

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Classical Sociological Theory
Module Name/Title	Contrasting and Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim – 1
Pre Requisites	Classic Theories and Marx, Weber, Durkheim; Western Capitalism and Social Theories; Comparative Discussion; Thematic Differences and Similarities
Objectives	This module will help to broaden views on thematic interrelation, commonalities and contradictions of founding fathers of sociology.
Key words	Classic sociological theories, Social Stratification, Capitalist Economy, Division of Labour, Comparative analysis, Social structure and function

Module Structure

Contrasting and Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim – 1	Introduction; Basic Thoughts and Interrelations; Class, Status and Social Order; Division of Labour and The Trio, Capital, Economy and Politics; Conclusion.
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CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Contrasting and Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim -1

Part 1

Introduction:

Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) contributed to build the base of sociological knowledge which is popularly known as classic sociological theory. Their involvement with social changes and transformation from mid-nineteen to early twentieth century grasp the core issues of human existence and development. In the time span of emerging modern social theory the influential and leading contribution came from these three thinkers. That is not the only point why a comparative discussion among Marx, Weber and Durkheim is needed, but also the common ground they have chosen to develop their theories needs to be acknowledged. They discussed about human history, society, politics, economics and culture in an interconnected manner. They show and reveal this connection of individual and society which becomes the interior of practicing sociology. Hence, reading about the founding fathers of sociology Marx, Weber and Durkheim is necessary to acquiring knowledge about social theories and apply them in social problems (Visvanathan 2011). Furthermore the contradictions and conversation among them regarding human world and social changes allow us to examine any sociological issue with a critical viewpoint.

This module will help us to know about the commonalities of these three thinkers and their works. How they have seen the social system and human culture? How their ideas become contradictory as well as complementary to each other in some point? What are the basic points to contrast the theoretical schemes they have given? What are the shortcomings for each of them to define and describe human society? By comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim and discussing how their views are contrasting, this module will answer these questions.

Marx's theory based on social critique and conflict, wherein Durkheim emphasizes on social factors. Weber believes social relation shaped by politics, economics and culture and individual act has subjective meaning. To talk about human life, act, behavior, and formulation of human society all of them have taken a strongly defined position. In Marx's view, "The first historical act is... the production of material life itself. This is indeed a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history" (Marx 1964: 60). Taking this understanding in foci, he develops the idea of historical materialism. He goes on talking about human basic needs and the dissatisfaction that leads to new needs. The production of new needs is the first

historical act for him (Marx 1964). Hearing to Marx, Durkheim is also stating that human desires are unlimited and “the more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs” (Durkheim 1951: 248). However, he is offering the idea of social control in this matter where society imposes limits on human desire and constitutes and regulative force. Weber’s definition of sociology reflects his perspective on human action and behavior. According to him, social facts are in the last resort intelligible facts and we can perceive human actions by penetrating to the subjective meaning of behaviors. Hence he defines sociology as the “science which aims at the interpretative understanding (verstehen) of social behavior in order to gain an explanation of its cause, its course, and its effects (Weber 1964: 29).

Contrasting and comparing these three thinkers’ ideas and theories will foster the possibilities to debate on social system, social stratification, division of labor, religion and social change. Therefore the module is designed in dividing it two parts. In the first part, we will know about the basic works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim where we found their common interests. Then we will elaborate the discussion on some specific thematic points bearing their conceptual ideas. The second part of this module will continues with the rest of thematic ideas.

Basic Thoughts and Interrelations:

As a major figure in the history of economic and philosophical thought, Karl Marx took the side of tension and struggle for social change in describing how society move forward. To elaborate the idea he emphasizes on class struggle, division of labor and production system. He also clarified this class struggle had marked all history and these struggles differed according to historical stage. He pronounce, “ideas and categories are no more eternal that the relations which the express. They are historical and transitory products” (Marx 1976: Ch 2 p 1). Marx was convinced by a holistic approach that considered society as a structurally interrelated whole. He counts and identifies all aspects of human life for instance education, culture, religion, legal codes, art and so forth reliantly connected in with this structured whole means could not be understood by themselves. Hence, he is suggesting the major independent variable which is mode of economic production and to learn about the historical phenomena you have to look at the economic factors.

The political, legal, philosophical, literary, and artistic development rests on the economic. But they all react upon one another and upon the economic base. It is not the case that the economic situation is the sole active cause and the everything else is merely a passive effect. There is, rather, a reciprocity within a field of economic necessity which in the last instance always asserts itself. (Marx and Engels 1962: 304)

Another German born sociologist and philosopher Max Weber used to introduce himself as a political economist. He opposed with Marx on the idea of historical materialism and defining social system in a new way by combining the factors of economy and religion. In this new way of viewing society, Weber identifies the processes of rationalization, secularization and disenchantment. These three processes are associated with the rise of capitalism and modernity. This is a great shift of focus to analyze capitalism from the Marxist point of view. This new line of thought demonstrated by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* where he defines the rationalization as a process of replacing the current values, traditions and emotions of a society, that motivate their current behaviors, with thoughts and actions which appear to be more rational and a move towards rational-legal authority is inevitable. Secularization broadly refers as a progress through rationalization and modernization where religion loses its supreme authority. Disenchantment for Weber is forward move towards cultural rationalization and scientific progress by opposing the traditional system. It is a disenchantment because it oppose to live in the traditional world where “the world remains in a great enchanted garden”(Weber 1971:270).

However, Marx underlined the emergence of modern society above all with the development of capitalism, Weber advocates a distinctive way of thinking which is a ‘rational circulation’ that associated with the protestant ethics. On the other hand, for Durkheim it is connected with industrialization and the new social division of labour (Harris 1992: 325). For this French philosopher and sociologist, sociology is the science to discover structural social facts. Hence, unlike to Marx and Weber he was interested to see how Western societies in modern era maintain their coherence and integrity. Then he found that, in the modern age traditional social and religious ties are no longer assumed, rather new social institutions come into being. Opposing with Weber’s interest on individuals action, he suggests the phenomena regarding society at large as the site of investigation in sociology. In the book *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim regards conflict, chaos, disorder, crisis as pathological phenomena to modern society unlike Marx who identifies class conflict. To outline the development of society from ‘primitive’ to ‘industrial-capitalist’ he acquire the terminology ‘solidarity’ and distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity. In Mechanical solidarity the members of the society are much alike in their devotion and contribution to common spirit. Here “ideas and tendencies common to all members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain personally to each member. This solidarity can grow only in inverse ratio to personality” (Durkheim

1956: 129). On the other hand, organic solidarity emerges out of differences rather than likenesses where society functions with these increasing differentiations between its members. But he clarifies in modern era the organic solidarity resulting a highly division of labor but still needs some common beliefs and faith to tie called common conscience collective.

These similarities and differences in particular issues, contradictions and fairly new ideas in relation to others derived from Marx, Weber and Durkheim develop the grand theories in sociology broadly for social sciences. One of the issues may be social stratification regarding what they shed light on with different but in a holistic perspective.

Class, Status and Social Order:

Conceptualization of Social class and class structure is Marx's classical contribution in defining and elaborating the human world and historical materialism or dialectical materialism. In his concept of class he identifies the historical tendency in all societies to divide themselves into two social classes which are unequal. These classes are structured in a hierarchy. In this situation of manifold and subordinate gradation of social rank classes are always engaged in a 'historical struggle' or 'class struggle'. He outlined it in Communist Manifesto (1848):

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another.... In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank....The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Society... splitting up into two great hostile camps,...— Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (Marx 1988:55-56)

Disagreeing with Marx's viewpoint on class and class struggle, Weber identifies the development of 'status group' in modern societies. Actually, he argues that, three major adjustments have taken place in modern age: class, status and party. Weber defines social class in relation with social action and emphasize on class situation in a different way.

We may speak of a class when (1) a member of people have in common a specific causal component of their life changes 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 and labor markets. This is the class situation. (Weber 1968: 927)

From this assertion from Weber we can see the formation of social class is depended on (a) modern market situation, (b) social actions and (c) different types of class antagonism and struggle. Weber is proposing different types of class antagonism in comparison to Marx's class struggle. According to Marx, depending on common set of interest the "mass people" transformed into a class and they initiate a political struggle by opposing the interest of dominant class. Here Marx also pointed the absolute 'ownership of the means of production' is sole determinant of the class situation. Weber brings the different argument in this matter and outlines two categories of the class situation. First category underlines the ownership of property by one class that leads a monopolization of the means of production and determined the class situation. In this situation, life chances existed only for the propertied classes and they only confronted each other. Second category highlights the class category that determined by different skills, abilities and education. These capabilities, credentials are capable to sold in market and create life chances. Here in modern market situation individual can have a life chances without owning property. From this point of view he also found Marx's theory of class struggle 'ambiguous' and suggested different types social action and struggle. For him there are no class interests in modern age only "average interests" of individual in similar economic class situations. The action by class against the class structure can happen only in two ways: "irrational protest" and "rational associations". (Weber 1968: 929-30).

Contrasting with Marx's use of the term 'class' Weber frequently uses 'groups' and focused on a great shift of class struggle between antagonistic groups because progressive use of legal order has been used to resolve disputes. Moving towards by following the resolution of extreme class struggle, he suggested about the formation of 'status group'. Weber's status groups compete for prestige and social reputation unlike to Marx's class struggle for power and property/wealth. He defines the status group as a choice and life style of individual which has nothing to do with market situation and economic behavior like class. Social honor is the basic principal for status group whereas it has distinct activity criteria. In conjunction with class and status group Weber also considered political party that restricted to the realm of power and political order. (Weber 1968:932-38).

When we see a contradiction regarding class situation and social stratification between Marx and Weber, another founding father of sociology Emile Durkheim does not see social classes as the main determinant

of individual consciousness. Rather, he suggests about social solidarity and describes the modern society based on new mutual dependencies that creates a complex division of labour. We need to have a comparative discussion on division of labour to learn about the major viewpoints of them regarding this specific issue.

Division of Labour and the Trio:

The classical sociology of Marx, Durkheim and Weber see the development of industrialisation and specialisation in different ways and present different kinds of prospects. However, the blueprints for the future society are not present in the work of any of these theorists but their analysis presents an effective framework for studying modern society. The concept of division of labour is present in most of the work of Marx like *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript*, *The German Ideology*, *Capital* etc. Durkheim dedicated his first and major theoretical work in this domain with the same name and explores a curious paradox by asking: “how does it come about that individual, whilst becoming more autonomous, depends ever more closely on society?” (Durkheim 1893: xxx).

Both Marx and Durkheim say that the modern division of labour was possible because of decimation of old social order. Durkheim says that “the division of labour varies in direct proportion to the volume and densities of societies and if it progresses in a continuous manner over the course of social development it is because societies become regularly more dense and generally more voluminous.” (Durkheim 1986; 205). So, for him, increase in social density is the cause for the specialisation and subsequent development of division of labour in societies. Further, he says that growth and development of societies necessitate a greater division of labour. So, it is not the instrument whereby that division is brought about; but it is its determining cause (Durkheim 1986; 205). The determining cause for the increase in the “moral and social density” is not demography rather it is due to increase in the interactions among the social groups on permanent basis. So, he agrees with Marx that the locus of specialisation in cities where people from different strata come and converge to go for differentiation of work. Marx gives the example of Northern America and says that Northern states of American Union is more denser than India due to development of division of labour despite India having higher population (Tucker 1978; 393).

In the work of Max Weber, the division of labour in the society came from the inescapable rationalization. This process of rationalization changed the face of different domains and created specific kind of

knowledge to satisfy the need of society. In his work, *The Protestant Ethics and the spirit of capitalism*, he talks about the rationalisation of protestant through the doctrines of Calvinism which changed the rational means of gaining economic prosperity to deal with salvation anxiety. The protestants, generally, took technical education which helped them to become specialised in their field. They also followed the spirit of rationality in their work to cultivate 'spirit of capitalism' in them. So, the division of labour through specific process of rationalisation created a differentiation in the society which gave them the feeling of 'disenchantment'. So, Weberian notion of division of labour is different from the work of Durkheim and Marx, however, Marx and Weber both finds the process of rationalisation is alienating the workers.

Max Weber in his theory of Bureaucracy talks about the specific role attached to the specific posts through the specification of jurisdictional areas and these areas cannot be changed by the whim of the superiors. He says that increasing rationalisation of society leads to development of strict division of labour. This kind of division of labour is manifested through the bureaucratic organisations of the society. His concept of bureaucracy is based on hierarchy of authority, impersonality, written rules, achievement based growth, specialised division of labour, efficiency etc. The increasing rationalisation of social world is building greater control of human over nature. Rationalisation, which is the most important element of Weber's theory is identified with division of labour, bureaucracy and mechanisation. He in the work "Science as Vocation" talks about the notion of progress and says how it is giving rise to 'disenchantment'(Gerth and Mills 1946; 140).

Durkheim's work mainly rely on "individual consciousness" and "collective consciousness" and these two things determine the intensity of division of labour in the society. Marx sees individual consciousness being shaped by social strata to which an individual is belonging but Durkheim finds social stratification as the pathological character of society in a phase of transition to modernity which he calls 'anomie'. He views it not as the instrument of exploitation rather a determinant of social solidarity. Durkheim provides functional analysis of society and he tries to find out functionality of 'normal', and 'pathological' characters of society. He finds pathological reinforces morality in society and for him, presence of pathology is not a problem as societies collective consciousness through several mechanism will reinforce normal conditions as when any deviant is being punished by law then the 'collective representation' of society in the ritual of execution of punishment forces individuals to submit to the morality of society. Therefore, somehow he is trying to counter the pessimistic views of modern society provided by Marx. In addition to the mechanical and organic solidarity Durkheim uses 'co-variance analysis' in the work Division of Labour to find the true cause and effect relation and also to reject those causes which are not related with effects.

In the chapter The Anomic Division of Labour, he finds two abnormal type of Division of labour. He tries to find out the 'partial breaking of organic solidarity' in case of commercial crisis and bankruptcies and says that with increasing specialisation of division of labour, the labour got organised and conflicts between employer and worker increased (Durkheim 1986;292-293). Marx finds the specialisation of division of labour alienating and calls for revolution which will bring “organised division of labour”. The other abnormal form of division of labour is 'anomic division of labour'. If the division of labour does not produce solidarity then it is because the inter-relationships of organs are not regulated and then it is in the state of anomie. Durkheim finds that the structure of individual consciousness is shaped by roles, norms and morality. These things produce healthy personality of an individual in the society. Therefore, he does not see division of labour as much as a means to class exploitation, rather a cause of social solidarity in societal setting.

Both Marx and Durkheim see the consequences of division of labour differently, while Durkheim says that division of labour brings society in equilibrium; Marx finds the human history as the history of class struggles. Contradictions, change and conflicts are the main words in Marx's writing. He finds capitalism as the struggle between capitalists and proletarians. So, only the revolution of proletariat has the potential to change the society. As a whole, Marx, Durkheim and Weber give different kind of analysis of division of labour. Their thoughts sometimes converge and other times diverge from each other's theory. However, all three thinkers find specialisation of division of labour problematic for modern society but everyone has different take on this. Marx says that only revolution can change the pathological character of society while Durkheim says that when the transformation of society from “mechanical solidarity” to “organic solidarity” will complete then these anomic conditions will disappear from the society. However, Weber does not see any light at the end of tunnel as he finds that there is no way out of this “iron cage” of bureaucracy and rule-based rational control. Weber also criticize the Marxian concept of alienation by stating that there is no emancipation from this and the overarching process of rationalisation produces an split between public domain consists of state and capital and individuals separated from means of production.

Capital, Economy and Politics:

To develop their arguments, three of these thinkers make a strong connection between politics and economy very proficiently. They identify the capital in modern age, criticize the political economy and articulate the formation and complexities of political system. However, in a general and popular sense

people consider Marx and Weber in this regard as major contributors because of the authorship of books like *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, *Economy and Society* or *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. But Durkheim also illustrates the 'economic facts' while elaborating his theory on religion as the foundation of society. He disagreed with the Marxian notion that the economy could be at the root of society and argued that religion was the foundation from which the economy grew. What Marx said regarding capital? His major theorization of capitalist political economy is illustrated in the volumes of *Capital* (1867). In contrast to the traditional conception of market competition, entrepreneurship, supply and demand, he outlined the complexity of capitalism as a social formation and economic system of production. Then he went on to conceptualize means of production and ownership, forces of production and relations of production, surplus value, commodity and labor. In capitalist accumulation, the commodification of labor power and the institution of wage labor is the most important factor for him. He argued, surplus value is the basis of profit for capitalists and this form of unpaid labor results in a class conflict. Hence, the politically conscious or class-conscious wage-laborers are engaged in a struggle for a post-capitalist society where use value will be the goal of production, not surplus value and labor (Ritzer and Stepnisky 2011: 141). Marx's economic production and complexity of capitalism are certainly linked to a strong political agenda from struggle, activism to revolution and power.

Weber defined modern capitalism as a type of money economy and a type of economic organization. The unambiguous stamp on the economic organization of Western capitalism had been placed by Protestant religious maxims that affected economic behavior and became incentives for life regulation and the control of material reality by asceticism. This asceticism he uses for articulating a form of self-denial which arises in everyday life to prohibit enjoyment and worldly pressure. Weber gave importance to 'rationalization' of industry and trade that eventually led to the development of 'calculable law' and ensured the rational operation of economic life. So, this application of legal rules minimizes extreme discrimination between bourgeoisies and proletariats, eliminates the naked exploitation. Furthermore, Weber extended the idea of capitalism by comparing the other ways of money-making with Western capitalism. According to him, Western capitalism has developed the philosophy or spirit which rejects the worldly luxury, concaving wealth and profit beyond the individual and personal need and an avoidance of use of wealth for personal enjoyment. When Weber is connecting the economy with religion and explaining the religious spark that assists modern rational capitalism, he also sheds light on the suspension of those religious forces. Now, how does the capitalist system run and capitalism sustained further? In searching for the answer, we can revisit the discussion on sociology of knowledge by Durkheim. He states that capitalism cannot survive without ideological support and the schooling system plays a decisive role

by becoming a central institution through which the cognitive capital embodied in the individual is produced (Steiner 2011: 213). In his book *Elementary forms of religious life*, Durkheim also suggests to explore the relation between economy and religion: “the idea of economic value and that of religious value cannot be unrelated, but the nature of these relationships has not yet been studied” (quoted in Steiner 2011, 58).

Durkheim was not convinced by Marx’s political forecast and revolutionary change of capitalist system. However he taken interest in exploring socialism and consider it as a “social fact”, in his definition of socialism it is not necessary to surrender the economic life in the hand of state rather having a reciprocal interaction. From a functional point of view he proposed the mutual understanding between economy and political society. The managing agency of society deals with economy in a way where working class would be rewarded according to the social value of their service and integrates into all aspects of economic, political and social life (Durkheim 1962: 52-61). When we found a contradiction between Marx and Durkheim in discussing political change and system in capitalist formation and forward, Weber advocates for strong parliamentary democracy and criticizes socialism in contrast to capitalism. He believes the contestation of power and monopoly ruler-ship can occur more effectively in democracies. Weber claims socialism fails to offer the open competition like capitalism where energetic entrepreneur and vigorous risk-takers would introduce a dynamic social form (Weber 1946, Kalberg 2005). Despite these contradictions and differences regarding economy and political system, Weber defines ‘power’ and ‘politics’ in a distinct way.

Conclusion:

In this module, we talked about major classical topics of sociology and take of three founding fathers of this discipline. In doing so, we categorize the thematic points and examine how Marx, Durkheim and Weber listening to each other, contradicting and extending the knowledge. From a materialist point of view Marx begins his critical argument on political economy, later Durkheim and Weber show the interconnectedness of the sociology of religion and sociology of economy. Their extended work also led to a new approach of linking economic sociology, religious sociology and the sociology of knowledge. However, we need to keep in mind there is a contradiction between evolutionary and revolutionary approach, moral and material viewpoint. State apparatuses, bureaucracy, law, power and dominant belief

systems are instruments of the ruling class to suppression for Marx, for Weber and Durkheim those are the key elements of functioning society.

There are some other issues emerged from their basic theorization which may elaborate our knowledge in study sociology. The comparative discussion would not be limited in the sphere of economy, social structure or political system; it will also include the cultural theories and more discussion about religious practice and rituals. Nevertheless, the differences and disagreement among these three thinkers and philosophers sometime taken an opposite direction from each other, a complete course of acknowledgement certainly make a stage where we wish to get the answer from three of them “who we are” and “how do we live”.