation", meaning that the individual becomes increasingly detached from other members of his community. Those individuals who were not sufficiently bound to social groups (and therefore well-defined values, traditions, norms, and goals) were left with little social support or guidance, and therefore tended to commit suicide on an increased basis. An example Durkheim discovered was that of unmarried people, particularly males, who, with less to bind and connect them to stable social norms and goals, committed suicide at higher rates than married people.

B. Altruistic Suicides

Altruistic suicides occur in societies with high integration, where individual needs are seen as less important than the society's needs as a whole. They thus occur on the opposite integration scale as egoistic suicide. As individual interest was not important, Durkheim stated that in an altruistic society there would be little reason for people to commit suicide. He stated one exception, namely when the individual is expected to kill themselves on behalf of society – a primary example being the soldier in military service.

C. Anomic Suicides

Anomic suicides are the product of moral deregulation and a lack of definition of legitimate aspirations through a restraining social ethic, which could impose meaning and order on the individual conscience. This is symptomatic of a failure of economic development and division of labor to produce Durkheim's organic solidarity. People do not know where they fit in within their societies.

D. Fatalistic Suicides

Fatalistic suicides occur in overly oppressive societies, causing people to prefer to die than to carry on living within their society. This is an extremely rare reason for people to take their own lives, but a good example would be within a prison; people prefer to die than live in a prison with constant abuse.

The above four types of suicide are based on the degrees of imbalance of two social forces: social integration and moral regulation. Durkheim noted the effects of various crises on social aggregates – war, for example, leading to an increase in altruism, economic boom or disaster contributing to anomie.

5.4.2. Elementary Forms of Religious Life

This is perhaps Durkheim's most complex work, as he attempts to provide both sociology of religion and a theory of knowledge. In this work, Durkheim studies primitive society to demonstrate that an enduring quality of all religions, even the most modern, is the differentiation between the sacred and the profane. The sacred is created through rituals, and what is deemed sacred is what morally binds individuals to society. This moral bond then becomes, according to Durkheim, a cognitive bond that shapes the categories we use to understand the social world.

The development of religion is not simply based on the differentiation between the sacred and the profane, but also on religious beliefs, rituals, and the church. The latter two conditions are particularly important to Durkheim because they connect the individual to the social; individuals learn about the sacred and religious beliefs through participating in rituals and the church. The most primitive form of religion is totemism, which is connected to the least complex form of social organization, the clan. The totem is the actual representation of the clan-it is the material representation of the nonmaterial, collective morality of the clan.

Durkheim had motive for studying the functions of religion-namely, concern with mechanisms that might serve to shore up a threatened social order. In this respect he was in quest of what would today be described as functional equivalents for religion in a fundamentally a-religious age.

Basic to his theory is the stress on religious phenomena as communal rather than individual. "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Durkheim was not concerned with the variety of religious experience of individuals but rather with the communal activity and the communal bonds to which participation in religious activities gives rise.

Durkheim's sociology of religion is not limited to these general considerations, which, in fact, are contained in only a few pages of his monumental work on *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. The bulk of the book is devoted to a close and careful analysis of primitive religion, more particularly of the data on primitive Australian forms of cults and beliefs. Here, as elsewhere, Durkheim is concerned with elucidating the particular functions of religion rather than with simply describing variant forms.

In a well-known critique, the Durkheimian scholar Harry Alpert conveniently classified Durkheim's four major functions of religion as disciplinary, cohesive, vitalizing, and euphoric social forces. Religious rituals prepare men for social life by imposing self-discipline and a certain measure of asceticism. Religious ceremonies bring people together and thus serve to reaffirm their common bonds and to reinforce social solidarity. Religious observance maintains and revitalizes the social heritage of the group and helps transmit its enduring values to future generations. Finally, religion has a euphoric function in that it serves to counteract feelings of frustration and loss of faith and certitude by reestablishing the believers' sense of well-being, their sense of the essential rightness of the moral world of which they are a part. By countering the sense of loss, which, as in the case of death, may be experienced on both the individual and the collective level, religion helps to reestablish the balance of private and public confidence. On the most general plane, religion as a social institution serves to give meaning to man's existential predicaments by tying the individual to that supra-individual sphere of transcendent values which is ultimately rooted in his society.

Chapter Six: Karl Marx (1818-1883)

6.1. Biographical Sketch

Karl Marx was born in Germany, whose works has proven so productive to sociology. Rediscoveries and reinterpretations of Marx have often renewed sociology and opened up a fresh perspective on such issues as alienation, human nature, labor, dialectic materialism, and the like.

Despite differing interpretations, there is general agreement that Marx's main interest was in the historical basis of inequality, especially the unique form it takes under capitalism. However, Marx's approach was different from many of the theories that we will examine. For Marx, a theory about how society works would be partial, because what he mainly sought was a theory about how to change society. Marx's theory, then, is an analysis of inequality under capitalism and how to change it.

6.2. The Dialectic and Human Nature

The Dialectic

- **Dialectic (dialectical materialism)** is a method that Marx used to study the real existing contradictions within a social system. Marx believed that the history of society could best be understood as a dialectical process, but material dialectic. Instead of the opposition and negation of abstract principles, dialectical materialism consists in the confrontation of conflicting class interests. For instance, one of the contradictions within capitalism is the relationship between the workers and the capitalists.

The idea of a dialectical philosophy had been around for centuries. Its basic idea is the centrality of contradiction. While most philosophies, and indeed common sense, treat contradictions as mistakes, a dialectical philosophy believes that contradictions exist in reality and that the most appropriate way to understand historical change. According to Hegel, a philosopher who highly influenced Marx, historical change has been driven by the contradictory understandings that are the essence of reality, our attempts to resolve the contradictions, and the new contradictions that develop.

Marx also accepted the centrality of contradictions to historical change. We see this in such well-known formulations as the “contradictions of capitalism” and “class contradictions.” However, unlike Hegel, Marx did not believe that these contradictions could be worked out in our understanding, that is, in our minds. Instead, for Marx these are real existing contradictions. For Marx, such contradictions are not resolved by the philosopher sitting in an armchair, but by a life-and-death struggle that changes the social world. This was a crucial transformation because it allowed Marx to move the dialectic out of the realm of philosophy and into the realm of a study of social relations grounded in the material world. It is this

focus that makes Marx's work so relevant to sociology, even though the dialectical approach is very different from the mode of thinking used by most sociologists. The dialectic leads to an interest in the conflicts and contradictions among various levels of social reality, rather than to the more traditional sociological interest in the way these various levels mesh neatly into a cohesive whole.

For example, one of the contradictions within capitalism is the relationship between the workers and the capitalists—who own the factories and other means of production with which the work is done. The capitalist must exploit the workers in order to make a profit from the workers labor. The workers, in contradiction to the capitalists, want to keep at least some of the profit for themselves. Marx believed that this contradiction was at the heart of capitalism, and that it would grow worse as capitalists drove more and more people to become workers by forcing small firms out of business and as competition between the capitalists forced them to further exploit the workers to make profit. As capitalism expands, the number of workers exploited, as well as the degree of exploitation, increases. This contradiction cannot be resolved through philosophy, but only through social change. The tendency for the level of exploitation to escalate leads to more and more resistance on the part of the workers. Resistance begets more exploitation and oppression, and the likely result is a confrontation between the two classes.

6.3. Human Nature

Marx built his critical analysis of the contradictions of capitalist society on his premises about human nature, its relation to labor, and its potential for alienation under capitalism. He believed that there was a real contradiction between our human nature and the way that we must work in capitalist society.

Marx wrote in an early work that human beings are an “ensemble of social relations.” He indicates by this that our human nature is intertwined with our specific social relations and our institutional context. Therefore, human nature is not a static thing, but varies historically and socially. To understand human nature, we need to understand social history, because human nature is shaped by the same dialectical contradictions that Marx believed shapes the history of society.

For Marx, a conception of human nature that does not take social and historical factors into account is wrong, but to take them into account is not the same as being without a conception of human nature. It simply complicates this conception. For Marx, there is a human nature in general, but what is more important is the way that human nature is “modified in each historical epoch”. When speaking of our general human nature, Marx often used the term *species being*. By this he meant the potentials and powers that are uniquely human and that distinguish us from other species.

Some Marxists have contended that the mature Marx did not believe in any human nature. There are certainly reasons to downplay human nature for someone interested in changing society. Ideas about human nature such as our “natural” greed, our “natural” tendency to violence, and our “natural” gender differences have often been used to argue against any social change. Such conceptions of human nature are innately conservative. If our problems are due to human nature, we had better learn to just adapt instead of trying to change things.

Nevertheless, there is much evidence that Marx did have a notion of human nature. Indeed, it makes little sense to say there is no human nature. Even if we are like a blank chalkboard, the chalkboard must be made out of something, and must have a nature such that chalk marks can show up on it. Some conception of human nature is part of any sociological theory. Our concept of human nature dictates how society can be sustained and how it can be changed, but most importantly for Marx’s theory, it suggests how society should be changed. The real question is not whether we have a human nature, but what kind of nature it is unchanging or open to historical processes.

Unless we confront the idea, however dangerous, of our human nature and species being and get some understanding of them, we cannot know what it is we might be alienated from or what emancipation might mean. Nor can we determine which of our “slumbering powers” must be awakened to achieve emancipatory goals. A working definition of human nature, however tentative and insecure, is a necessary step in the search for real as opposed to fantastic alternatives. A conversation about our “species being” is desperately called for.

6.4. Labor

For Marx, our species being and our human nature are intimately related to labor:

Labor is in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature.... By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway.... We presuppose labor in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor process we get a result that existed in the imagination of the laborer at its

commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose (Marx, 1867 cited in Ritzer and Goodman, 2004: 49).

We see in the above quotation many important parts of Marx's view of the relation between labor and human nature. First, what distinguishes us from other animals—our species being—is that our labor creates something in reality that previously existed only in our imagination. Our production reflects our purpose. Marx calls this process where we create external objects out of our internal thoughts *objectification*. Second, this labor is material. It works with material nature in order to satisfy our material needs. Finally, Marx believed that this labor does not just transform nature; it also transforms us, including our needs, our consciousness, and our human nature. Labor is thus at the same time (1) the objectification of our purpose, (2) the establishment of an essential relation between human need and the material objects of our need, and (3) the transformation of our human nature.

Marx's use of the term *labor* is not restricted to economic activities but encompasses all productive actions where we transform material nature in accordance with our purpose. Whatever is created through this free purposive activity is both an expression of our human nature and a transformation of it. As we will see below, the process of labor has been changed under capitalism, making it difficult for us to understand Marx's conception, but we get close to Marx's concept when we think of the creative activity of the artist. The art work is a representation of the thought of the artist. In Marx's terms, the art work is an objectification of the artist. However, it is also true that the process of creating the art changes the artist. Through the process of producing the art, the artist's ideas of it change or the artist may become aware of a new vision that needs objectification. In addition, the completed art work can take on a new meaning for the artist and transform the artist's conceptions of that particular piece or of art in general.

Labor, even artistic labor, is in response to a need, and the transformation that labor entails also transforms our needs. The satisfaction of our needs can lead to the creation of new needs. For example, the production of cars to satisfy our need for long distance transportation led to a new need for highways. Even more significantly, although few people thought they needed cars when cars were first invented, now most people feel that they need one. A similar change has occurred with the computer. Whereas two generations ago few thought they needed a personal computer, now many people need one, as well as all of the software and peripherals that go with it.

We labor in response to our needs, but the labor itself transforms our needs, which can lead to new forms of productive activity. According to Marx, it is this transformation of our needs through labor that is the engine of human history.

Not only the objective conditions change in the act of production... but the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language (Marx, 1857 cited in *ibid*).

Labor, for Marx, is the development of our truly human powers and potentials. By transforming material reality to fit our purpose, we also transform ourselves. Further more, labor is a social activity. Work involves others, directly in joint productions, or because others provide us with the necessary tools or raw materials for our work, or because they enjoy the fruits of our labor. Labor does not just transform the individual human, it transforms society. Indeed, for Marx, the emergence of a human as an individual depends on a society. Marx wrote, “Man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society” (*Ibid*). In addition, Marx tells us that this transformation includes even our consciousness: “Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all” (Marx and Engels, 1845 cited in *Ibid*). Consequently, the transformation of the individual through labor and the transformation of society are not separable.

6.5. Alienation

Although Marx believed that there is an inherent relation between labor and human nature, he thought that this relation is perverted by capitalism. He calls this perverted relation *alienation*. Our discussion of Marx’s concept of human nature and of alienation is derived mainly from Marx’s early work. Even though he shied away from such a heavily philosophical term later in his work on the nature of capitalist society, alienation remained one of his main concerns.

Marx analyzed the peculiar form that our relation to our own labor has taken under capitalism. We no longer see our labor as an expression of our purpose. There is no objectivation. Instead, we labor in accordance with the purpose of the capitalist who has hired us and pays us. Rather than being an end in itself—an expression of human capabilities—labor in capitalism is reduced to a means to an end earning money. Because our labor is not our own, it no longer transforms us. Instead we are alienated from our labor and therefore alienated from our true human nature.

Although it is the individual who feels alienated in capitalist society, Marx’s basic analytic concern was with the structures of capitalism that cause this alienation. Marx uses the concept of alienation to reveal the devastating effect of capitalist production on human beings and on society. Of crucial significance here is the two-class system in which the capitalists employ the workers (and thereby own their labor

time) and own the means of production (tools and raw materials) as well as the ultimate products. In order to survive, workers are forced to sell their labor time to capitalists. This is the sociological basis of alienation.

First, the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor therefore is not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it (Marx, 1964 cited in Ibid, 2004: 50).

As a result, people feel freely active only in their animal functions—eating, drinking, and procreating—while in the essentially human process of labor, they no longer feel themselves to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human, and what is human becomes animal. Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions, but separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions.

Alienation can be seen as having four basic components. First, the workers in capitalist society are alienated from their *productive activity*. Workers do not produce objects according to their own ideas or to directly satisfy their own needs. Instead, they work for capitalists, who pay them a subsistence wage in return for the right to use the workers in any way they see fit. Because productive activity belongs to the capitalists, and because they decide what is to be done with it, we can say that workers are alienated from that activity. Furthermore, many workers perform highly specialized tasks and as a result have little sense of their role in the total production process. For example, automobile assembly line workers who tighten a few bolts on an engine may have little feel for how their labor contributes to the production of the entire car. They do not objectivate their ideas, and they are not transformed by the labor in any meaningful way. Instead of being a process that is satisfying in and of itself, productive activity in capitalism is reduced, Marx argued, to an often boring and stultifying means to the fulfillment of the only end that really matters in capitalism—earning enough money to survive.

Second, the workers are alienated not only from productive activities but also from the object of those activities—the product. The product of their labor does not belong to the workers. Instead, the product belongs to the capitalists, who may use it in any way they wish, because the product is the capitalists' private property. Marx tells us that, private property is thus the product, the result, and the necessary

consequence of alienated labor. The capitalist will use his or her ownership in order to sell the product for a profit.

If workers wish to own the product of their own labor, they must buy it like anyone else. No matter how desperate the workers need, they cannot use the products of their own labor to satisfy their need. Even workers in a bakery can starve if they don't have the money to buy the bread that they have made. Because of this peculiar relation, things that we buy—that are made by others—seem to us to be more an expression of ourselves than the things we make at our jobs. People's personalities are judged more by the cars that they drive, the clothes that they wear, the gadgets that they use—none of which they have made—than by what they actually produce in their daily work, which appears to be an arbitrary and accidental means for making money in order to buy things.

Third, the workers in capitalism are *alienated from their fellow workers*. Marx's assumption was that people basically need and want to work cooperatively in order to appropriate from nature what they require to survive. But in capitalism this cooperation is disrupted, and people, often strangers, are forced to work side by side for the capitalist. Even if the workers on the assembly line are close friends, the nature of the technology makes for a great deal of isolation. Here is the way one worker describes his social situation of the assembly line:

You can work next to a guy for months without even knowing his name. One thing, you're too busy to talk. Can't hear.... You have to holler in his ear. They got these little guys coming around in white shirts and if they see you running your mouth, they say, "This guy needs more work." Man, he's got no time to talk. (Terkel, 1974 cited in Ibid)

Of course, much the same is true in the newest version of the assembly line, the office cubicle. But this social situation is worse than simple isolation; the workers are often forced into outright competition, and sometimes conflict, with one another. In order to extract maximum productivity and to prevent the development of cooperative relationships, the capitalist pits one worker against another to see who can produce more work more quickly, or please the boss more. The ones who succeed are given a few extra rewards; those who fail are discarded. In either case, considerable hostility is generated among the workers toward their peers. This is useful to the capitalists because it tends to deflect hostility that otherwise would be aimed at them. The isolation and the interpersonal hostility tend to make workers in capitalism alienated from their fellow workers.

Finally, and most generally, workers in capitalist society are alienated from their own *human potential*. Instead of work being the transformation and fulfillment of our human nature, work is where we feel least

human, least ourselves. Individuals perform less and less like human beings as they are reduced in their work to machines. Even our smiles and greetings are programmed and scripted. Consciousness is numbed and, ultimately, destroyed as relations with other humans and with nature are progressively controlled. The result is a mass of people who are unable to express their essential human qualities, a mass of alienated workers.

Alienation is an example of the sort of contradiction that Marx's dialectical approach focused on. There is a real contradiction between our human nature which is defined and transformed by labor and the actual social conditions of our labor under capitalism. What Marx wanted to stress is that this contradiction cannot be resolved merely in thought. We are not any less alienated because we identify with our employer or with the things that our wages can purchase. Indeed, these things are a symptom of our alienation, which can be resolved only through real social change.

6.6. The Structures of Capitalist Society

6.6.1. Capitalism

Europe in Marx's time was undergoing increasing industrialization. People were being forced to leave agricultural and artisan trades and work in factories where the conditions were often literally inhuman. By the 1840s, when Marx was entering his most productive period, Europe was experiencing a widespread sense of social crisis. This led to a series of revolts across Europe in 1848 (soon after the publication of Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto*). The effects of industrialization and its political connotations were especially evident in the group of mostly rural states collectively referred to as Germany. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, cheap manufactured goods from England and France began to destroy the less efficient manufacturers in Germany. In response, the German states imposed capitalism on the still mainly feudal society. The resulting poverty, dislocation, and alienation were particularly evident because of the imposed rapidity of the change. It was also clearly a political as well as an economic process.

Marx's analysis of alienation was a response to the economic, social, and political changes that he saw going on around him. He did not want to understand alienation as a philosophical problem. He wanted to understand what changes are needed to create a society in which human potential can be adequately expressed. In relation to this, Marx developed an important insight: The capitalist economic system is the primary cause of alienation. Marx's work on human nature and its alienation led him both to a critique of capitalist society and to a political program oriented to overcoming the structures of capitalism so that people could express their essential humanity.

Capitalism is an economic system in which a great number of workers, who own little, produce commodities for the profit of a small number of capitalists who own all of the following: the commodities, the means of producing the commodities, and even the labor time of the worker because they have purchased it through wages. But one of Marx's central insights is that capitalism is much more than just an economic system. Most significantly, capitalism is also a system of power. The secret of capitalism is that political powers have been transformed into economic relations. Capitalists are able to coerce the workers through their power to dismiss workers or close plants. Because of this, capitalists seldom need to use brute force. Capitalism, then, is not simply an economic system; it is at the same time a political system, a mode of exercising power, and a process for exploiting the workers.

Under capitalism, the economy appears to us as a natural force. People are laid off, wages are reduced, and factories are closed all because of the "economy." We do not see these as social or political decision. The links between human suffering and the economic structures are treated as irrelevant or trivial. For example, you might read in the newspaper that the Federal Reserve Board of the United States has raised interest rates. A reason often given for this is that the economy is "overheated," which is to say that there is the possibility of inflation. Raising interest rates does indeed "cool-off" the economy; that is, it puts people out of work so that workers are afraid to demand higher wages which might get passed on as higher prices. Thus, inflation is averted. Even though this is presented as an economic decision, notice its political dimensions. Inflation makes money worthless; therefore, it primarily hurts people who have accumulated money. If people live from paycheck to paycheck, they are not hurt by inflation because their income and their cost of living both go up. Consequently, capitalists are more hurt by inflation because the money they have accumulated goes down in value. However, the people who are hurt by rising interest rates are disproportionately the poor, because they are the first to lose their jobs in a slowing economy. In raising interest rates, then, the Federal Reserve Board adopts a policy that helps capitalists and hurts workers. Nevertheless, this decision usually is presented as a purely economic one. Marx would see this as a political decision that favors the capitalists at the expense of the workers.

Marx's aim is to make the social and political aspects of the economy clearer by revealing "the economic law of motion of modern society". Furthermore, Marx intends to reveal the internal contradictions that he hopes will inevitably transform capitalism.

6.6.2. Commodities

The basis of all of Marx's work on social structures, and the place in which that work is most clearly tied to his views on human potential, is his analysis of commodities, or products of labor intended primarily

for exchange. The problem of commodities is the central, structural problem of capitalist society. By starting with the commodity, Marx is able to reveal the nature of capitalism.

Marx's view of the commodity was rooted in his materialist orientation, with its focus on the productive activities of actors. As we saw earlier, it was Marx's view that in their interactions with nature and with other actors, people produce the objects that they need in order to survive. These objects are produced for use by oneself or by others in the immediate environment. This is what Marx called the commodity's *use value*. However, in capitalism this process takes on a new and dangerous form. Instead of producing for themselves or their immediate associates, the actors produce for someone else (the capitalist). The products have *exchange value*; that is, instead of being used immediately, they are exchanged in the market for money or for other objects.

Use value is connected to the intimate relation between human needs and the actual objects that can satisfy those needs. It is difficult to compare different use values. Bread has the use value of satisfying hunger; shoes have the use value of protecting our feet. It is difficult to say that one has more use value than the other. They are *qualitatively* different. Furthermore, use value is tied to the physical properties of a commodity. Shoes cannot satisfy our hunger and bread cannot protect our feet because they are physically different kinds of objects. However, in the process of exchange, commodities are compared to one another. One pair of shoes can be exchanged for six loaves of bread. Or if we use money, as is common, the shoes are worth six loaves of bread. Or if we use money, as is common, the shoes are worth six times as much money as a loaf of bread. Exchange values are *quantitatively* different. One can say that a pair of shoes has more exchange value than a loaf of bread. Furthermore, exchange value is separate from the physical property of the commodity. Only things that can be eaten can have the use value of satisfying hunger, but any type of thing can have the exchange value of a dollar.

6.6.3. Fetishism of Commodities

Commodities are the product of human labor, but they can become separated from the needs and purposes of their creator. Because exchange value floats free from the actual commodity and seems to exist in its own quantitative realm separate from any human use, we are led to believe that these objects and the market for them have an independent existence. In fully developed capitalism, this belief turns into reality as the objects and their market do become real, independent phenomena. The commodity becomes an independent, almost mystical external reality. Marx called this the *fetishism of commodities*. Marx did not mean that commodities take on sexual meanings, since he wrote before Freud gave the term *fetish* this twist. Marx was referring to the ways in which the members of some religions, such as the Zuni's, carve

figures and then worship them. This is what Marx meant by fetish, a thing that we have made ourselves, but that we now worship as if it were a god.

In capitalism, the products that we make, their values, and the economy that is made up of our exchanges all seem to take on a life of their own. They are separate from any human needs or decisions. Most important, even our own labor—the thing that makes us truly human—becomes a commodity that is bought and sold on the market. Our labor acquires an exchange value that is separate from us. It is turned into an abstract thing and used by the capitalist to make objects that come to dominate us. Hence, the commodity is the source of the alienation discussed above. Even the labor of self-employed commodity producers is alienated, because they must produce for the market instead of according to their own purpose and need.

Thus, the economy takes on a function that Marx believed only actors could perform: the production of value. For Marx, the true value of a thing comes from the fact that labor produces it and that someone needs it. Its value represents human social relations, but in capitalism Marx (1867 quoted in *Ibid*) tells us, “A definite social relation between men... assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things”. Granting reality to commodities and the market, the individual in capitalism progressively loses control over them.

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product to that labor: because the relations of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. (Marx, 1867 quoted in *Ibid*)

Think, for example, of the cup of coffee that you might have bought before sitting down to read this text. In that simple transaction, you entered into a relationship with hundreds of others: the waitperson, the owner of the coffee shop, the people working at the roaster, the importer, the truck driver, the dockworkers, all the people on the ship that brought the beans, the coffee plantation owner, the pickers, etc. In addition, you supported a particular trading relation between countries, a particular form of government in the grower's country that has been historically shaped by the coffee trade, a particular relation between the plantation owner and the worker, and many other social relations. You did all this by exchanging money for a cup of coffee. In the relation between these objects lies hidden all these social relations between people.

Marx' discussion of commodities and their fetishism takes us from the level of the individual actor to the level of large-scale social structures. The fetishism of commodities imparts to the economy an independent objective reality that is external to, and coercive of, the actor. Looked at in this way, the fetishism of commodities is translated into the concept of *reification*. Reification can be thought of as "thingification," or the process of coming to believe that humanly created social forms are natural, universal, and absolute things, and as a result, those social forms do acquire those characteristics. The concept of reification implies that people believe that social structures are beyond their control and unchangeable. Reification occurs when this belief comes to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Then the structures actually do acquire the character people endowed them with. People become mesmerized by the seeming objectivity and authority of the economy. People lose their jobs, make career choices, or move across the country because of the economy. But according to Marx, the economy is not an objective, natural thing. It is a form of domination, and decisions about interest rates and lay offs are political decisions that tend to benefit one group over another.

By using this concept, we can see that people reify the whole range of social relationships and social structures. Just as people reify commodities and other economic phenomena (for example, the division of labor), they also reify religious, political, and organizational structures. Marx made a similar point in reference to the state: "And out of this very contradiction between the individual and... the community the latter takes an independent form as the state, divorced from the real interests of individual and community". Capitalism is made up of particular types of social relations that tend to take forms that appear to be and eventually are independent of the actual people involved. The result is a new, increasingly abstract form of social domination one that subjects people to impersonal structural imperatives and constraints that cannot be adequately grasped in terms of concrete domination (e.g., personal or group domination).

6.7. Capital, Capitalists, and Proletariat

Marx found the heart of capitalist society within the commodity. A society dominated by objects whose main value is exchange produces certain categories of people. The two main types that concerned Marx were the proletariat and the capitalist. Let us start with the proletariat.

Proletariats are workers who sell their labor and who do not own their own means of production. They do not own their own tools or their factories, but Marx further believed that the proletariat would even lose their own skills as they increasingly just serviced the machines which had the workers' skills built into them. Because the proletariats produce only for exchange, they are also consumers. Since they don't have the means to produce for their own needs, they must instead use their wages to buy what they need.

Consequently, the proletariat is completely dependent on its wages in order to live. This makes the proletariat dependent on those who pay the wages.

Those who pay the wages are the capitalists. Briefly, the capitalists are those who own the means of production. However, before we can fully understand a capitalist, we must first understand what *capital* is. To begin with, capital is money that produces more money. In other words, capital is money that is invested rather than being used to satisfy human needs or desires. We can make this clear by looking at what Marx considered to be “the starting-point of capital”, the *circulation of commodities*. Marx discussed two types of circulation of commodities. One of these types of circulation—Money→Commodities→(a larger sum of) Money (M_1-C-M_2)—is characteristic of capital; the other—Commodities→Money→Commodities (C_1-M-C_2)—is not.

In non-capitalist circulation of commodities, the circuit C_1-M-C_2 predominates. An example of C_1-M-C_2 would be the fisherman who sells his catch (C_1) and then uses the money (M) to buy bread (C_2). In other words, the primary goal of exchange in noncapitalist circulation is a commodity that one can use and enjoy.

Conversely, the capitalist circulation of commodities (M_1-C-M_2) has the goal of producing more money. Commodities are purchased in order to make a profit, not necessarily to use. In the capitalist circuit, referred to by Marx as “buying in order to sell”, the individual actor buys a commodity with money and in turn exchanges it for presumably more money. Here a store owner would buy (M_1) the fish (C) in order to sell them for more money (M_2). To further increase profits, the store owner might buy the boat and fishing equipment and pay the fisherman a wage. The end of this circuit is not the consumption of the use value, as it is in the simple circulation of commodities. The end is more money. The particular properties of the commodity used to make money are irrelevant. The commodity can be fish or it can be labor. Also, the real needs and desires of human beings are irrelevant; all that matters is what will produce more money.

Capital, then, is money that produces more money, but Marx tells us it is more than that: it is also a particular social relation. In other words, money becomes capital only because of a social relation between, on the one hand, the proletariat who does the work and must purchase the product and, on the other hand, those who have invested the money. The capacity of capital to make a profit appears “as a power endowed by Nature—a productive power that is immanent in Capital”, but it is, according to Marx, a relation of power. Capital cannot increase except by exploiting those who actually do the work. The workers are exploited by a system, and the irony is that it is a system that is produced through the workers own labor. The capitalist system is the social structure that emerges on the basis of that exploitive

relationship. Capitalists are those who live off the profit of their capital, and we can see now that they are the beneficiaries of the proletariat's exploitation. Within the idea of capital is already contained a social relation between those who own the means of production and those whose wage labor is exploited.

6.8. Exploitation

For Marx, exploitation and domination are more than an accidentally unequal distribution of wealth and power. *Exploitation* is a necessary part of the capitalist economy. Of course, all societies have exploitation, but what is peculiar in capitalism is that the exploitation is accomplished by the impersonal and "objective" economic system. It seems to be less a matter of power and more a matter of economists' charts and figures. Furthermore, the coercion is rarely naked force and is instead the worker's own needs, which can now be satisfied only through wage labor. Dripping irony, Marx describes the freedom of this wage labor:

For the conversion of his money into capital... the owner of money must meet in the market with the free laborer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labor power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for realization of his labor-power (Marx, 1867 quoted in *ibid*: 57)

Workers appear to be "free laborers," entering into free contracts with capitalists. But Marx believed that the workers must take the terms the capitalists offer them, because the workers can no longer produce for their own needs. This is especially true because capitalism usually creates what Marx referred to as a *reserve army* of the unemployed. If the worker does not want to do the job at the wage which the capitalist offers, someone else in the reserve army of the unemployed will.

The capitalists pay the workers less than the value the workers produce and keep the rest for themselves. This leads us to Marx's central concept of *surplus value*. This is defined as the difference between the value of the product when it is sold and the value of the elements consumed in the formation of that product (including the worker's labor). The capitalists can use this profit for private consumption, but that would not lead to the expansion of capitalism. Rather, capitalists expand their enterprise by converting it into a base for the creation of still more surplus value.

It should be stressed that this is not simply an economic concept. Surplus value, like capital, is a particular social relation and a form of domination, because labor is the real source of surplus value. The rate of surplus value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labor power by capital, or

of the laborer by the capitalist. This point to one of Marx's more colorful metaphors: capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks.

Marx makes one other important point about capital: "Capital exists and can only exist as many capitals." What he means by this is that capitalism is always driven by incessant competition. Capitalists may seem to be in control, but even they are driven by the constant competition between capitals. The capitalist is driven to make more profit in order to accumulate and invest more capital. The capitalist who does not do this will be out competed by the others who will. As such, he shares with the miser an absolute drive towards self-enrichment. But what appears in the miser as the mania of an individual is in the capitalist the effect of a social mechanism in which he is merely a cog.

The desire for more profit and more surplus value for expansion pushes capitalism toward what Marx called the *general law of capitalist accumulation*. The capitalists seek to exploit workers as much as possible: the constant tendency of capital is to force the cost of labor back towards Zero. Marx basically argued that the structure and the ethos of capitalism push the capitalists in the direction of the accumulation of more capital. In order to do this, given Marx's view that labor is the source of value, the capitalists are led to intensify the exploitation of the proletariat. This is what drives class conflict.

6.9. Class Conflict

By *class*, Marx usually is taken to have meant a group of people in similar situations with respect to their control of the means of production. This, however, is not a complete description of the way that Marx used the term. *Class*, for Marx, was always defined in terms of its potential for conflict. Individuals form a class insofar as they are in a common conflict with others over the surplus value. In capitalism there is an inherent conflict of interest between those who hire wage laborers and those whose labor is turned into surplus value. It is this inherent conflict that produces classes.

For Marx, a class truly exists only when people become aware of their conflicting relation to other classes. Without this awareness, they only constitute what Marx called a class *in itself*. When they become aware of the conflict, they become a true class, a class *for itself*.

In capitalism, Marx's analysis discovered two primary classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. The *bourgeoisie* is the particular name for the capitalists in the modern economy. They own the means of production and employ wage labor. The conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat is another example of a real material contradiction. This contradiction grows out of the previously mentioned contradiction between labor and capitalism. None of these contradictions can be resolved except by changing the capitalist structure. In Fact, until that change occurs, the contradiction will only become worse. Society

will be increasingly polarized into these two great opposing classes. Competition with megastores and franchise chains will shut down many small, independent businesses; mechanization will replace skilled artisans; and even some capitalists will be squeezed out through attempts to establish monopolies, for example, by means of mergers. All these displaced people will be forced down into the ranks of the proletariat. Marx called this inevitable increase in the proletariat *proletarianization*.

In addition, because capitalists have already reduced the workers to laboring machines performing a series of simple operations, mechanization becomes increasingly easy. As mechanization proceeds, more and more people are put out of work and fall from the proletariat to the industrial reserve army. In the end, Marx foresaw a situation in which society would be characterized by a tiny number of exploitative capitalists and a huge mass of proletariat and members of the industrial reserve army. By reducing so many people to this condition, capitalism creates the masses that will lead to its own overthrow. The increased centralization of factory work, as well as the shared suffering, increases possibility of an organized resistance to capitalism. Furthermore, the international linking of factories and markets encourages workers to be aware of more than their own local interests. This is likely to lead to revolution.

The capitalists, of course, seek to forestall this revolution. For example, they sponsor colonial adventures with the objective of shifting at least some of the burden of exploitation from the home front to the colonies. However, in Marx's view, these efforts are ultimately doomed to failure, since the capitalist is as much controlled by the laws of the capitalist economy as are the workers. The capitalists are under competitive pressure from one another, forcing each to try to reduce labor costs and intensify exploitation—even though this intensified exploitation will increase the likelihood of revolution and therefore contribute to the capitalists' demise. Even goodhearted capitalists will be forced to further exploit their workers in order to compete: The law of capitalist accumulation, metamorphosed by economists into pretended law of nature, in reality merely states that the very nature of accumulation excludes every diminution in the degree of exploitation.

Whether they want to or not, capitalists must move their factories where labor is cheaper; they must exploit the workers. If one capitalist does not, he or she will not be able to compete with those who do. Marx usually did not blame individual members of the bourgeoisie for their actions; he saw these actions as largely determined by the logic of the capitalist system. This is consistent with his view that actors in capitalism generally are devoid of creative independence. However, the developmental process inherent in capitalism provides the conditions necessary for the ultimate reemergence of such creative action and, with it, the overthrow of the capitalist system. The logic of the capitalist system is forcing the capitalists

to produce more exploited proletariats, and these are the very people who will bring an end to capitalism through their revolt. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, is, above all, its own gravediggers.

It is not only the ultimate proletariat revolution that Marx sees as caused by the underlying contradictions of capitalism, but also many of the various personal and social crises that beset modern society. On the personal side, we have already discussed some of the facets of the alienation that Marx believed was at the root of the feeling of meaninglessness in so many people's lives. At the economic level, Marx predicted a series of booms and depressions as capitalists overproduced or laid off workers in their attempts to increase their profits. At the political level, Marx predicted the increasing inability of a civil society to discuss and solve social problems. Instead we would see the growth of a state whose only purpose are the protection of the capitalists' private property and an occasional brutal intervention when economic coercion by the capitalist fails.

6.10. Historical Materialism and Related Concepts

6.10.1. Materialist Conception of History

Marx was able to criticize capitalism from the perspective of its future because of his belief that history would follow a predictable course. This was based on his materialist conception of history (often simply shortened to the term *historical materialism*). The general claim of Marx's historical materialism is that the way in which people provide for their material needs determines or, in general, conditions the relations that people have with each other, their social institution, and even their prevalent ideas.

Because of the importance of the way in which people provide for their material needs, this, along with the resultant economic relations, are often referred to as the *base* while the non economic relations, other social institutions, and prevalent ideas are referred to as the *superstructure*.

It should be noted that Marx's view of history does not envision a straightforward trend where the superstructure simply comes into line with the base. Human history is set into motion by the attempt to satisfy need, but as we noted above, these needs are themselves historically changing. Consequently, advances in the satisfaction of needs tend to produce more needs so that human needs are both the motivating foundation and the result of the economic base.

The following quote is one of Marx's best summaries of his materialist conception of history:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. These relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, which is the real foundation on top of which arises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production or—what is but a legal expression of the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructures is more or less rapidly transformed. (Marx, 1859 quoted in *ibid*: 62)

The place to start in the above quote is with the material *forces of production*. These are the actual tools, machinery, factories, and so forth, used to satisfy human needs. The *relations of production* refer to the kinds of associations that people have with each other in satisfying their needs. Marx's theory holds that a society will tend to adopt the system of social relations which best facilitates the employment and development of its productive powers. Therefore, the relations of production correspond to the state of the material forces of production. For example, certain stages of low technology correspond to social relations characterized by a few large landowners and a large number of serfs who work the land in return for a share of the produce. The higher technology of capitalism corresponds to a few capitalists who are able to invest in the expensive machinery and factories and a large number of wage workers. As Marx succinctly, if somewhat simplistically, puts it, "the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the capitalist". Marx adds that these relations between people also can be expressed as property relations: the capitalist owns the means of production, and the wage laborer does not.

Capitalist economies have unique relations between people, and they carry certain expectations, obligations, and duties. For example, wage laborers must show certain deference to the capitalist if they want to keep their jobs. For Marx, what was important about these relations of production was their propensity to class conflict, but it is also possible to see the effect of the relations of production in family and personal relations. The socialization necessary to produce the "good" male worker also produces a certain type of husband. Similarly, early capitalism's requirement that the man leave the home to work all day led to a definition of the mother as the primary caretaker of the children. Hence, changes in the forces

of production led to deep changes in the family structure, these changes too can be seen as relations of production.

Marx is never quite clear about where the relations of production leave off and the superstructure starts. However, he clearly felt that there are some relations and forms of “social consciousness” that play only a supporting role in the material means of production. Marx predicted that although these are not directly involved, they tend to take a form that will support the relations of production.

Marx’s view of history was a dynamic one, and he therefore believed that the forces of production will change to become better at providing for material needs. For example, this is what happened with the advent of capitalism, when technological changes made factories possible. However, before capitalism could actually occur there had to be changes in society, changes in the relations of production. Factories, capitalists, and wage laborers were not compatible with feudal relations. The feudal lords, who tied their wealth solely to the ownership of land and who felt a moral obligation to provide for their serfs, had to be replaced by capitalists who tied their wealth to capital and who felt no moral obligation to the wage laborer. Similarly, the serf’s feeling of personal loyalty to the lord had to be replaced by proletariats who will sell their labor to whomever will pay. The old relations of production were in conflict with the new forces of production.

A revolution is often required in order to change relations of production. We see that the main source of the revolution is the material contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production. However, this revolution takes the form of another contradiction, that between the exploiters and the exploited. According to Marx, the contradiction between the exploiters and the exploited has always existed. It leads to a revolutionary change when the exploited line up on the side of a change in the relations of production that favors the changes occurring in the forces of production. This means that Marx did not believe that all workers’ revolts could be effective, only those that were on the side of a change in the forces of production. And this revolution, according to Marx, will cause the supporting relations, institution, and prevalent ideas to change so that they sanction the new relations of production.

6.11. Ideology

Not only do the existing relations of production tend to prevent the necessary changes for the development of the forces of production, but similarly, the supporting relations, institutions, and, in particular, prevalent ideas also tend to prevent these changes. When prevalent ideas perform this function, Marx gave them a special name: *ideologies*.

As with many terms, Marx is not always precise about his use of the word ideology. He seems to use it to indicate two related sorts of ideas. First, ideology refers to those ideas that naturally emerge out of everyday life in capitalism, but which, because of the nature of capitalism, reflect reality in an inverted manner. For this he used the metaphor of a *camera obscura*, which employs an optical quirk to show a real image reflected upside down. This is the type of ideology represented by the fetishism of commodities or by money. Even though we know that money is nothing but a piece of paper that has value only because of underlying social relations, we must, in our daily lives, treat money as though it had its own value. Instead of seeing that we give money its value, it often seems that money gives us value.

This type of ideology is vulnerable to disruption because it is based on underlying material contradictions. Human value is not really dependent on money, and we often meet people who are living proof of that contradiction. In fact, it is at this level that we usually become aware of the material contradictions that Marx believed will drive capitalism to the next phase. We become aware of the material contradictions that Marx believed will drive capitalism to the next phase. We become aware, for example, that the economy is not an objective, independent system, but a political sphere. We become aware that our labor is not just another commodity, and that its sale through wages produces alienation. Or if we don't become aware of the underlying truth, we at least become aware of the disruption because of a blatantly political move in the economic system or our own feeling of alienation. It is in addressing these disruptions that the second use of ideology is relevant.

When disruptions occur and the underlying material contradictions are revealed, a second type of ideology will emerge. Here Marx uses the term ideology to refer to those systems of ruling ideas that attempt once again to hide the contradictions that are at the heart of the capitalist system. In most cases, they do this in one of three ways: (1) they present a system of ideas—a religion, a philosophy, a literature, a legal system—that makes the contradictions appear to be coherent; (2) they explain away those experiences that reveal the contradictions, usually as personal problems or individual idiosyncrasies; or (3) they present the capitalist contradiction as really being a contradiction in human nature and therefore one that cannot be fixed by social change.

In general, those of the ruling class create this second type of ideology. For example, Marx refers to bourgeois economists who present the commodity form as natural and universal. Or he criticizes bourgeois philosophers, such as Hegel, for pretending that the material contradictions can be resolved by changing how we think. However, even the proletariat can create this type of ideology. People who have given up the hope of actually changing society need such ideologies. But no matter who creates it, these ideologies always benefit the ruling class by hiding the contradictions that would lead to social change.

Freedom and Equality

For an example of ideology, we will look at Marx's ideas about the bourgeois conception of equality and freedom. According to Marx, our particular ideas of equality and freedom emerge out of capitalism, although we take our belief in freedom and equality to be an obvious thing, any historical study will demonstrate that it is not. Most societies would have considered the idea that all people are essentially equal as absurd. For most cultures throughout history, slavery seemed quite natural. Now under capitalism, we believe quite the opposite: inequality is absurd, and slavery is unnatural.

Marx thought that this change in our ideas could be traced to the everyday practices of capitalism. The act of exchange which is the basis of capitalism presupposes the equality of the people in the exchange, just as it presupposes the equality of the commodities in the exchange. For the commodities, the particular qualitative differences of their use values are hidden by their exchange value. In other words, apples and oranges are made equal by reducing them to their monetary value. The same thing happens to the differences between the people involved in the exchange. Most exchanges in advanced capitalism involve people who never meet and don't know each other. We don't care who grew the apples and oranges we buy. This anonymity and indifference constitutes a kind of equality.

Furthermore, freedom is assumed in this exchange, since any of the partners to the exchange are presumed to be free to exchange or not as they see it. The very idea of capitalist exchange means that commodities are not taken by force, but freely traded. This is also true of the exchange of labor time for wages. It is assumed that the worker or the employer is free to enter into the exchange and free to terminate it. Marx concludes the equality and freedom are not only respected in exchange which is based on exchange values, but the exchange of exchange values is the real productive basis of all equality and freedom. Nevertheless, Marx believed that capitalist practices result in an inverted view of freedom. It seems that we are free, but in fact, it is capital that is free and we who are enslaved.

For Marx, freedom means the ability to have control over your own labor and its products. Although individuals may seem free under capitalism, they are not. Under previous social forms, people were directly dominated by others and so were aware of their unfreedom. Under capitalism, people are dominated by capitalist relations that seem to be objective and natural, and therefore are not perceived as a form of domination. Marx decries the insipidity of the view that free competition is the ultimate development of human freedom. This kind of individual freedom is therefore at the same time the most complete suspension of all individual freedom, and the most complete subjugation of individuality under social conditions which assume the form of objective powers.

Because the capitalist owns the means of production, the exchange of wages for labor time cannot be free. The proletariat must work in order to live, but the capitalist has the choice to hire others from the reserve army of labor, or to mechanize, or to let the factory sit idle until the workers become desperate enough to “freely” accept the capitalist’s wages. The worker is neither free nor equal to the capitalist.

Hence, we see that the first level of the ideology of freedom and equality emerges from the practices of exchange in capitalism, but that our ideas are inverted and do not represent real freedom and equality. It is capital that is freely and equally exchanged; it is capital that is accepted without prejudice; it is capital that is able to do as it wishes; not us. As we noted above, this first type of ideology is easily disrupted, and our awareness of this disruption drives capitalism to the next phase. Despite the ideology of equality and freedom, few workers feel equal to their employers; few feel free in their jobs. This is why the second type of ideology is necessary. These disruptions somehow must be explained away or made to look inevitable.

This is especially true with the ideology of equality and freedom, since these ideas are among the most threatening to capitalism. They are another example of how capitalism creates its own gravediggers. Older forms of unfreedom and inequality were clearly tied to people, and there was hope, therefore, of becoming free and equal by changing the hearts of the people who oppressed us. When we become aware of the source of unfreedom and inequality under capitalism, we begin to realize that capitalism itself must be changed. Ideologies therefore must be created to protect the capitalist system, and one way in which they do this is by portraying inequality as equality and unfreedom as freedom.

Marx believed that the capitalist system is inherently unequal. The capitalists automatically benefit more from the capitalist system, while the workers are automatically disadvantaged. Under capitalism, those who own the means of production, those with capital, make money from their money. Under capitalism, capital begets more capital that is, investments give a return and as we saw above, Marx believed that this was derived from the exploitation of the workers. Not only are the workers automatically exploited, they also bear the burden of unemployment due to technological changes, geographical shifts, and other economic dislocations, all of which benefit the capitalist. The rule of capitalism is reflected in the common saying that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Constantly increasing inequality is built into the capitalist system.

Any attempt toward a more equal society must take into account this automatic propensity of the capitalist system to increased inequality. Nevertheless, attempts to make the capitalist system more equal often are portrayed as forms of inequality. From the Marxist viewpoint, these would be the second form of ideology. For example, ideologues promote a “flat tax” which taxes the rich and the poor at the same rate.

They argue that because the rate is the same for rich and poor, it is equal. They ignore the fact that a graduated tax rate may be just compensation for the built-in inequality of capitalism. They create an ideology by portraying the obvious inequalities of the capitalist system as inevitable or as being due to the laziness of the poor. In this way, inequality is portrayed as equality, and the freedom of the rich to keep the fruits of exploitation trumps the freedom of the workers.

We see in this example not only the two types of ideology, but also another instance of how Marx thought that capitalism is good thing. The ideas of freedom and equality emerge from capitalism itself, and it is these ideas that drive us toward the dissolution of capitalism, toward communism.

6.12. Religion

Marx also sees religion as an ideology. He famously refers to religion as the opiate of the people, but it is worthwhile to look at the entire quote:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. (Marx, 1843 quoted in *ibid*: 66)

Marx believed that religion, like all ideology, reflects a truth, but that it is inverted. Because people cannot see that their distress and oppression are produced by the capitalist system, they are given a religious form. Marx clearly says that he is not against religion per se, but against a system that requires the illusions of religion.

This religious form is vulnerable to disruption, and therefore is always liable to become the basis of a revolutionary movement. We do indeed see that religious movements have often been in the forefront of opposition to capitalism. Nevertheless, Marx felt that religion is especially amenable to becoming the second form of ideology by portraying the injustice of capitalism as a test for the faithful and pushing any revolutionary change off into the afterlife. In this way, the cry of the oppressed is used to further oppression.

6.13. Communism

Marx often wrote as though changes in the mode of production were inevitable, as in the above quote where the hand-mill gives you feudalism and the steam-mill gives you capitalism. Unless one wishes to find reasons for rejecting Marx's theories, it is probably best to interpret Marx's historical materialism as motivated by a desire to identify some predictable trends and to use these trends to discover the points

where political action could be most effective. The truth of historical materialism, then, does not depend on the inevitability of its historical predictions, but upon whether a focus on the way that we satisfy our material needs is the best way to reveal the opportunities for effective political intervention.

If the goal of Marx's materialist view of history was to predict those points where political action could be most effective, then it is his view of what changes will lead to the next stage that is most important. Marx thought that capitalism had developed its productive powers so that it was ready to enter a new mode of production, which he called communism. Most of his analysis dwelt on those conflicts in the present that will lead to this new economic form.

Despite the importance to Marx of the future communist society, he spent surprisingly little time depicting what this world would be like. The era in which Marx wrote was filled with talk of revolutions and new forms of society—of communism, socialism, anarchy, and many more now forgotten. Charismatic political leaders appeared upon the historical stage and stirred audiences with their speeches. Marx, however, was intellectually opposed to painting utopic visions of the future. To Marx, the most important task was the critical analysis of contemporary capitalist society. He believed that such criticism would help bring down capitalism and create the conditions for the rise of a new socialist world. There would be time to construct communist society once capitalism was overcome. In general, however, Marx believed that communism would involve making decisions about what is to be produced away from the reified economy which runs in the interests of the few capitalists and putting in its place some sort of social decision making that would allow the needs of the many to be taken into account.

Chapter Seven: Max Weber (1864-1920)

7.1. Methodology

History and Sociology

Weber's methodological essays are more in the nature of philosophical reflections upon the nature and significance of claims to historical and social knowledge. A discussion of even these general matters was viewed by Weber as mainly a precondition of fruitful intellectual work. Weber focused on substantive work: only by laying bare and solving substantive problems can sciences be established and their methods developed. On the other hand, purely epistemological and methodological reflections have never played the crucial role in such developments.

To deal with Weber's methodology, we first must clarify his thinking on the relationship between history and sociology. Even though Weber was a student of, and took his first academic job in, law, his early

career was dominated by an interest in history. In fact, his doctoral dissertations were historical studies of the Middle Ages and of Rome. In his later years, however, he identified more and more with sociology. It has been argued that it was in 1909, the year Weber started writing his massive *Economy and Society*, which he began to devote himself fully to sociology.

As Weber moved more in the direction of the relatively new field of sociology, he sought to clarify its relationship to the established field of history. Although Weber felt that each field needed the other, his view was that the task of sociology was to provide a needed “service” to history. In Weber’s words, sociology performed only a “preliminary, quite modest task”. Weber explained the difference between sociology and history: Sociology seeks to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical processes. This distinguishes it from history, which is oriented to the causal analysis and explanation of individual action, structures, and personalities possessing cultural significance. Despite this seemingly clear-cut differentiation, in his own work Weber was able to combine the two. His sociology was oriented to the development of clear concepts so that he could perform a causal analysis of historical phenomena. Weber defined his ideal procedure as the sure imputation of individual concrete events occurring in historical reality to *concrete, historically* given causes through the study of precise empirical data which have been selected from specific points of view. We can think of Weber as a historical sociologist.

Weber’s thinking on sociology was profoundly shaped by a series of intellectual debates raging in Germany during his time. The most important of these debates was over the issue of the relationship between history and science. At the pole in this debate were those (the positivists) who thought that history was composed general (nomothetic) laws and those (the subjectivists) who reduced history to idiosyncratic (idiographic) actions and events. (The positivists thought that history could be like a natural science; the subjectivists saw the two as radically different.) For example, a nomothetic thinker would generalize about social revolutions, whereas an ideograph analyst would focus on the specific events leading up to the American Revolution. Weber rejected both extremes and in the process developed a distinctive way of dealing with historical sociology. In Weber’s view, history is composed of unique empirical events; there can be no generalizations at the empirical level. Sociologists must, therefore, separate the empirical world from the conceptual universe that they construct. The concepts never completely capture the empirical world, but they can be used as heuristic tools for gaining a better understanding of reality. With these concepts, sociologists can develop generalizations, but these generalizations are not history and must not be confused with empirical reality.

Although Weber was clearly in favor of generalizing, he also rejected historians who sought to reduce history to a simple set of laws: for the knowledge of historical phenomena in their concreteness, the most general laws, because they are devoid of content, are also the least valuable. For example, Weber rejected a historian who took as his task the search for the laws of the historical evolution of a people and who believed that all peoples went through a typical sequence of stages. For Weber, the reduction of empirical reality to ‘laws’ is meaningless. In other terms, a systematic science of culture would be senseless in itself. This view is reflected in various specific historical studies. For example, in his study of ancient civilizations, Weber admitted that although in some respects earlier times were precursors of things to come, the long and continuous history of Mediterranean-European civilization does not show either closed cycles or linear progress. Sometimes phenomena of ancient civilizations have disappeared entirely and then come to light again in an entirely new context.

In rejecting these opposing views of German historical scholarship, Weber fashioned his own perspective, which constituted a fusion of the two orientations. Weber felt that history (that is, historical sociology) was appropriately concerned with both individuality and generality. The unification was accomplished through the development and utilization of general concepts (what we later will call “ideal types”) in the study of particular individuals, events, or societies. These general concepts are to be used to identify and define the individuality of each development, the characteristics which made the one conclude in a manner so different from that of the other. Thus done, one can then determine the causes of which led to the differences. In doing this kind of causal analysis, Weber rejected, at least at a conscious level, the idea of searching for a single causal agent throughout history. He instead used his conceptual arsenal to rank the various factors involved in a given historical case in terms of their causal significance.

Weber’s views on historical sociology were shaped in part by the availability of, and his commitment to the study of, empirical historical data. His was the first generation of scholars to have available reliable data on historical phenomena from many parts of the world. Weber was more inclined to immerse himself in these historical data than he was to dream up abstract generalizations about the basic thrust of history. Although this led him to some important insights, it also created serious problems in understanding his work; he often got so involved in historical detail that he lost sight of the basic reasons for the historical study. In addition, the sweep of his historical studies encompassed so many epochs and so many societies that he could do little more than make rough generalizations. Despite these problems, Weber’s commitment to the scientific study of empirical phenomena made him attractive to the developing discipline of sociology in the United States.

In sum, Weber believed that history is composed of an inexhaustible array of specific phenomena. To study these phenomena, it was necessary to develop a variety of concepts designed to be useful for research on the real world. As a general rule, although Weber (as we will see) did not adhere to it strictly and neither do most sociologists and historians, the task of sociology was to develop these concepts, which history was to use in causal analyses of specific historical phenomena. In this way, Weber sought to combine the specific and the general in an effort to develop a science that did justice to the complex nature of social life.

7.2. Verstehen

Weber felt that sociologists had an advantage over natural scientists. That advantage resided in the sociologist's ability to *understand* social phenomena, whereas the natural scientist could not gain a similar understanding of the behavior of an atom or a chemical compound. The German word for understanding is *verstehen*. Weber's special use of the term *verstehen* in his historical research is one of his best known, and most controversial, contributions to the methodology of contemporary sociology. As we clarify what Weber meant by *verstehen*, we will also underscore some of the problems involved in his conceptualization of it. The controversy surrounding the concept of *verstehen*, as well as some of the problems involved in interpreting what Weber meant, grows out of a general problem with Weber's methodological thoughts.

Weber's thoughts on *verstehen* were relatively common among German historians of his day and were derived from a field known as *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics was a special approach to the understanding and interpretation of published writings. Its goal was to understand the thinking of the author as well as the basic structure of the text. Weber sought to extend this idea from the understanding of texts to the understanding of social life:

Once we have realized that the historical method is nothing more or less than the classical method of interpretation applied to overt action instead of to texts, a method aiming at identifying a human design, a "meaning" behind observable events, we shall have no difficulty in accepting that it can be just as well applied to human interaction as to individual actors. From this point of view all history is interaction, which has to be interpreted in terms of the rival plans of various actors. (Lachman, 1971, in *ibid*)

In other words, Weber sought to use the tools of hermeneutics to understand actors, interaction, and indeed all of human history.

One common misconception about *verstehen* is that it is simply the use of “intuition” by the researcher. Thus many critics see it as a “soft,” irrational, subjective research methodology. However, Weber categorically rejected the idea that *verstehen* involved simply intuition, sympathetic participation, or empathy. To him, *verstehen* involved doing systematic and rigorous research rather than simply getting a “feeling” for a text or social phenomenon. In other words, for Weber *verstehen* was a rational procedure of study.

7.3. Causality

Another aspect of Weber’s methodology was his commitment to the study of causality. Weber was inclined to see the study of the causes of social phenomena as being within the domain of history, not sociology. Yet to the degree that history and sociology cannot be clearly separated—and they certainly are not clearly separated in Weber’s substantive work—the issue of causality is relevant to sociology. Causality is also important because it is, as we will see, another place in which Weber sought to combine nomothetic and idiographic approaches.

By *causality* Weber simply meant the probability that an event will be followed or accompanied by another event. It was not, in his view, enough to look for historical constants, repetitions, analogies, and parallels, as many historians are content to do. Instead, the researcher has to look at the reasons for, as well as the meanings of, historical changes. Although Weber can be seen as having a one-way causal model—in contrast to Marx’s dialectical mode of reasoning—in his substantive sociology he was always attuned to the interrelationships among the economy, society, polity, organization, social stratification, religion and so forth. Thus, Weber operates with a multicausal approach in which *hosts* of interactive influences are very often effective causal factors.

Weber was quite clear on the issue of multiple causality in his study of the relationship between Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism. Although he is sometimes interpreted differently, Weber simply argued that the protestant ethic was one of the causal factors in the rise of the modern spirit of capitalism. He labeled as “foolish” the idea that Protestantism was the sole cause. Similarly foolish, in Weber’s view, was the idea that capitalism could have arisen “only” as a result of the protestant Reformation; other factors could have led to the same result. Here is the way Weber made his point:

We shall as far as possible clarify the manner and the general *direction* in which... the religious movements have influenced the development of material culture. Only when this has been determined with reasonable accuracy can the attempt be made to estimate to what

extent the historical development of modern culture can be attributed to those *religious forces* and to what extent to others. (Weber 1904 cited in Ritzer & Goodman, 2004: 115)

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as well as in most of the rest of his historical work, Weber was interested in the question of causality, but he did not operate with a simple one way model; he was always attuned to the interrelationships among a number of social factors.

The critical thing to remember about Weber's thinking on causality is his belief that because we can have a special understanding of social life (*verstehen*), the causal knowledge of the social sciences is different from the causal knowledge of the natural sciences. As Weber put it, 'meaningfully' interpretable human conduct ('action') is identifiable by reference to 'valuations' and meanings. For this reason, our criteria for causal explanation have a unique kind of satisfaction in the 'historical' explanation of such an 'entity'. Thus the causal knowledge of the social scientist is different from the causal knowledge of the natural scientist.

Weber's thoughts on causality were intimately related to his efforts to come to grips with the conflict between nomothetic and idiographic knowledge. Those who subscribe to a nomothetic point of view would argue that there is a necessary relationship among social phenomena, whereas the supporters of an idiographic perspective would be inclined to see only random relationships among these entities. As usual, Weber took a middle position, epitomized in his concept of "adequate causality." The notion of adequate causality adopts the view that the best we can do in sociology is to make probabilistic statements about the relationship between social phenomena; that is, if x occurs, then it is probable that y will occur. The goal is to estimate the *degree* to which a certain effect is 'favored' by certain 'conditions'.

7.4. Ideal Types

The ideal type is one of Weber's best known contributions to contemporary sociology. As we have seen, Weber believed it was the responsibility of sociologists to develop conceptual tools, which could be used later by historians and sociologists. The most important such conceptual tool was the ideal type:

An ideal type is formed by the one sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.... In its conceptual purity, this mental construct... cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. (Weber 1903 cited in *ibid*: 116)

In spite of this definition, Weber was not totally consistent in the way he used the ideal type. To grasp what the concept means initially, we will have to overlook some of the inconsistencies. At its most basic level, an *ideal type* is a concept constructed by a social scientist, on the basis of his or her interests and theoretical orientation, to capture the essential features of some social phenomenon.

The most important thing about ideal types is that they are heuristic devices; they are to be useful and helpful in doing empirical research and in understanding a specific aspect of the social world (or a “historical individual”). Here is the way Weber put it: its function is the comparison with empirical reality in order to establish its divergences or similarities, to describe them with the *most unambiguously intelligible concepts*, and to understand and explain them causally. Ideal types are heuristic devices to be used in the study of slices of historical reality. For example, social scientists would construct an ideal-typical bureaucracy on the basis of their immersion in historical data. This ideal type can then be compared to actual bureaucracies. The researcher looks for divergences in the real case from the exaggerated ideal type. Next, the social scientist must look for the causes of the deviation. Some typical reasons for these divergences are:

1. Actions of bureaucrats that are motivated by *misinformation*.
2. *Strategic errors*, primarily by the bureaucratic leaders.
3. *Logical fallacies* undergirding the actions of leaders and followers.
4. Decisions made in the bureaucracy on the basis of *emotion*.
5. Any *irrationality* in the action of bureaucratic leaders and followers.

To take another example, an ideal-typical military battle delineates the principal components of such a battle—opposing armies, opposing strategies, materiel at the disposal of each, disputed land (“no-man’s-land”), supply and support forces, command centers, and leadership qualities. Actual battles may not have all these elements, and that is one thing a researcher wants to know. The basic point is that the elements of any particular military battle may be compared with the elements identified in the ideal type.

The elements of an ideal type (such as the components of the ideal-typical military battle) are not to be thrown together arbitrarily; they are combined on the basis of their compatibility. As a sociologist puts it, ideal types are not the product of the whim or fancy of a social scientist, but are logically constructed concepts.

In Weber’s view, the ideal type was to be derived inductively from the real world of social history. Weber did not believe that it was enough to offer a carefully defined set of concepts, especially if they were deductively derived from an abstract theory. The concepts had to be empirically adequate. Thus, in order

to produce ideal types, researchers had first to immerse themselves in historical reality and then derive the types from that reality.

In line with Weber's efforts to find a middle ground between nomothetic and idiographic knowledge, he argued that ideal types should be neither too general nor too specific. For example, in the case of religion he would reject ideal types of the history of religion in general, but he would also be critical of ideal types of very specific phenomena, such as an individual's religious experience. Rather, ideal types are developed of intermediate phenomena such as Calvinism, pietism, Methodism, and Baptism.

Although ideal types are to be derived from the real world, they are not to be mirror images of that world. Rather, they are to be one-sided exaggerations (based on the researcher's interests) of the essence of what goes on in the real world. In Weber's view, the more exaggerated the ideal type, the more useful it will be for historical research.

The use of the word *ideal* or *utopia* should not be construed to mean that the concept being described is in any sense the best of all possible worlds. As used by Weber, the term meant that the form described in the concept was rarely, if ever, found in the real world. In fact, Weber argued that the ideal type need not be positive or correct; it can just as easily be negative or even morally repugnant.

Ideal types should make sense in themselves, the meaning of their components should be compatible, and they should aid us in making sense of the real world. Although we have come to think of ideal types as describing static entities, Weber believed that they could describe either static or dynamic entities. Thus we can have an ideal type of a structure, such as a bureaucracy, or of a social development, such as bureaucratization.

Ideal types also are not developed once and for all. Because society is constantly changing, and the interests of social scientists are as well, it is necessary to develop new typologies to fit the changing reality. This is in line with Weber's view that there can be no timeless concepts in the social sciences.

Although we have presented a relatively unambiguous image of the ideal type, there are contradictions in the way Weber defined the concepts. In addition, in his own substantive work, Weber used the ideal type in ways that differed from the ways he said it was to be used. As Burger noted, "The ideal types presented in *Economy and Society* are a mixture of definitions, classification, and specific hypotheses seemingly too divergent to be reconcilable with Weber's statements" (1976, cited in *ibid*). Although she disagrees with Burger on Weber's inconsistency in defining ideal types, Hekman (1983, cited in *ibid*) also recognizes that Weber offers several varieties of ideal types:

1. *Historical ideal types*. These relate to phenomena found in some particular historical epoch (for example, the modern capitalistic marketplace).
2. *General sociological ideal types*. These relate to phenomena that cut across a number of historical periods and societies (for example, bureaucracy).
3. *Action ideal types*. These are pure types of action based on the motivations of the actor (for example, effectual action).
4. *Structural ideal types*. These are forms taken by the causes and consequences of social action (for example, traditional domination).

Clearly Weber developed an array of varieties of ideal types, and some of the richness in his work stems from their diversity, although common to them all is their mode of construction.

A scholar argues that while the heuristic use of ideal types in empirical research is important, it should not be forgotten that they also play a key *theoretical* role in Weber's work. Although Weber rejects the idea of theoretical laws, he does use ideal types in various ways to create theoretical models. Thus, ideal types constitute the theoretical building blocks for the construction of a variety of theoretical models (for example, the routinization of charisma and the rationalization of society—both of which are discussed later in this unit). And these models are then used to analyze specific historical development.

7.5. Substantive Sociology and Authority

7.5.1. Substantive Sociology

In articulating his view on sociology, Weber often took a stance against the large-scale evolutionary sociology, the organicism that was preeminent in the field at the time. For example, Weber said "I became a sociologist in order to put an end to collectivist notions. In other words, sociology, too, can only be practiced by proceeding from the action of one or more, few or many, individuals that means, by employing a strictly "individualist" method". Despite his stated adherence to an "individualist" method, Weber was forced to admit that it is impossible to eliminate totally collective ideas from sociology. But even when he admitted the significance of collective concepts, Weber ultimately reduced them to patterns and regularities of individual action: "For the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as *solely* the resultants and modes of organizations of the particular acts of

individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action”.

At the individual level, Weber was deeply concerned with meaning, and the way in which it was formed. There seems little doubt that Weber believed in, and intended to undertake, a micro sociology. But is that, in fact, what he did? One of Weber’s foremost interpreters provides us with an unequivocal answer in his description of the overall thrust of *Economy and Society*: the first strictly *empirical comparison of social structure* and normative order in *world-historical* depth.

With this as background, we are now ready for Weber’s definition of *sociology*: “Sociology... is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences” (1921, in *ibid*: 122). Among the themes discussed earlier that are mentioned or implied in this definition are:

- Sociology should be a science.
- Sociology should be concerned with causality. (Here, apparently, Weber was combining sociology and history.)
- Sociology should utilize interpretive understanding (*verstehen*).

We are now ready for what Weber meant by social action.

7.5.2. Social Action

Weber’s entire sociology, if we accept his words at face value, was based on his conception of social action. He differentiated between action and purely reactive behavior. The concept of behavior is reserved, then as now, for automatic behavior that involves no thought processes. A stimulus is presented and behavior occurs, with little intervening between stimulus and response. Such behavior was not of interest in Weber’s sociology. He was concerned with action that clearly involved the intervention of thought processes (and the resulting meaningful action) between the occurrence of a stimulus and the ultimate response. To put it slightly differently, action was said to occur when individuals attached subjective meanings to their action. To Weber, the task of sociological analysis involved “the interpretation of action in terms of its subjective meaning”. A good, and more specific, example of Weber’s thinking on action is found in his discussion of *economic action*, which he defined as “a *conscious, primary* orientation to economic consideration... for what matters is not the objective necessity of making economic provision, but the belief that it is necessary” (Weber 1921, cited in *ibid*).

In embedding his analysis in mental processes and the resulting meaningful action, Weber was careful to point out that it is erroneous to regard psychology as the foundation of the sociological interpretation of action. Weber seemed to be making essentially the same point made by Durkheim in discussing at least some nonmaterial social facts. That is, sociologists are interested in mental processes, but this is not the same as psychologists' interest in the mind, personality, and so forth.

In his action theory, Weber's clear intent was to focus on individuals and not on the collectivity. Action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behavior exists only as the behavior of one or more *individual* human beings. Weber was prepared to admit that for some purposes we may have to treat collectivities as individuals, but for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as *solely* the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action. It would seem that Weber could hardly be more explicit: the sociology of action is ultimately concerned with individuals, *not* collectivities.

Weber utilized his ideal-type methodology to clarify the meaning of action by identifying four basic types of action. Not only is this typology significant for understanding what Weber meant by action, but it is also, in part, the basis for Weber's concern with larger social structures and institutions. Of greatest importance is Weber's differentiation between the two basic types of rational action. The first is *means-ends rationality*, or action that is "determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as 'conditions' or 'means' for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends". The second is *value rationality*, or action that is "determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects for success". *Affectual* action (which was of little concern to Weber) is determined by the emotional state of the actor. *Traditional* action (which was of far greater concern to Weber) is determined by the actor's habitual and customary ways of behaving.

It should be noted that although Weber differentiated four ideal-typical forms of action, he was well aware that any given action usually involves a combination of all four ideal types of action. In addition, Weber argued that sociologists have a much better chance of understanding action of the more rational variety than they do of understanding action dominated by affect or tradition.

We turn now to Weber's thoughts on social stratification, or his famous ideas on class, status, and party (or power). His analysis of stratification is one area in which Weber does operate, at least at first, as an action theorist.

7.5.3. Class, Status, and Party

One important aspect of this analysis is that Weber refused to reduce stratification to economic factors (or class, in Weber's terms) but saw it as multidimensional. Thus, society is stratified on the bases of economics, status, and power. One resulting implication is that people can rank high on one or two of these dimensions of stratification and low on the other (or others), permitting a far more sophisticated analysis of social stratification than is possible when stratification is simply reduced (as it was by some Marxists) to variations in one's economic situation.

Starting with class, Weber adhered to his action orientation by arguing that a class is not a community. Rather, a class is a group of people whose shared situation is a possible, and sometimes frequent, basis for action by the group. Weber contends that a "class situation" exists when three conditions are met:

- (1) A number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets. This is "class situation." (Weber, 1921, cited in *ibid*: 124)

The concept of "class" refers to any group of people found in the same class situation. Thus a class is *not* a community but merely a group of people in the same economic, or market, situation.

In contrast to class, status does normally refer to communities; status groups are ordinarily communities, albeit rather amorphous ones. "Status situation" is defined by Weber as every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*. As a general rule, status is associated with a style of life. (Status relates to consumption of goods produced, while class relates to economic production.). Those at the top of the status hierarchy have a different lifestyle than do those at the bottom. In this case, lifestyle, or status, is related to class situation. But class and status are not necessarily linked to one another: money and an entrepreneurial position are not in themselves status qualifications, although they may lead to them; and the lack of property is not in itself a status disqualification, although this may be a reason for it. There is a complex set of relationships between class and status, and it is made even more complicated when we add the dimension of party.

While classes exist in the economic order and status group in the social order, parties can be found in the political order. To Weber, parties are always *structures* struggling for domination. Thus parties are the most organized elements of Weber's stratification system. Weber thinks of parties very broadly as including not only those that exist in the state but also those that may exist in a social club. Parties usually, but not always, represent class and/or status groups. Whatever they represent, parties are oriented to the attainment of power.

While Weber remained close to his action approach in his ideas on social stratification, these ideas already indicate a movement in the direction of macro-level communities and structures. In most of his other works, Weber focused on such large-scale units of analysis. Not that Weber lost sight of the action; the actor simply moved from being the focus of his concern to being largely a dependent variable determined by a variety of large-scale forces. For example, as we will see, Weber believed that individual Calvinists are impelled to act in various ways by the norms, values, and beliefs of their religion, but his focus was not on the individual but on the collective forces that impel the actor.

7.5.4. Structures of Authority

Weber's sociological interest in the structures of authority was motivated, at least in part, by his political interests. Weber was no political radical; in fact, he was often called the "bourgeois Marx" to reflect the similarities in the intellectual interests of Marx and Weber as well as their very different political orientations. Although Weber was almost as critical of modern capitalism as Marx was, he did not advocate revolution. He wanted to change society gradually, not overthrow it. He had little faith in the ability of the masses to create a "better" society. But Weber also saw little hope in the middle classes, which he felt were dominated by shortsighted, petty bureaucrats. Weber was critical of authoritarian political leaders like Bismarck. Nevertheless, for Weber the hope—if indeed he had any hope—lay with the great political leaders rather than with the masses or the bureaucrats. Along with his faith in political leaders went his unswerving nationalism. He placed the nation above all else: the vital interests of the nation stand, of course, above democracy and parliamentarianism. Weber preferred democracy as a political form not because he believed in the masses but because it offered maximum dynamism and the best milieu to generate political leaders. Weber noted that authority structures exist in every social institution, and his political views were related to his analysis of these structures in all settings. Of course, they were most relevant to his views on the polity.

Weber began his analysis of authority structures in a way that was consistent with his assumptions about the nature of action. He defined *domination* as the probability that certain specific commands (or all

commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons. Domination can have a variety of bases, legitimate as well as illegitimate, but what mainly interested Weber were the legitimate forms of domination, or what he called *authority*. What concerned Weber, and what played a central role in much of his sociology, were the three bases on which authority is made legitimate to followers—rational, traditional, and charismatic. In defining these three bases, Weber remained fairly close to his ideas on individual action, but he rapidly moved to the large-scale structures of authority. Authority legitimized on *rational* grounds rests on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands. Authority legitimized on *traditional* grounds is based on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them. Finally, authority legitimized by *charisma* rests on the devotion of followers to the exceptional sanctity, exemplary character, heroism, or special powers (for example, the ability to work miracles) of leaders, as well as on the normative order sanctioned by them. All these modes of legitimizing authority clearly imply individual actors, thought processes (beliefs), and actions.

1. Legal Authority

Legal authority can take a variety of structural forms, but the one that interested Weber most was the *bureaucracy*, which he considered “the purest type of exercise of legal authority”.

Despite his discussion of the positive characteristics of bureaucracies, here and elsewhere in his work, there is a fundamental ambivalence in his attitude toward them. Although he detailed their advantages, he was well aware of their problems. Weber expressed various reservations about bureaucratic organizations. For example, he was cognizant of the “red tape” that often makes dealing with bureaucracies so trying and so difficult. His major fear, however, was that the rationalization that dominates all aspects of bureaucratic life was a threat to individual liberty.

Weber was appalled by the effects of bureaucratization and, more generally, of the rationalization of the world of which bureaucratization is but one component, but he saw no way out. He described bureaucracies as “escape proof” “practically unshatterable,” and among the hardest institutions to destroy once they are established. Along the same lines, he felt that individual bureaucrats could not “squirm out” of the bureaucracy once they were “harnessed” in it. Weber concluded that “the future belongs to bureaucratization”, and time has borne out his prediction.

Weber would say that his depiction of the advantages of bureaucracy is part of his ideal-typical image of the way it operates. The ideal-typical bureaucracy is a purposeful exaggeration of the rational characteristics of bureaucracies. Such an exaggerated model is useful for heuristic purposes and for

studies of organizations in the real world, but it is not to be mistaken for a realistic depiction of the way bureaucracies actually operate.

Weber distinguished the ideal-typical bureaucracy from the ideal-typical bureaucrat. He conceived of bureaucracies as structures and of bureaucrats as positions within those structures. He did *not*, as his action orientation might lead us to expect, offer a social psychology of organizations or of the individuals who inhabit those bureaucracies (as modern symbolic integrationists might).

The ideal-typical bureaucracy is a type of organization. Its basic units are offices organized in a hierarchical manner with rules, functions, written documents, and means of compulsion. All these are, to varying degrees, large-scale structures that represent the thrust of Weber's thinking. He could, after all, have constructed an ideal-typical bureaucracy that focused on the thoughts and actions of individuals within the bureaucracy. There is a whole school of thought in the study of organizations that focuses precisely on this level rather than on the structures of bureaucracies.

The following are the major characteristics of the ideal-typical bureaucracy:

1. It consists of a continuous organization of official functions (offices) bound by rules.
2. Each office has a specified sphere of competence. The office carries with it a set of obligations to perform various functions, the authority to carry out these functions, and the means of compulsion required to do the job.
3. The offices are organized into a hierarchical system.
4. The offices may carry with them technical qualifications that require that the Participants obtain suitable training.
5. The staff that fills these offices does not own the means of production associated with them; staff members are provided with the use of those things that they need to do the job.
6. The incumbent is not allowed to appropriate the positions; it always remains part of the organizations.
7. Administrative acts, decisions, and rules are formulated and recorded in writing.

A bureaucracy is one of the rational structures that is playing an ever-increasing role in modern society, but one may wonder whether there is any alternative to the bureaucratic structure. Weber's clear and

unequivocal answer was that there is no possible alternative: “The needs of mass administration make it today completely indispensable. The choice is only between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration”.

2. Traditional Authority

Whereas legal authority stems from the legitimacy of a rational-legal system, traditional authority is based on a claim by the leaders, and a belief on the part of the followers, that there is virtue in the sanctity of age-old rules and powers. The leader in such a system is not a superior but a personal master. The administrative staff, if any, consists not of officials but mainly of personal retainers. In Weber’s words, “personal loyalty, not the official’s impersonal duty, determines the relations of the administrative staff to the master”. Although the bureaucratic staff owes its allegiance and obedience to enacted rules and to the leader, who acts in their name, the staff of the traditional leader obeys because the leader carries the weight of tradition—he or she has been chosen for that position in the traditional manner.

Weber was interested in the staff of the traditional leader and how it measured up to the ideal-typical bureaucratic staff. He concluded that it was lacking on a number of counts. The traditional staff lacks offices with clearly defined spheres of competence that are subject to impersonal rules. It also does not have a rational ordering of relations of superiority and inferiority; it lacks a clear hierarchy. There is no regular system of appointment and promotion on the basis of free contracts. Technical training is not a regular requirement for obtaining a position or an appointment. Appointments do not carry with them fixed salaries paid in money.

Weber also used his ideal-type methodology to analyze historically the different forms of traditional authority. He differentiated between two very early forms of traditional authority. A *gerontocracy* involves rule by elders, whereas *primary patriarchy* involves leaders who inherit their positions. Both of these forms have a supreme chief but lack an administrative staff. A more modern form is *patrimonialism*, which is traditional domination with an administration and a military force that are purely personal instruments of the master. Still more modern is *feudalism*, which limits the discretion of the master through the development of more routinized, even contractual, relationships between leader and subordinate. This restraint, in turn, leads to more stabilized power positions than exist in patrimonialism. All four of these forms may be seen as structural variations of traditional authority, and all of them differ significantly from rational-legal authority.

Weber saw structures of traditional authority, in any form, as barriers to the development of rationality. This is our first encounter with an overriding ‘theme in Weber’s work—factors that facilitate or impede

the development of (formal) rationality (see the next section). Over and over we find Weber concerned, as he was here, with the structural factors conducive to rationality in the Western world and the structural and cultural impediments to the development of a similar rationality throughout the rest of the world. In this specific case, Weber argued that the structures and practices of traditional authority constitute a barrier to the rise of rational economic structures—in particular, capitalism—as well as to various other components of a rational society. Even patrimonialism—a more modern form of traditionalism—while permitting the development of certain forms of “primitive” capitalism, does not allow for the rise of the highly rational type of capitalism characteristic of the modern West.

3. Charismatic Authority

Charisma is a concept that has come to be used very broadly. The news media and the general public are quick to point to a politician, a movie star, or a rock musician as a charismatic individual. By this they most often mean that the person in question is endowed with extraordinary qualities. The concept of charisma plays an important role in the work of Max Weber, but his conception of it was very different from that held by most laypeople today. Although Weber did not deny that a charismatic leader may have outstanding characteristics, his sense of charisma was more dependent on the group of disciples and the way that they *define* the charismatic leader. To put Weber’s position bluntly, if the disciples define a leader as charismatic, then he or she is likely to be a charismatic leader irrespective of whether he or she actually possesses any outstanding traits. A charismatic leader, then, can be someone who is quite ordinary. What is crucial is the process by which such a leader is set apart from ordinary people and treated as if endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or qualities that are not accessible to the ordinary person.

In this section, we have discussed the three types of authority as ideal types, but Weber was well aware that in the real world, any specific form of authority involves a combination of all three. Thus we can think of Franklin D. Roosevelt as a president of the United States who ruled on all three bases. He was elected president in accordance with a series of rational-legal principles. By the time he was elected president for the fourth time, a good part of this rule had traditional elements. Finally, many disciples and followers regarded him as a charismatic leader.

Although we have presented the three forms of authority as parallel structures, in the real world there is constant tension and, sometimes, conflict among them. The charismatic leader is a constant threat to the other forms of authority. Once in power, the charismatic leader must address the threat posed to him or her by the other two forms. Even if charismatic authority is successfully routinized, there then arises the

problem of maintaining its dynamism and its original revolutionary qualities. Then there is the conflict produced by the constant development of rational legal authority and the threat it poses to the continued existence of the other forms. If Weber was right, however, we might face a future in which the tension among the three forms of authority is eliminated, a world of the uncontested hegemony of the rational-legal system. This is the “iron cage” of a totally rationalized society that worried Weber so much. In such a society, the only hope lies with isolated charismatic individuals who manage somehow to avoid the coercive power of society. But a small number of isolated individuals hardly represent a significant hope in the face of an increasingly powerful bureaucratic machine.

7.5.5. Rationalization

There has been a growing realization in recent years that rationalization lies at the heart of Weber’s substantive sociology. However, it is difficult to extract a clear definition of *rationalization* from Weber’s work. In fact, he operated with a number of different definitions of the term, and he often failed to specify which definition he was using in a particular discussion. As we saw earlier, Weber did define *rationality*; indeed, he differentiated between two types—means-ends and value rationality. However, these concepts refer to types of action. They are the basis of, but not coterminous with, Weber’s larger-scale sense of rationalization. Weber is interested in far more than fragmented action orientations; his main concern is with regularities and patterns of action within civilization, institutions, organizations, strata, classes, and groups.

7.5.5.1. Types of Rationality

The first type is *practical rationality*: very way of life that views and judges worldly activity in relation to the individual’s purely pragmatic and egoistic interests. People who practice practical rationality accept given realities and merely calculate the most expedient ways of dealing with the difficulties that they present. This type of rationality arose with the severing of the bonds of primitive magic, and it exists trans-civilizationally and trans-historically; that is, it is not restricted to the modern Occident. This type of rationality stands in opposition to anything that threatens to transcend everyday routine. It leads people to distrust all impractical values, either religious or secular-utopian, as well as the theoretical rationality of the intellectuals, the type of rationality to which we now turn.

Theoretical rationality involves a cognitive effort to master reality through increasingly abstract concepts rather than through action. It involves such abstract cognitive processes as logical deduction, induction,

attribution of causality, and the like. This type of rationality was accomplished early in history by sorcerers and ritualistic priests and later by philosophers, judges, and scientists. Unlike practical rationality, theoretical rationality leads the actor to transcend daily realities in a quest to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos. Like practical rationality, it is trans-civilizational and trans-historical. The effect of intellectual rationality on action is limited. In that it involves cognitive processes, it need not affect action taken, and it has the potential to introduce new patterns of action only indirectly.

Substantive rationality (like practical rationality but not theoretical rationality) directly orders action into patterns through clusters of values. Substantive rationality involves a choice of means to ends within the context of a system of values. One value system is no more (substantively) rational than another. Thus, this type of rationality also exists trans-civilizationally and trans-historically, wherever consistent value postulates exist.

Finally, and most important, is *formal rationality*, which involves means-ends calculation. But whereas in practical rationality this calculation occurs in reference to pragmatic self interests, in formal rationality it occurs with reference to “universally applied rules, laws and regulations.” Weber makes this quite clear in the specific case of bureaucratic rationalization.

Bureaucratic rationalization...revolutionizes with *technical means*, in principle, as does every economic reorganization, “from without”: It *first* changes the material and social orders, and *through* them the people, by changing the conditions of adaptation, and perhaps the opportunities for adaptation, through a rational determination of means and ends (Weber, 1921 cited in Ritzer and Goodman, 2004: 133).

Although all the other types of rationality are trans-civilizational and epoch-transcending, formal rationality arose *only* in the West with the coming of industrialization. The universally applied rules, laws, and regulations that characterize formal rationality in the west are found particularly in the economic, legal, and scientific institutions, as well as in the bureaucratic form of domination. Thus, we have already encountered formal rationality in our discussion of rational-legal authority and the bureaucracy.

7.6. Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

7.6.1. Religion and the Rise of Capitalism

Weber spent much of his life studying religion—this in spite of, or perhaps because of, his being a religious, or, as he once described himself, “religiously unmusical”. One of his overriding concerns was

the relationship among a variety of the world's religions and the development only in the West of a capitalist economic system. It is clear that the vast bulk of this work is done at the social-structural and cultural levels; the thoughts and actions of Calvinists, Buddhists, Confucians, Jews, Muslims, and others are held to be affected by changes in social structures and social institutions. Weber was interested primarily in the systems of ideas of the world's religions, in the "spirit" of capitalism, and in rationalization as a modern system of norms and values. He was also very interested in the structures of the world's religions, the various structural components of the societies in which they exist that serve to facilitate or impede rationalization, and the structural aspects of capitalism and the rest of the modern world.

By according the religious factor great importance, Weber appeared to be simultaneously building on and criticizing his image of Marx's work. Weber, like Marx, operated with a complicated model of the interrelationship of primarily large-scale systems. Weber's sociology is related to Marx's thought in the common attempt to grasp the interrelations of institutional orders making up a social structure: in Weber's work, military and religious, political and juridical institutional systems are functionally related to the economic order in a variety of ways. In fact, Weber's affinities with Marx are even greater than is often recognized. Although Weber, especially early in his career, gave primacy to religious ideas, he later came to see that material forces, not idea systems, are of greater importance. As Weber said, "Not ideas, but material and ideal interest, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest".

7.6.2. Paths to Salvation

In analyzing the relationship between the world's religions and the economy, Weber developed a typology of the paths of salvation. *Asceticism* is the first broad type of religiosity, and it combines an orientation toward action with the commitment of believers to denying themselves the pleasures of the world. Ascetic religions are divided into two subtypes. *Otherworldly asceticism* involves a set of norms and values that command the followers not to work within the secular world and to fight against its temptations. Of greater interest to Weber, because it encompasses Calvinism, was *innerworldly asceticism*. Such a religion does not reject the world; instead, it actively urges its members to work within the world so that they can find salvation, or at least signs of it. The distinctive goal here is the strict, methodological control of the members' patterns of life, thought, and action. Members are urged to reject everything unethical, esthetic, or dependent on their emotional reactions to the secular world. Innerworldly ascetics are motivated to systematize their own conduct.

Whereas both types of asceticism involve some type of action and self-denial, *mysticism*, involves contemplation, emotion and inaction. Weber subdivided mysticism in the same way as asceticism. *World-rejecting mysticism* involves total flight from the world. *Innerworldly mysticism* leads to contemplative efforts to understand the meaning of the world, but these efforts are doomed to failure, because the world is viewed as being beyond individual comprehension. In any case, both types of mysticism and world rejecting asceticism can be seen as idea systems that inhibit the development of capitalism and rationality. In contrast, innerworldly mysticism is the system of norms and values that contributed to the development of these phenomena in the West.

3.3 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

In Max Weber's best-known work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), he traced the impact of ascetic Protestantism—primarily Calvinism—on the rise of the spirit of capitalism. This work is but a small part of a larger body of scholarship that traces the relationship between religion and modern capitalism throughout much of the world.

Weber, especially later in his work, made clear that his most general interest was in the rise of the distinctive rationality of the West. Capitalism, with its rational organization of free labor, its open market, and its rational bookkeeping system, is only one component of that developing system. He directly linked it to the parallel development of rationalized science, law, politics, art, architecture, universities, and the polity.

Weber did not directly link the idea system of the Protestant ethic to the structures of the capitalist system; instead, he was content to link the Protestant to another system of ideas, the “spirit” of capitalism. In other words, two systems of ideas are directly linked in this work. Although links of the capitalist economic system to the material world are certainly implied and indicated, they were not Weber's primary concern. Thus, *The Protestant Ethic* is not about the rise of modern capitalism but is about the origin of a peculiar spirit that eventually made modern rational capitalism (some form of capitalism had existed since early times) expand and come to dominate the economy.

Weber began by examining and rejecting alternative explanations of why capitalism arose in the West in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To those who contended that capitalism arose because the material conditions were right at that time, Weber retorted that material conditions were also ripe at other times and capitalism did not arise. Weber also rejected the psychological theory that the development of capitalism was due simply to the acquisitive instinct. In his view, such an instinct always has existed, yet it did not produce capitalism in other situations.

Evidence for Weber's views on the significance of Protestantism was found in an examination of countries with mixed religious systems. In looking at these countries, he discovered that the leaders of the economic system—business leaders, owners of capital, high-grade skilled labor, and more advanced technically and commercially trained personnel—were all overwhelmingly protestant. This suggested that Protestantism was a significant cause in the choice of these occupations and, conversely, that other religions (for example, Roman Catholicism) failed to produce idea systems that impelled individuals into these vocations.

In Weber's view, the spirit of capitalism is not defined simply by economic greed; it is in many ways the exact opposite. It is a moral and ethical system, an ethos, that among other things stresses economic success. In fact, it was the turning of profit making into an ethos that was critical in the West. In other societies, the pursuit of profit was seen as an individual act motivated at least in part by greed. Thus it was viewed by many as morally suspect. However, Protestantism succeeded in turning the pursuit of profit into a moral crusade. It was the backing of the moral system that led to the unprecedented expansion of profit seeking and, ultimately, to the capitalist system. On a theoretical level, by stressing that he was dealing with the relationship between one ethos (Protestantism) and another (the spirit of capitalism), Weber was able to keep his analysis primarily at the level of systems of ideas.

The spirit of capitalism can be seen as a normative system that involves a number of interrelated ideas. For example, its goal is to instill an "attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically". In addition, it preaches an avoidance of life's pressures: "Seest thou a man diligent in business? He shall stand before kings". Also included in the spirit of capitalism are ideas such as "time is money," "be industrious", "be frugal", "be punctual," "be fair," and "earning money is a legitimate end in itself." Above all, there is the idea that it is people's duty to increase their wealth ceaselessly. This takes the spirit of capitalism out of the realm of individual ambition and into the category of an ethical imperative. Although Weber admitted that a type of capitalism (for example, adventurer capitalism) existed in china, India, Babylon, and the classical world and during the Middle Ages, it was different from Western capitalism, primarily because it lacked "this particular ethos".

Weber was interested not simply in describing this ethical system but also explaining its derivations. He thought that Protestantism, particularly, Calvinism, was crucial to the rise of the spirit of capitalism. Calvinism was no longer necessary to the continuation of that economic system. In fact, in many senses modern capitalism, given its security, stands in opposition to Calvinism and to religion in general. Capitalism today has become, in Durkheim's terms, a social fact that is external to, and coercive of, the individual. As Weber puts it:

Capitalism is today an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalist rule of action (Weber, 1904 cited in Ritzer & Goodman, 2004: 145).

Another crucial point here is that Calvinists did not consciously seek to create a capitalist system. In Weber's view, capitalism was an *unanticipated consequence* of the Protestant ethic. The concept of unanticipated consequences has broad significance in Weber's work, for he believed that what individuals and groups intend by their actions often leads to a set of consequences that are at variance with their intentions. Although Weber did not explain this point, it seems that it is related to his theoretical view that people create social structures but that those structures soon take on a life of their own, over which the creators have little or no control. Because people lack control over them, structures are free to develop in a variety of totally unanticipated directions. Reified social structures are free to move in unanticipated directions, as both Marx and Weber showed in their analyses of capitalism.

7.6.3. Calvinism and the Spirit of Capitalism

Calvinism was the version of Protestantism that interested Weber most. One feature of Calvinism was the idea that only a small number of people are chosen for salvation. In addition, Calvinism entailed the idea of predestination; people were predestined to be either among the saved or among the damned. There was nothing that the individual or the religion as a whole could do to affect that fate. Yet the idea of predestination left people uncertain about whether they were among the saved. To reduce this uncertainty, the Calvinists developed that idea that *signs* could be used as indicators of whether a person was saved. People were urged to work hard, because if they were diligent, they would uncover the signs of salvation, which were to be found in economic success. In sum, the Calvinist was urged to engage in intense, worldly activity and to become a "man of vocation."

However, isolated actions were not enough. Calvinism, as an ethic, required self-control and a systematized style of life that involved an integrated round of activities, particularly business activities. This stood in contrast to the Christian ideal of the Middle Ages, in which individuals simply engaged in isolated acts as the occasion arose in order to atone for particular sins and to increase their chances of salvation. "The God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system." Calvinism produced an ethical system and ultimately a group of people who were nascent capitalists. Calvinism "has the highest ethical appreciation of the sober, middle-

class, self-made man”. Weber neatly summarized his own position on Calvinism and its relationship to capitalism as follows:

The religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means of asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of... the spirit of capitalism (Weber, 1904 cited in *ibid*).

In addition to its general link to the spirit of capitalism, Calvinism had some more specific links. First, as already mentioned capitalists could restlessly pursue their economic interests and feel that such pursuit was not merely self-interest but was, in fact, their ethical duty. This not only permitted unprecedented mercilessness in business but also silenced potential critics, who could not simply reduce these actions to self-interest. Second, Calvinism provided the rising capitalist “with sober, conscientious and unusually industrious workmen who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by god”. With such a work force, the nascent capitalist could raise the level of exploitation to unprecedented heights. Third, Calvinism legitimized an unequal stratification system by giving the capitalist the “comforting assurances that the unequal distribution of the goods of this world was a special dispensation of Divine Providence”.

Weber also had reservations about the capitalist system, as he did about all aspects of rationalized world. For example, he pointed that capitalism tends to produce “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.”

Although in *The Protestant Ethic* Weber focused on the effect of Calvinism on the spirit of capitalism, he was well aware that social and economic conditions have a reciprocal impact on religion. He chose not to deal with such relationships in his book, but he made it clear that his goal was not to substitute a one-sided spiritualist interpretation for the one-sided materialist explanation that he attributed to Marxists.

If Calvinism was one of the causal factors in the rise of capitalism in the West, then the question arises: why didn't capitalism arise in other societies? In his effort to answer this question, Weber dealt with spiritual and material barriers to the rise of capitalism.

Chapter Eight: George Simmel (1858-1918)

8.1. Social Interaction

8.1.1. Social Interaction: Forms and Types

Simmel is best known in contemporary sociology for his contributions to our understanding of the patterns, or forms, of social interaction. Interaction (association) among conscious actors was one of his primary interests and that his intent was to look at a wide range of interactions that may seem trivial at some times but crucially important at others. His was not a Durkheimian expression of interest in social facts but a declaration of a smaller-scale focus for sociology.

Because Simmel sometimes took an exaggerated position on the importance of interaction in his sociology, many have lost sight of his insights into the larger-scale aspects of social reality. At times, for example, he equated society with interaction: "Society... is only the synthesis or the general term for the totality of these specific interactions.... 'Society' is identical with the sum total of these relations". Such statements may be taken as a reaffirmation of his interest in interaction, but as we will see, in his general and philosophical sociologies, Simmel held a much larger-scale conception of society as well as culture.

One of Simmel's dominant concerns was the *form* rather than the *content* of social interaction. From Simmel's point of view, the real world is composed of innumerable events, actions, interactions, and so forth. To cope with this maze of reality (the "contents"), people order it by imposing patterns, or forms, on it. Thus, instead of a bewildering array of specific events, the actor is confronted with a limited number of forms. In Simmel's view, the sociologist's task is to do precisely what the layperson does, that is, impose a limited number of forms on social reality, on interaction in particular, so that it may be better analyzed. This methodology generally involves extracting commonalities that are found in a wide array of specific interactions. For example, the super ordination and subordination forms of interaction are found in a wide range of settings, in the state as well as in a religious community, in a band of conspirators as in an economic association, in art school as in a family.

8.1.2. Social Geometry

In Simmel's formal sociology, one sees most clearly his effort to develop "geometry" of social relations. Two of the geometric coefficients that interested him are numbers and distance.

Numbers

Simmel's interest in the impact of numbers of people on the quality of interaction can be seen in his discussion of the difference between a dyad and a triad.

A) Dyad and Triad

For Simmel there was a crucial difference between the dyad (two-person group) and the triad (three-person group). The addition of a third person causes a radical and fundamental change. Increasing the membership beyond three has nowhere near the same impact as does adding a third member. Unlike all other groups, the dyad does not achieve a meaning beyond the two individuals involved. There is no independent group structure in a dyad; there is nothing more to the group than the two separable individuals. Thus, each member of a dyad retains a high level of individuality. The individual is not lowered to the level of the group. This is not the case in a triad. A triad does have the possibility of obtaining a meaning beyond the individuals involved. There is likely to be more to a triad than the individuals involved. As a result, there is a greater threat to the individuality of the members. A triad can have a general leveling effect on the members.

With the addition of a third party to the group, a number of new social roles become possible. For example, the third party can take the role of arbitrator or mediator in disputes within the group. Then the third party can use disputes between the other two for his or her own gain or become an object of competition between the other two parties. The third number also can intentionally foster conflict between the other two parties in order to gain superiority (divide and rule). A stratification system and an authority structure then can emerge. The movement from dyad to triad is essential to the development of social structures that can become separate from, and dominant over, individuals. Such a possibility does not exist in a dyad.

The process that is begun in the transition from a dyad to a triad continues as larger and larger groups and, ultimately, societies emerge. In these large social structures, the individual, increasingly separated from the structure of society, grows more and more alone, isolated, and segmented. This results finally in a dialectical relationship between individuals and social structures. According to Simmel, the socialized individual always remains in a dual relation toward society: he is incorporated within it and yet stands against it. The individual is determined, yet determining; acted upon, yet self-actuating. The contradiction here is that society allows the emergence of individuality and autonomy, but it also impedes it.

B) Group Size

At a more general level, there is Simmel's ambivalent attitude toward the impact of group *size*. On the one hand, he took the position that the increase in the size of a group or society increases individual freedom. A small group or society is likely to control the individual completely. However, in a larger society, the individual is likely to be involved in a number of groups, each of which controls only a small

portion of his or her total personality. In other words, *individuality in being and action generally increases to the degree that the social circle encompassing the individual expands*. However, Simmel took the view that large societies create a set of problems that ultimately threaten individual freedom. For example, he saw the masses as likely to be dominated by one idea, the simplest idea. The physical proximity of a mass makes people suggestible and more likely to follow simplistic ideas, to engage in mindless, emotional actions.

Perhaps most important, in terms of Simmel's interest in forms of interaction, is that increasing size and differentiation tend to loosen the bonds between individuals and leave in their place much more distant, and segmental relationships. Paradoxically, the large group that frees the individual simultaneously threatens that individuality. Also paradoxical is Simmel's belief that one way for individuals to cope with the threat of the mass society is to immerse themselves in small groups such as the family.

Distance

Another of Simmel's concerns in social geometry was *distance*. A sociologist offers a good summation of Simmel's views on the role of distance in social relationships: *the properties of forms and the meanings of things are a function of the relative distances between individuals and other individuals or things*. This concern with distance is manifested in various places in Simmel's work. The essential point is that the value of something is determined by its distance from the actor. It is not valuable if it is either too close or too easy to obtain or too distant and too difficult to obtain. Objects that are attainable, but only with great effort, are the most valuable.

8.2. Social Types and Social Forms

Simmel's types include the stranger, the miser, the spendthrift, the adventurer, and the nobleman. To illustrate his mode of thinking in this area, we will focus on one of his types, the poor.

The Poor—as is typical of types in Simmel's work, the *poor* were defined in terms of social relationships, as being aided by other people or at least having the right to that aid. Here Simmel quite clearly did not hold the view that *poverty* is defined by a quantity, or rather a lack of quantity, of money.

Simmel focused on the poor in terms of characteristic relationships and interaction patterns. He also had a relativistic view of poverty; that is, the poor are not simply those who stand at the bottom of society. From his point of view, poverty is found in *all* social strata. This concept foreshadowed the later sociological concept of *relative deprivation*. If people who are members of the upper classes have less

than their peers do, they are likely to feel poor in comparison to them. Therefore, government programs aimed at eradicating poverty can never succeed. Even if those at the bottom are elevated, many people throughout the stratification system will still feel poor in comparison to their peers.

As with social types, Simmel looked at a wide range of social forms, including exchange, conflict, prostitution and sociability. We can illustrate Simmel's work on social forms through his discussion of domination, that is, superordination and subordination.

8.2.1. Super Ordination and Subordination

Super ordination and subordination have a reciprocal relationship. The leader does not want to determine completely the thoughts and actions of others. Rather, the leader expects the subordinate to react either positively or negatively. Neither this nor any other form of interaction can exist without mutual relationships. Even in the most oppressive form of domination, subordinates have at least some degree of personal freedom.

To most people, super ordination involves an effort to eliminate completely the independence of subordinates, but Simmel argued that a social relationship would cease to exist if this were the case.

Simmel asserted that one can be subordinated to an individual, a group, or an objective force. Leadership by a single individual generally leads to a tightly knit group either in support of or in opposition to the leader. Even when opposition arises in such a group, discord can be resolved more easily when the parties stand under the same higher power. Subordination under a plurality can have very uneven effects. On the one hand, the objectivity of rule by a plurality may make for greater unity in the group than does the more arbitrary rule of an individual. On the other hand, hostility is likely to be engendered among subordinates if they do not get the personal attention of a leader.

Simmel found subordination under an objective principle to be most offensive, perhaps because human relationships and social interactions are eliminated. People feel they are determined by an impersonal law that they have no ability to affect. Simmel saw subordination to an individual as freer and more spontaneous: subordination under a person has an element of freedom and dignity in comparison with which all obedience to laws has something mechanical and passive. Even worse is subordination to

objects, which Simmel found a “humiliatingly harsh and unconditional kind of subordination”. Because the individual is dominated by a thing, “he himself psychologically sinks to the category of mere thing”.

8.3. Cultural Products

8.3.1. Social Structures

Simmel said relatively little directly about the large-scale structures of society. In fact, at times, given his focus on patterns of interaction, he denied the existence of that level of social reality. A good example of this is found in his effort to define *society*, where he rejected the realist position exemplified by Emile Durkheim that society is a real, material entity. Simmel was also uncomfortable with the nominalist conception that society is nothing more than a collection of isolated individuals. He adopted an intermediate position, conceiving of society as a set of interactions. “*Society* is merely the name for a number of individuals connected by ‘interaction’ ”.

Although Simmel enunciated this interactionist position, in much of his work he operated as a realist, as if society were a real material structure. There is, then, a basic contradiction in Simmel’s work on the social-structural level. Simmel noted society transcends the individual and lives its own life which follows its own laws. It, too, confronts the individual with a historical, imperative firmness.

The resolution of this paradox lies in the difference between Simmel’s formal sociology, in which he tended to adhere to an interactionist view of society, and his historical and philosophical sociologies, in which he was much more inclined to see society as an independent, coercive social structure.

8.3.2. Individual Culture and Objective Culture

People are influenced and in Simmel’s view threatened, by social structures and, more important for Simmel, by their cultural products. Simmel distinguished between individual (subjective) culture and objective culture. Objective culture refers to those things that people produce (art, science, philosophy, and so on). Individual (subjective) culture is the capacity of the actor to produce, absorb, and control the elements of objective culture. In an ideal sense, individual culture shapes, and is shaped by, objective culture. The problem is that objective culture comes to have a life of its own. As Simmel put it, the elements of culture acquire fixed identities, a logic and lawfulness of their own; this new rigidity

inevitably places them at a distance from the spiritual dynamic which created them and which makes them independent.

One of the main focuses of Simmel's historical and philosophical sociology is the cultural level of social reality, or what he called the "objective culture." In Simmel's view, people produce culture, but because of their ability to reify social reality, the cultural world and the social world come to have lives of their own, lives that come increasingly to dominate the actors who created, and daily re-create them. The cultural objects become more and more linked to each other in a self-contained world which has increasingly fewer contacts with the individual subjective psyche and its desires and sensibilities. Although people always retain the capacity to create and re-create culture, the long-term trend of history is for culture to exert a more and more coercive force on the actor.

In various places in his work, Simmel identified a number of components of the objective culture, for example, tools, means of transport, products of science, technology, arts, language, the intellectual sphere, conventional wisdom, religious dogma, philosophical systems, legal systems, moral codes, and ideals.

8.3.3. More-Life and More-Than-Life

Another area of Simmel's thinking, his philosophical sociology, is an even more general manifestation of his dialectical thinking. In discussing the emergence of social and cultural structures, Simmel took a position very similar to some of Marx's ideas. Marx used the concept of the fetishism of commodities to illustrate the separation between people and their products. For Marx, this separation reached its apex in capitalism, could be overcome only in the future socialist society, and thus was a specific historical phenomenon. But for Simmel this separation is inherent in the nature of human life. In philosophical terms, there is an inherent and inevitable contradiction between "more-life" and "more-than-life".

The issue of more-life and more-than-life is central in Simmel's essay "The Transcendent Character of Life" (1918). As the title suggests and Simmel makes clear, *Transcendence is immanent in life*. People possess a doubly transcendent capability. First, because of their restless, creative capacities (more-life), people are able to transcend themselves. Second, this transcendent, creative ability makes it possible for people to constantly produce sets of objects that transcend them. The objective existence of these phenomena (more-than-life) comes to stand in irreconcilable opposition to the creative forces (more-life) that produced the objects in the first place. In other words, social life creates and sets free from itself something that is not life but 'which has its own significance and follows its own law'. Life is found in

the unity, and the conflict, between the two. As Simmel concludes life finds its essence, its process, in being more-life and more-than-life.

Thus, because of his metaphysical conceptions, Simmel came to an image of the world far closer to Weber's than Marx's. Simmel, like Weber, saw the world as becoming an iron cage of objective culture from which people have progressively less chance of escape.

8.3. 4. The Philosophy of Money

The Philosophy of Money illustrates well the breadth and sophistication of Simmel's thinking. It demonstrates conclusively that Simmel deserves at least as much recognition for his general theory as for his essays on micro-sociology, many of which can be seen as specific manifestations of his general theory.

Although the title makes it clear that Simmel's focus is money, his interest in that phenomenon is embedded in a set of his broader theoretical and philosophical concerns. For example, Simmel was interested in the broad issue of value, and money can be seen as simply a specific form of value. At another level, Simmel was interested not in money per se but in its impact on such a wide range of phenomena as the "inner world" of actors and the objective culture as a whole. At still another level, he treated money as a specific phenomenon linked with a variety of other components of life, including "exchange, ownership, greed, extravagance, cynicism, individual freedom, the style of life, culture, the value of the personality, etc". Finally and most generally, Simmel saw money as a specific component of life capable of helping us understand the totality of life.

Money and Value

One of Simmel's initial concerns in his work is the relationship between money and value. In general, he argued that people create value by making objects, separating themselves from those objects, and then seeking to overcome the "distance, obstacles, and difficulties". The greater the difficulty of obtaining an object, the greater its value. However, difficulty of attainment has a "lower and an upper limit". The general principle is that the value of things comes from the ability of people to distance themselves properly from objects. Things that are too close, too easily obtained, are not very valuable. Some exertion is needed for something to be considered valuable. Conversely, things that are too far, too difficult, or nearly impossible to obtain are also not very valuable. Things that defy most, if not all, of our efforts to

obtain them cease to be valuable to us. Those things that are most valuable are neither too distant nor too close. Among the factors involved in the distance of an object from an actor are the same it takes to obtain it, its scarcity, the difficulties involved in acquiring it, and the need to give up other things in order to acquire it. People try to place themselves at a proper distance from objects, which must be attainable, but not too easily.

In this general context of value, Simmel discussed money. In the economic realm, money serves both to create distance from objects and to provide the means to overcome it. The money value attached to objects in a modern economy places them at a distance from us; we cannot obtain them without money of our own. The difficulty in obtaining the money and therefore the objects makes them valuable to us. At the same time, once we obtain enough money, we are able to overcome the distance between ourselves and the objects. Money thus performs the interesting function of creating distance between people and objects and then providing the means to overcome that distance.

References

1. Kon, I.S. 1979. A History of Classical Sociology. Progress Publisher: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
2. Noble, T. 2000. Social Theory and Social Change. Palgrave: New York.
3. Ritzer, G. 2008. Modern Sociological Theory. 6th ed. Mc Grall Hill: University of Maryland.
4. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. August Comte philosophy. Retrieved in September 2009 From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auguste_Comte
5. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Emile Durkheim. Retrieved in September 2009 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89mile_Durkheim