

Description of the Module

<i>Items</i>	<i>Description of the Module</i>
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Classical Sociological Theory
Module Name/Title	Contrasting and Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim – 2
Pre Requisites	Theoretical Base, Sociological Imagination, Crisis of Modernity, Critiques of Capitalist Economy
Objectives	This module seeks to analyze sociological tradition and Marx, Weber, Durkheim's perspectives regarding methodological instances, thematic interactions on religion, culture and other social phenomena. It will give an indulgent in sociological tradition and knowledge from classical era as well as informs about the source of sociological imagination.
Key words	Social Theory, Methodological Approach, Modernity, Religion, Subjective Meaning, Social Action, Philosophical Foundation

Module Structure

Contrasting and Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim – 2	Introduction; Ways of Investigation: On Methodology; Extending Theory: On Modernity; Religion, Culture and Social Realities; Individual and Society; Conclusion
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CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Contrasting and Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim – 2

Part 2

Introduction

Theoretical knowledge in social science has build upon classical concepts of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. In the first part of this module comparing and contrasting these three influential theorists, we covered the basic perspectives of them. We have seen Marx provided the conceptual ground of social class, means of production, materialist theory of history, theory of surplus value, class-consciousness in capitalist system and the trajectory of class struggle, revolution or communism. While Marx outlined all these issues mostly in his book *The Capital, The German Ideology, A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, The Communist Manifesto and Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Durkheim brought a different kind of understanding of social system and structure. Specially, *The Division of Labor, The Rules of Sociological Method, Suicide and The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* accumulated the major thematic and conceptual proposition by Durkheim. Weber's religion, rationalization, social action and stratification, politics-power and a different view on capitalism being elaborated in *The Protestant Ethics and The Spirit of Capitalism, Economy and Society*, and some lectures in political writings.

In this module we are going to discuss on sociological tradition and their perspectives regarding methodological instances, thematic interactions on religion, culture and other social phenomena. We will try to learn how these three philosophers have perceived modernity and encountered the complexities of interactions between individual and community. Overall, it gives an indulgent in sociological tradition and knowledge from classical era as well as informs about the source of sociological imagination. As Robert Nisbet (1993) noted,

Major ideas in the social sciences invariably have roots in moral aspiration. However abstract the ideas may eventually become, however neutral they may come to seem to scientists and theorists, they do not ever really divest themselves of their moral origins.... There is no direction from scientific greatness when we emphasize that such men as Weber and Durkheim were working with intellectual materials- values, concepts, and theories- that could never have come into their possession apart from persisting moral conflicts in the nineteenth century. Each of the ideas makes its first appearance in the undisguised, unambiguous terms of moral affirmation. Community begins as a moral value; only gradually does the secularization of this concept become

apparent in sociological thought in the century. Precisely the same is true alienation, authority, status and others. The moral texture of these ideas never wholly lost. Even in the scientific writings of Weber and Durkheim, a full century after these ideas had made their first appearance, the moral element remains vivid. The great sociologists never ceased to be moral philosopher. (2003[1993]:18)

It may be true that most of the classic sociological theories have two aspects, the significance of moral assumption and the nature of subject matter. Our intellectual challenge is to uncover the general propositions embedded in the basic ideas of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. They have tried to construct the ideas and theories in a holistic manner by conceiving a diverse area of human life and society that we have to keep in mind to discuss on specific topic.

Durkheim emphasize that, while primary domain of psychology is to understand processes internal to the individual the primary domain of sociology is “social facts”. As a social scientist, he advocated a systematic and methodical examination of social facts and their impact on individual. He was interested in both objective and subjective elements of society like external social facts as well as feelings of solidarity or commitment to a moral code. In a same way, Marx’s economic philosophy is not only occupied by market, money and profit, it is rooted in science and humanist prophecy. In analyzing the economic dynamics of capitalism, he considered the social and moral problems inherent to capitalist system. We found Weber to “combined a methodical, scientific approach with a concern about the material conditions and idea systems of modern societies” (Edles and Appelrouth 2010: 07). Bearing these intellectual challenges to read and reveal the core themes and the interconnection of ideas we will proceed to discuss some major concepts in sociology by comparing and contrasting Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

Ways of investigation: On methodology

As we were discussing that the classical theorists develop their arguments upon morality and emphasize upon society as a moral unity, they certainly followed a particular approach to examine the society. Durkheim was influenced by *Auguste Comte (1798-1857)* and argued for ‘positivism’ as a methodological perspective. Hence, he builds the ground where the methods were following a law-like relation among phenomena and modeled on the physical sciences, developing “positive science”. Weber rejected this positivist connection of social science with natural science and argued that the method of science,

whether subject matter be things or man, always proceeds by abstraction and generalization. When Durkheim is claiming that social facts (or social phenomena or forces) are the subject matter of sociology, Weber argues sociology is the science “which aims at the interpretive understanding (Verstehen) of social behavior in order to gain an explanation of its cause, its course, and its effects” (Weber 1964: 29).

Durkheim’s second major work *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) manifested the guidelines of methodological perspectives for social sciences and the art of explaining social life. He believes these rules are helpful to see the existence of social realities outside the individual and examine the social facts. He also outlines a difference between individual facts and social facts and defines social facts in the following way:

A social fact is to be recognized by power of external coercion which it exercise over individuals, and the presence of this power may be recognized by the existence of some specific sanction or by the resistance offered against every individual effort that tend to violate it. The essential characteristic is that it is independent of the individual forms it assumes in its diffusion. (Durkheim 1938[1895]: 10)

According to Durkheim, Social facts are general throughout the society, diffuse within the group, external to individual and constitute the objective structure of society. It can be recognized by the power of external coercion or by the resistance offered against individual effort to violate social rules and customary practices. Then he offered the way to study the social facts and to do so Durkheim suggested that, we have to consider the social facts as things (Durkheim 1938: 3). Things are not ‘ideas’ and ‘ideas have no reality’ so in observing social facts we have to treat the ‘material things’ which may be legal rules, customs and religious rules because they have power of external coercion, these are not simply formed impression of mind. However, emphasizing ‘social facts as things’ as the basic rule Durkheim propose the guidelines for observation and study social reality, where he develops criteria and formulate basis to comparing and analyzing social institutions and their functions. Weber, on the contrary, rejects the notion that societies can be best understood as unified. He was pushing forward, methodologically, an interpretive and subjective meaning of social realities and independent actions. As he mentioned in *Economy and Society*:

Sociology... is a science that offers an interpretive understanding of social action and in doing so, provides a causal explanation of its cause and effects. We shall speak of “action” insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior – be it overt or covert, omission

or acquiescence. Action is “social” insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course. (Weber 1968: 04)

Weber depends on meaningful actions and subjective meaningfulness of the motives for these actions when he carefully avoids discovering an objectively correct meaning. He was then talking about value relevance which must be distinguished from value-neutrality. He identified that values remain central in our research process even in the selection of our topics. From this argument, he also developed the key conceptual tool for researchers to escape from dilemma in comparative study: the notion of ideal type. Weber is also shown the mastery in methodological viewpoint unlike to Durkheim and Marx by offering the causality and probability in social science research. But when we are talking the contradiction and cohesion of methodological instances in sociological practices of Durkheim and Weber, what about Marx. Both Durkheim and Weber began with a critical approach towards Marx’s historical materialism. However, Marx rejected abstract idealism and acquired a critical method to identify the social relations into economic phenomena of capitalism. The central scientific goal for Marx was to provide an empirically well-founded description of capitalist economic system by illustrating the historical process, in that sense his main social scientific contribution is *Capital*. There are reasoning, calculation and explanation. These sociological description, historical interpretation and quasi-formal reasoning about institutions and economic relations reflect that Marx’s style of inquiry has a number of features. It is materialist as because it focuses on the forces and relations of production, and it postulates that technology and power are fundamental with regard to other social formations. It is oriented to the salience of class and class conflict within historical change. At the same time dialectics is not the methodological position of Marx rather it is simply a high-level hypothesis (Little 1987, Ollman 1993). A good number of twentieth century social scientists argued that rational choice approach can be considered as Marx’s methodological perspective as well as it is eclectic (Elster 1985, Ilyenkov 1982, Przeworski 1985).

Extending Theory: On Modernity

Sociology is dealing with human action and interaction and sociologists are fascinated with new theories and methods. Kenneth Allan (2013) said, theoretical thinking is a way of seeing and being aware of the

world. Marx, Weber and Durkheim build up theories from empirical phenomena. They provide some concepts, definition and key instruments to explore the human society. All of them extend the modern theory of social sciences and at the same time deal with the facts and phenomena of modernity. We can see in Weber's assertion on "ideal type of modernity" and his idea of rationality and disenchantment of Western world.

Marx, Weber and Durkheim's theory of modern society widely appreciated and considered as the landmark analyses of modernity in classical sociological theory. Marx found the *Alienation* is a central problem of modern capitalist society and his discussion of alienation is the vital point in modern sociological thinking. Alienation is defined as the social-psychological feeling of estrangement from work, from our fellow human beings, and from the self. Marx believes that this alienation is rooted in the capitalist mode of production itself (Elwell 2006). In his words:

The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is, as we have already shown, finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that mechanism, constitute the power of the 'master' (Marx, 1976[1867] :393-394).

Later in the same volume of *Capital* he continued that, "Modern Industry rent the veil that concealed from men their own social process of production, and that turned the various, spontaneously divided branches of production into so many riddles, not only to outsiders, but even to the initiated. The principle which it pursued, of resolving each process into its constituent movements, without any regard to their possible execution by the hand of man, created the new modern science of technology" (Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, pp. 456-457). With a serious note, he considered it as a significant problem of modern work and the modern division of labor in capitalist society. It is not only the problem for economic sphere but also affect on social relations in modern life. Hence, a central insight of Marx's critique of alienation in capitalist society is simply the importance of recognizing "men as both the authors and the actors of their own drama" (Marx 1977, 206). With this concern regarding alienation he also pointed out on 'agency' as major element in understanding of modern society.

When Marx is considering Alienation, Durkheim picks 'anomie' as the key concept to understand modernity. He analyzed modern society and social structure depending on his theory of anomie. But he also begins with the discussion on structural interdependency that creates pressure for integration and also there is increase rate of division of labour. People also tend to perceive socially differentiated distinct culture. Hence, all these issues together give rise of problems, which are problems of modernity. Then he elaborates the possible social pathologies like anomie and forced division of labor. He noticed the crisis of modernity:

We are certainly not predestinated from birth to any particular form of employment, but we nevertheless possess tastes and aptitudes that limit our choice. If no account is taken of them, if they are constantly frustrated in our daily occupation, we suffer, and seek the means of bringing that suffering to the end. (Durkheim 1984 [1893] 310-11)

As Allan(2013) states, Durkheim's theory motivated by his concern about culture in modernity and he sees modernity as being driven by increasing level of population density and division of labor. We can see a constant appearance of these issues in Durkheim's argument. In some way, this condition matches with what Marx talked about alienation. Marx's alienation and Durkheim's division of labor both of the situations led to a suffering and separation. But, both of these are differ in the way people perceived them and how these conditions emerge. Durkheim's alienation is the result of pathological form of division of labor and it exist as subjective state. Marx's alienation happened with organic evolution and people get to know about this through class-consciousness.

With Marx and Durkheim, Weber is taking a central role in theorizing modernity and his position has been termed as 'cultural pessimism.' The term cultural pessimist has some merit, given Weber's often sobering remarks on modern society. In the influential text, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber suggests that:

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved." (Weber 2001: 124)

He clearly mentioned that the spirit of Christian asceticism and rational conduct are the fundamental elements of modern capitalism and modern culture. Furthermore, the modern society has been characterized by the concepts such as “bureaucratization,” “rationalization,” “intellectualization” and the “*disenchantment of the world*”. He also figured out the development of philosophical and scientific empiricism, from technical development to spiritual ideals, quantitative cultural significance of ascetic Protestantism with capital rationalism to describe the modern culture and the status of modernity. Three of them were concerned about structural aspect of modernity. Despite of their differences in the perspective to elaborate, they offered a ground for ambivalence to revisit the site of modernity with a cultural and phenomenological outlook.

Religion, Culture and Social Realities

Marx, Weber and Durkheim, all put forward a wide range of thoughts and concepts regarding to religion. Bearing the idea of sacred and profane as two major divisions, he proposed that society is the soul of religion. It can shape ones thoughts and feelings and gives people a sense of hope and something to believe in. Marx helps us to understand the mass appeal made by religion in society, and he must takes on historicity and class position in this regard. As he defines:

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. (Marx 1976)

He also believes, The criticism of religion disenchant man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses. He makes a distinction between true sun and illusory sun to talk about religion and claims that “religion is only the illusory Sun which revolves around man...”. On the other hand, Durkheim perceived religion as a combination of practice and belief that lead towards collective consciousness and social solidarity. He defines religion as, “A unified system of belief and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them”. (Durkheim 1995: 44)

Here we can see how Durkheim's view on religion is different from Marx. Marx's takes on religion as a major context of his theoretical perspective of false consciousness, wherein Durkheim is taking it with his theory of social solidarity and collective consciousness. Moving forward we have to consider Durkheim and Weber's contribution for brought religion as a central theme and analytical locus of sociology and anthropology, they made it intellectually rigorous at the same time. Weber never suggests a formal definition of religion but his writing on religion reflects the historical and cultural contexts of development and social implications of different religion. In his views in religion mostly articulated in *The Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism*, *Religion of China*, *Religion of India* and in *Ancient Judaism*. At the same time we can see a set of ideas regarding religious complexity in relation to social action, economic behavior had been accumulated in *Economic ethics of the world religion series* and *Economy and Society*. Through the religious complexity and multicausality he compared the Western modern capitalist development with China and India. He identifies different arrays or orientations related to ruling, religion, economy, social prestige, family-kinship and law in different civilization. Weber examines the 'psychological rewards' and economic implications of religious system like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, ancient Judaism, Taoism and Confucianism. To talk about religion, he uses the term and idea of magic and suggested about the historical point when religious world view liberated from a connection to the magic and become rational so that growth, development in modern economic system can began. Shortly, the development of modern civilization proceeds directly in relation to the decline of magic in social life. As Weber pointed:

Wherever magical and religious forces have inhibited the unfolding of organized life, the development of organized life oriented systematically towards economic activity has confronted broad-ranging internal resistance. Magical and religious powers, and the belief in them anchored in ethical notions of duty, have been in the past among the most important influences upon the way life has been organized. (Weber 1968: 341)

When Weber is considering the religious phenomena as sociological analysis and economic consideration, Durkheim on the contrary emphasizing on religious belief, what are the functions of these collective believes and how they are related to social integration. When we are talking about religion, if we remind how Marx, Weber and Durkheim altogether talked about secularization. Marx's alienation of labor, Durkheim's pathologies and Weber's iron cage reflects their views on the mechanism and secularization in modern capitalist system. The ambiguity and prediction Weber and Durkheim configured in their own magnum opuses, would clarified the ideological and methodological distinctiveness regarding religion.

In *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber outlined:

We are interested rather in something entirely different: the influence of those psychological sanctions which, originating in religious belief and the practice of religion, gave a direction to practical conduct and held the individual to it. Now these sanctions were to a large extent derived from the peculiarities of the religious ideas behind them.... We can of course only proceed by presenting these religious ideas in the artificial simplicity of ideal types, as they could at best but seldom be found in history.... That great historic process in the development of religions, the elimination of magic from the world which had begun with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought, had repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin, came here to its logical conclusion. (Weber 2001: 54-64)

On the other hand, Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* argued:

In a word, the old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born. But feasts and rites, in a word, the cult, are not the whole religion. This is not merely a system of practices, but also a system of ideas whose object is to explain the world ; we have seen that even the humblest have their cosmology.... In every sort of religion, gods are individualities distinct from each other; however, they are conceived, not perceived. Each people represents its historic or legendary heroes in fashions which vary with the time.... It is said that science denies religion in principle. But religion exists ; it is a system of given facts ; in a word, it is a reality. How could science deny this reality? Also, in so far as religion is action, and in so far as it is a means of making men live, science could not take its place, for even if this expresses life, it does not create it; it may well seek to explain the faith, but by that very act it presupposes it.... As a matter of fact, it does not know itself. It does not even know what it is made of, nor to what need it answers. It is itself a subject for science, so far is it from being able to make the law for science! And from another point of view, since there is no proper subject for religious speculation outside that reality to which scientific reflection is applied, it is evident that this former cannot play the same role in the future that it has played in the past. (Durkheim 2001: 322-25)

Individual and Society

The debates and crisis to exercising social theories often refer Marx, Weber and Durkheim for rendering the question, what actually social theories are? This question led to the sphere of philosophical linkage

from where the theories have been emerged. In a restricted sense we can see when Weber sought to understand Individual and the subjective meanings, Durkheim's attempt was to understand 'the social' in relation to social facts and phenomena. In relation to these we see, Marx's attempt to overthrow Hegel's idealism and to proclaim that the real point of philosophy is to change the world and not merely to understand it (Turner 2009:4). The philosophical roots and responses are diverse and seems ambivalence when we compare and contrast Marx, Durkheim and Weber. One of the divergences may be rooted in conceptualize individual and exploring society, in other way, how they have seen the individual and society separately and the interrelation of these two.

Durkheim outlined the balance between individual and society in a functional point of view while theorizing Suicide. According to him, suicide is a result of imbalance in the independence or autonomous relationship and it occurs among those subject to too much or too little social solidarity. He went on arguing that, suicide rates are different between different social groups because it depends how individuals are connected to society and what kinds of social supports they get. He suggested the balance between independence and individual freedom in one side, and on the other side subordination to the collective. This complexity and structural mechanism of individual and society also elaborated in division of labor and social solidarity theories of Durkheim. The individual for Durkheim, as analyzed by Cuff et al (1979), a creature of organic solidarity in the sense that a creature with individuality is only truly conceivable and possible within a certain kind of society. The very characteristics of the individual derive from the kind of society in which he or she is involved. Thus society creates 'the individual' and nor the other way about. (Cuff et al 2009 [1979]: 67)

Weber emphasized on interpretive understanding to develop the theory of social action and talk about sociological method. Subjective events are most important for social science research where knowledge must be of the internal or subjective states of individuals. He also interested to look at how individuals act on their understanding and how this 'understanding may be related to their social action in society. When in methodological perspective, subjective experiences of individuals are vital for him; these inner states are working as the base of social action. At the same time, to understand the society, he offers the idea of social spheres. One social sphere exists, act, rationalize and create orientation with other social acts and influence on other social spheres. He mentions, the legal, religious, political spheres of society maintain interconnection and in a process of overlapping and intersecting, they change and develop.

When we see Marx's workers or capitalist owners finally falling in the defined class of owners or workers, or bourgeoisies and proletariats, Weber extended the dualistic idea of stratification by the tripartite

model of class, status and party. This formulation of social stratification elaborates the outlook on examining the individual position in social structure and the interactions. Marx looks at individual and society through the lens of economic materialism. Durkheim and Weber both echoed with him in legitimizing all knowledge system and capitalist authoritarianism on individual and society, but they dismiss tie with Marx for developing their own arguments. Weber shows us how culture is socially constructed and proposed sociology of knowledge and sociology of organization. Durkheim extends the idea of social order and social structure to encounter the question how individual unlimited desires would be controlled by social regulation.

Conclusion

In this module, we discussed the basic sociological concepts which have been conceived in theoretical proposition of Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Weber and same as Durkheim continued with the interchanging ideas from Marx, but they are not follower in any way. Their criticism on Western modernism and capitalism bring new and original theoretical ground which have been widely celebrated as classics in social science discipline. However, the linkage and lineage of ideas and concepts of these three founding fathers would not be ignored. As Cuff et al (1979) observed, Weber's sociology is much closer to Marx than Durkheim's is and coming from a very different philosophical background from that of Marx, Weber was allied to the neo-Kantian rather than Hegelian tradition on German thought. In terms of their influence in sociology, it seems that in the immediate post-World War 2 period, Durkheim's influence was to be great and more sustained than Marx's or Weber's. (Cuff et al 2009[1979]: 35-58)

In terms of sociological imagination, all of them provide new routes where we found a rigorous methodological and conceptual base. Historical, economic, socio-political, cultural and religious elements of human existence have been covered by these three figures. If we consider some specific school or sub discipline of sociology per say Economic Sociology traces its historical roots primarily to Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Marx's and Weber's structuralism and Durkheim's structural functionalism build up the philosophical foundation of modern social science. To outline the foundation of social theory in relation with enlightenment and classical trend, Gerard Delanty (2009) asserted that, Marx established a tradition in social theory around and explanation of the rise and transformation of capitalist society while his social theory is critical in fashion. However, his early work was dominant by Aristotelian notion of "praxis" which he linked to his major themes of alienation and extended the idea of Hegel. After Marx, social theory split

into three classical traditions, one heritage continued with Marx's critical tradition, one was from Comte represented by Durkheim and another goes back to Kant that includes Weber. Schooled in French philosophy Emile Durkheim can be considered to be the first social theorist establish social theory as a social scientific endeavor. As a social theorist on the other hand, Weber set out to explain the modern world. Like Durkheim, he was interested to explain moral foundation of society but unlike Durkheim he emphasize meanings and process of cultural rationalization. Both Weber and Durkheim offered a general social theory of modern capitalist society that underpinned by new methodological approaches for social sciences. Like Marx, the themes of crisis were common for both of them. (Delanty 2009: 24-8)

This thematically fashioned module of comparison and contrast of the positions of Marx, Durkheim and Weber would be broadened our understanding about human society and help us to engage with their particular theories. It also enables us to analyze critically the specific conceptual position offered by them. To encounter and conceptualize the social forces in modern society, this comparing and contrasting would support us as a key tool. To acquire a critical approach to any sociological issue, if we seek help from this comparative discussion it may tell us about the basic variables Marx, Durkheim and Weber had use in their analysis of society. Marx obtained nature, Durkheim on psychology and Weber use religion as fundamental assumption. As founders of social theory, they established formal and systematic social scientific analysis of modern capitalist condition.