# FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY
## (SOC1C01)

**STUDY MATERIAL**

**I SEMESTER**

**CORE COURSE**

**MA SOCIOLOGY**

(2019 Admission onwards)


# UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

**SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**CALICUT UNIVERSITY- P.O**

**MALAPPURAM- 673635, KERALA**

**190351**

**SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

**STUDY MATERIAL**
**FIRST SEMESTER**

**MA SOCIOLOGY (2019 ADMISSION ONWARDS)**

**CORE COURSE:**

# SOC1C01: FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

***Prepared by:***

***Sri. Jawhar.C.T***
***Assistant Professor on Contract (Sociology)***
***School of Distance Education***
***University of Calicut***

***Scrutinized By:***

***Dr.Mahesh.C***
***Assistant Professor***
***Department of Sociology***
***Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Calicut***

Layout: 'H' Section, SDE

# FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

**Objectives**

Traces out the history of sociology

Introduces the ideas of the pioneering sociological thinkers

Recognises the relevance of the classical theory in contemporary societies.

## MODULE 1 THE ORIGINS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

1.1 Intellectual and Social forces in the development of Sociological Theory: Renaissance, Enlightenment,French Revolution, Industrial Revolution

1.2 Early Social Philosophers: Montesquieu, Condorcet, Saint Simone

1.3 Auguste Comte: Positivism, Herbert Spencer: Organic Analogy

1.4 Emile Durkheim: Social Fact, Division of Labour, Suicide, Elementary forms of Religious life

## MODULE 2 KARL MARX

2.1 Karl Marx: Dialectical and Historical Materialism

2.2 Class and Class conflict

2.3 Theory of Alienation, Commodity Fetishism

2.4 Theory of Social Change

## MODULE 3 MAX WEBER

3.1 Verstehen, Social Action, Ideal Type

3.2 Theory of Power and Authority, Bureaucracy

3.3 Rationality and Modernity- Rationalisation

3.4 The Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism

## MODULE 4 GEORG SIMMEL

4.1 Formal Sociology, Sociation and Group formation

4.2 Relationships and Social types

4.3 Philosophy of Money

4.4 Modernity - Metropolis

## Preface

This book is an introductory reading for the 1st semester MA Sociology students. In 2020 the Board of Studies in Sociology initiated the revision of the existing curriculum for MA Degree Programme. This new initiative emphasized on the broadening the scope of academic practices inSociology by including recent trends in the course. In this course we have four theory papers starting from classical sociological theories to more recent developments in social theory. Each semester have a sociological theory paper which helps us to get a panoramic view of the subject.

This paper, **Foundations of Sociological Theory** is an intellectual history of classical sociology and it will map the development of Sociology as an independent discipline. As we know, classical thinking is a library's worth of material with lot of historical contexts, individual theorist and their contributions. Here we are developing a theory textbook with relativelyshort chapter for each theorist. Theoretical thinking is a difficult kind of thinking and most difficult one as well. So, preparing a text book kind of reading is difficult academic exercise, especially in a short period. Hence, I used different sources to understand and write the theoretical concepts and perspective of classical thinkers.

# MODULE 1

# THE ORIGINS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

## Chapter Outline

1.1 Intellectual and Social forces in the development of Sociological Theory: Renaissance, Enlightenment, French Revolution, Industrial Revolution

1.2 Early Social Philosophers: Montesquieu, Condorcet, Saint Simone

1.3 Auguste Comte: Positivism, Herbert Spencer: Organic Analogy

## Objectives of this Module

This module deals with the emergence of sociology in Europe and the contribution of early founding fathers for the discipline. The objective of this unit is to

- Outline the intellectual and social background to the emergence and development of sociological theory.
- Describe the social conditions prevailing in Europe from the fourteenth to approximately eighteenth century.
- Analyses the how Renaissance, Enlightenment, French and the Industrial Revolution contributed to the development of modern Europe and subsequently for the emergence of Sociological theories.
- Understand the contribution of Early Social Philosophers such as Montesquieu, Condorcet, Saint Simone
- Examine the contributions of Auguste Comte to the understanding of Positivism and Herbert Spencer to the social evolutionism and organic analogy.

## 1. Introduction

In this module we will discuss the origins of sociological theory in Europe in the 18th and 19thcentury. This chapter is divided in to four parts which locate the historical and intellectual context in which sociology as a discipline emerged. In the first part, we will trace the relationship between the emergence of sociology and the social and intellectual conditions of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. As a discipline sociology emerged first in Europe as a response to the social and intellectual climate prevailing in Europe of that time.

A proper understanding of this linkage will help us to understand the ideas of the early works of sociologists. In the first part we will analyze four important intellectual and social forces in the development of sociological theory, such as renaissance, enlightenment, French Revolution and industrial revolution. This unit describes the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of Europe before the emergence of sociology background to the emergence of sociology especially from about fourteenth century to the eighteenth century.

In the second part we will discuss the contributions of different early social thinkers starting from Montesquieu, Condorcet, Saint Simone. Before the French, Industrial Commercial and the Scientific Revolutions in Europe these three thinkers laid foundation for sociological theories and critical analysis of the social and cultural thoughts. In the third part of this paper we will looks at the contribution and ideas of the founding fathers like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim. In this part we focus on the contribution of these thinkers from a methodological point of views. In the final part we will focus on the contribution of Durkheim such as social fact, division of labour, suicide, elementary forms of religious life.

## 2. Classical Sociological Theory

In sociology, classical social theory can be dated from the contributions of Auguste Comte in the first half of the 19th century and ended around 1920s with the emergence Talcott Parsons

as an important figure in American sociology. Of course, the major classical social theorists didn't just have a brainwave one day which then made them famous for all eternity. They all enjoyed intellectual precursors, whose legacy they built on through critique, revision and innovation. As we know, all sociological concepts have a history. Some concepts can be traced back to Ancient Greek philosophy, some to early religious thinking.

The classical social theorists were influenced by the scientific revolution that the West passed through in the shape of figures like Copernicus (1473– 1543), Galileo (1564–1642), Issac Newton (1642–1727) and Charles Darwin (1809–1882). This intellectual ferment flowed into the movement known as 'the Enlightenment' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From Edinburgh to Paris, Berlin to Naples, Amsterdam to Philadelphia, social and political thinkers tried to put reason in charge over irrational beliefs and superstitions.

In sociological theory the 'Classical' theory refers to the writings from 'the canon' of Comte, Spencer, Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel. Different scholars chose the contributions of different theorists in the canon of the classical social theorybecause of the different reasons.In 1920sAmerica the canon included Simmel and Durkheim, but not Weber orMarx. Durkheim's place in the canon was assured by a conservative interpretation of his theory of moral solidarity as a normal function of an organic social order. Weber was taken up in the 1930s because he provided an alternative explanation of capitalism in terms of ethical values against Marx's explanation in terms of crude material conditions.

As well as making a profound contribution to social theory, Weber's canonization was, in part, ideologically inspired against what were seen by ruling elites as the dangerous doctrines of Marxism. Marx was excluded from the canon at that time because his name was closely associated with a revolutionary movement that threatened the vested interests of capitalist society. Marx only joined 'the canon' of classical social theorists after the revolts of the 1960s.

Here we are not going back to the early historic times of the Greeks or Romans or even to the middle ages to trace the history of sociological thoughts. This is not because people in those historical epochs did not have sociologically relevant ideas, but because they did not investment much time to the study of society that is relevant to modern sociology. And none of the thinkers associated with those eras thought of themselves as sociologists or social theories. It is only in the early 18th onwards we begin to find thinkers who can be clearly identified as sociologists. This course will analyse the theories of classical sociological thinkers during and after 18th century and in this module we begin by examining the main social and intellectual forces that shaped their ideas.

Here the term classical sociological theory is used to refer primarily to the writings of Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903**)**, Karl Marx (1818–1883), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Max Weber (1864–1920). They produced ideas that constitute the canon or body of conceptual knowledge that all sociologists are expected to know. Their writings produced what sociologists acknowledge as the classic or foundational texts in sociology. Hence, in this first paper on *Foundations of Sociological Theory* we focus on the contributions of Comte, Spencer, Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel.

## 3. Intellectual and Social Forces

In this paper we will looks at the contemporary relevance of classical sociological theory. The theorists whose works we will discuss in this paper are vital in two ways: first, because they helped chart the course of the discipline of sociology from its inception until the present time. Second, because their concepts and theories still permeate contemporary concerns. Sociologists still seek to explain such critical issues as the nature of capitalism, the basis of social solidarity or cohesion, the role of authority in social life, the benefits and dangers posed by modern bureaucracies, the dynamics of gender and racial oppression, and the nature

of the "self," to name but a few. Classical sociological theory provides a pivotal conceptual base with which to explore today's world.

In this module we will looks at the historical origin of sociological theory. The aim this chapter is to describe different historical events which should help in putting the later detailed discussions of theorists and theories in a larger context. As we proceeds through the later chapters, it will help us to return to this module and place the discussions in their context. It is very difficult to establish the precise date in when sociological theory began. People have been thinking about, and developing theories of, social life since early in history.

Thus, this module will trace the emergence of sociology and sociological theory by analyzing the intellectual conditions of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. As we know, modern sociology emerged first in Europe. Modern sociology emerged as a response to the social and intellectual climate prevailing in Europe in eighteenth and nineteenth century.

A proper understanding of this historical context will help us to appreciate the ideas of the early sociologists and their contributions to the emergence of sociology as a discipline.
So, to understand the emergence of sociology in Europe we need to appreciate the relationship between social condition and the emergence of social ideas. There is always a connection between the social conditions of a period and the ideas, which arise and are dominant in that period.

**4. Early History and Contribution of Ibn-Khaldun**

As we know, long before the fourteenth century, Plato (ca. 428–ca. 347 bc), Aristotle (384–22 bc), and Thucydides (ca. 460–ca. 400 bc) wrote about the nature of war, the origins of the family and the state, and the relationship between religion and the government—topics that have since become central to sociology. Aristotle, for example, emphasized that human beings were naturally political animals—*zoonpolitikon*. He sought to identify the essence that

made a stone a stone or a society a society. For that matter, well before Aristotle's time, Confucius (551–479 bc) developed a theory for understanding Chinese society. Akin to Aristotle, Confucius maintained that government is the center of people's lives and that all other considerations derive from it. According to Confucius, a good government must be concerned with three things: sufficient food, a sufficient army, and the confidence of the people.

The central figures at the heart of classical sociological theory all sought to explain the extraordinary economic, political, and social transformations taking place in Europe in the late nineteenth century. Yet, concerns about the nature of social bonds and how these bonds can be maintained in the face of extant social change existed long before the eighteenth century and in many places, not only in Western Europe. Indeed, in the late fourteenth century, Abdel Rahman Ibn-Khaldun (1332–1406), born in Tunis, Tunisia, in North Africa, thought and wrote extensively on subjects that have much in common with contemporary sociology.

Before going the detailed analysis of the historical context in which sociological thought emerged we have to look at the biographic sketch and major contributions of Ibn-Khaldun. As we know there is a tendency to think of sociology as exclusively a comparatively modern, European and Western phenomenon. But in reality, scholars were developing sociological ideas and theories long ago in different parts of the world. Abdel Rahman Ibn-Khaldun was one among them.

Ibn-Khaldun was born in Tunis, North Africa, on May 27, 1332. He was schooled in the Quran, mathematics, and history. In his lifetime, he served a variety of sultans in Tunis, Morocco, Spain, and Algeria as ambassador, chamberlain, and member of the scholars' council. He also spent two years in prison in Morocco for his belief that state rulers were not divine leaders. After approximately two decades of political activity, Ibn-Khaldun returned to

North Africa, where he undertook an intensive five-year period of study and writing. Works produced during this period increased his fame and led to a lectureship at the center of Islamic study, Al-Azhar Mosque University in Cairo. In his well-attended lectures on society and sociology, Ibn-Khaldun stressed the importance of linking sociological thought and historical observation.

By the time he died in 1406, Ibn-Khaldun had produced a corpus of work that had many ideas in common with contemporary sociology. He was committed to the scientific study of society, empirical research, and the search for causes of social phenomena. He devoted considerable attention to various social institutions (for example, politics, economy) and their interrelationships. He was interested in comparing primitive and modern societies. Ibn-Khaldun did not have a dramatic impact on classical sociology, but as scholars in general, and Islamic scholars in particular, rediscover his work, he may come to be seen as being of greater historical significance (Ritzer: 2011).

Specifically, Khaldun's goal was to explain the historical process of the rise and fall of civilization in terms of a pattern of recurring conflicts between tough nomadic desert tribes and sedentary-type societies with their love of luxuries and pleasure. He believed that the advanced civilizations that develop in densely settled communities are accompanied by a more centralized political authority system and by the gradual erosion of social cohesion within the population. As a result such societies become vulnerable to conquest by tough and highly disciplined nomadic peoples from the unsettled desert.

Eventually, however, the hardy conquerors succumb to the temptations of the soft and refined lifestyle of the people they had conquered, and so the cycle is eventually repeated. Although this cyclical theory was based on Khaldun's observations of social trends in the Arabian desert, his goal was to develop a general model of the dynamics of society and the process of large-scale social change. His insights were neglected by European and American

social theorists, however, perhaps partly because of the growing dominance of Western Europe over the Arab world in succeeding centuries (Johnson; 2008).

## 5. Intellectual Developments and the Emergence of Sociological Theory

In the following part we will discuss different social intellectual factors that played a central role in shaping sociological theory. As we know intellectual developments cannot be separated from social changes. Therenaissance and enlightenment played an important role in providing intellectual basis for the development of modern Europe. Let us look at the role of this two intellectual development in the development of critical thinking in Europe and the subsequent development of sociological theories.

### 4.1. The Enlightenment

As we discussed, the roots of the ideas developed by the early sociologists are grounded in the social conditions that prevailed in Europe. This period of change in European society embodies the spirit of new awakening in the eighteenth century. As we know many of the seeds for what would become sociology were first planted during the Enlightenment, a period of remarkable intellectual development that originated in Europe during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The development of civil society (open spaces of debate relatively free from government control) and the quickening pace of the modern world enabled a newly emerging mass of literate citizens to think about the economic, political, and cultural conditions that shaped society.

As a result, a number of long-standing ideas and beliefs about social life were turned upside down. The Enlightenment, however, was not so much a fixed set of ideas as it was a new attitude, a new method of thought. One of the most important aspects of this new attitude was an emphasis on *reason,* which demanded the questioning and reexamination of received ideas and values regarding the physical world, human nature, and their relationship to God. The Enlightenment Period marked a radical change from the traditional thinking of feudal

Europe. It introduced the new way of thinking and looking at reality. Individuals started questioning each and every aspect of life and nothing was considered sacrosanct - from the church to the state to the authority of the monarch and so on.

Broadly, Enlightenment is not an historical period, but a process of social, psychological or spiritual development, unbound to time or place. Immanuel Kant defines "enlightenment" as humankind's release from its self-incurred immaturity; "immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another." So, it emphasized on the ideas, such as the belief that both nature and society can be studied scientifically, that human beings are essentially rational and that a society built on rational principles will make human beings realize their infinite potentials, can be traced in the development of science and commerce in Europe.

The new outlook developed as a result of the Commercial Revolution and the Scientific Revolution and crystalised during the French and the Industrial Revolutions gave birth to sociology as a discipline. To understand the social changes that were taking place in European society, we will first look at the kind of society that existed in traditional Europe, i.e. prior to the Enlightenment period.

The Enlightenment was a period of remarkable intellectual development and change in social, political and philosophical thoughts. It is the view of many observers that the Enlightenment constitutes a critical developmentin terms of the later evolution of sociology. During the time of enlightenment a numberof long-standing ideas and beliefs—many of which related to social life—were overthrownand replaced. The Enlightenment was characterized by the belief that people could comprehend and control the universe by means of reason and empirical research. The view was that because the physical world was dominated by natural laws, it was likely that the social world was too dominated and

controlled by social law. Thus it was up to the philosopher to discover these social laws by using reason and research.

The idea of Enlightenment is conceived as having its primary origin in the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries. The rise of the new science progressively undermines not only the ancient geocentric conception of the cosmos, but also the set of presuppositions that had served to constrain and guide philosophical inquiry in the earlier times. The dramatic success of the new science in explaining the natural world promotes philosophy from a handmaiden of theology, constrained by its purposes and methods, to an independent force with the power and authority to challenge the old and construct the new, in the realms both of theory and practice, on the basis of its own principles.

Another important dimension of Enlightenment is its political involvement and undertakings. The era is marked by three political revolutions, which together lay the basis for modern, republican, constitutional democracies: The English Revolution (1688), the American Revolution (1775–83), and the French Revolution (1789–99). The success at explaining and understanding the natural world encourages the Enlightenment project of re-making the social/political world, in accord with the models we allegedly find in our reason. Enlightenment philosophers find that the existing social and political orders do not withstand critical scrutiny.

Existing political and social authority is shrouded in religious myth and mystery and founded on obscure traditions. The criticism of existing institutions is supplemented with the positive work of constructing in theory the model of institutions as they ought to be. We owe to this period the basic model of government founded upon the consent of the governed; the articulation of the political ideals of freedom and equality and the theory of their institutional realization; the articulation of a list of basic individual human rights to be respected and realized by any legitimate political system; the articulation and promotion of toleration of

religious diversity as a virtue to be respected in a well ordered society; the conception of the basic political powers as organized in a system of checks and balances; and other now-familiar features of western democracies.

However, for all the enduring accomplishments of Enlightenment political philosophy, it is not clear that human reason proves powerful enough to put a concrete, positive authoritative ideal in place of the objects of its criticism. As in the epistemological domain, reason shows its power more convincingly in criticizing authorities than in establishing them. Here too the question of the limits of reason is one of the main philosophical legacies of the period. These limits are arguably vividly illustrated by the course of the French Revolution.

The explicit ideals of the French Revolution are the Enlightenment ideals of individual freedom and equality; but, as the revolutionaries attempt to devise rational, secular institutions to put in place of those they have violently overthrown, eventually they have recourse to violence and terror in order to control and govern the people. The devolution of the French Revolution into the Reign of Terror is perceived by many as proving the emptiness and hypocrisy of Enlightenment reason, and is one of the main factors which account for the end of the Enlightenment as an historical period.

The political revolutions of the Enlightenment, especially the French and the American, were informed and guided to a significant extent by prior political philosophy in the period. Though Thomas Hobbes, in his *Leviathan* (1651), defends the absolute power of the political sovereign, and is to that extent opposed to the revolutionaries and reformers in England, this work is a founding work of Enlightenment political theory. Hobbes' work originates the modern social contract theory, which incorporates Enlightenment conceptions of the relation of the individual to the state.

According toHobbes's social contract model, political authority is grounded in an agreement (often understood as ideal, rather than real) among individuals, each of whom aims in this agreement to advance his rational self-interest by establishing a common political authority over all. Thus, according to the general contract model (though this is more clear in later contract theorists such as Locke and Rousseau than in Hobbes himself), political authority is grounded not in conquest, natural or divinely instituted hierarchy, or in obscure myths and traditions, but rather in the rational consent of the governed. In initiating this model, Hobbes takes a naturalistic, scientific approach to the question of how political society ought to be organized (against the background of a clear-eyed, unsentimental conception of human nature), and thus decisively influences the Enlightenment process of secularization and rationalization in political and social philosophy.

The Enlightenment was characterized by the belief that people could comprehend and control the universe by means of reason and empirical research. The view was that because the physical world was dominated by natural laws, it was likely that the social world was too. Thus it was up to the philosopher, using reason and research, to discover these social laws. Once they understood how the social world worked, the Enlightenment thinkers had a practical goal—the creation of a “better,” more rational world.

The Enlightenment philosophers emphasized on reason and rejected the beliefs in traditional authority. When these thinkers examined traditional values and institutions, they often found them to be irrational—that is, contrary to human nature and inhibitive of human growth and development. The mission of the practical and change-oriented philosophers of the Enlightenment was to overcome these irrational systems. The theorists who were most directly and positively influenced by Enlightenment thinking were Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx, although the latter formed his early theoretical ideas in Germany.

### 5.2.Renaissance Period

The renaissance played an important role in the emergence of social thought in the fourteenth to sixteenth century Europe. As we know it is one of the most interesting periods of European history.According to historians it began in Italy about 1350 and in the rest of Europe after 1450 and that it lasted until about 1620. It was a historical era with distinctive themes in learning, politics, literature, art, religion, social life, and music.In the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries Italian intellectuals used the term *rinascità* which means 'rebirth or renaissance' to describe their own age as one in which learning, literature, and the arts were reborn. They saw the ancient world of Rome and Greece, whose literature, learning, and politics they admired, as an age of high achievement. But in their view, hundreds of years of cultural darkness followed because much of the learning and literature of the ancient world had been lost.

The significance of this development is that Europe produced a “scientific revolution” in the Renaissance period of fourteenth to sixteenth century A.D. The impact of the scientific revolution was crucial not just in changing material life, but also people’s ideas about Nature and Society. During this time different ideas and morels where emerged in European society. The idea of humanism was the defining intellectual movement of the Renaissance. It was based on the belief that the literary, scientific, and philosophical works of ancient Greece and Rome provided the best guides for learning and living. And humanists believed that the New Testament and early Christian authors offered the best spiritual advice.

The Humanistic ideas helped to develop critical attitude toward received values, individuals, and institutions, especially those that did not live up to their own principles. The humanists' study of ancient Rome and Greece gave them the chronological perspective and intellectual tools to analyze, criticize, and change their own world. Humanists especially questioned the institutions and values inherited from the Middle Ages. They found fault with

medieval art, government, philosophy, and approaches to religion. Once the humanist habit of critical appraisal developed, many turned sharp eyes on their own times. And eventually they turned their critical gaze on the learning of the ancient world and rejected parts of it.

One of the important dimensions of the Renaissance is that it produced an extraordinary amount of art, and the role of the artist differed from that in the Middle Ages. The Renaissance had a passion for art. Commissions came from kings, popes, princes, nobles, and lowborn mercenary captains. Leaders commissioned portraits of themselves, of scenes of their accomplishments, such as successful battles, and of illustrious ancestors. Cities wanted their council halls decorated with huge murals, frescoes, and tapestries depicting great civic moments. Monasteries commissioned artists to paint frescoes in cells and refectories that would inspire monks to greater devotion. And civic, dynastic, and religious leaders hired architects to erect buildings at enormous expense to beautify the city or to serve as semipublic residences for leaders. Such art was designed to celebrate and impress. A remarkable feature of Renaissance art was the heightened interaction between patron and artist.

### 5.3.Development of Science and Intellectual Environment

Along with the development of renaissance 5$^{th}$ century Europe witnessed the emergence of science and technology. Scientific thought had itself only begun to emerge in the fifteenth century through the efforts of astronomers and scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Bacon. Copernicus's discovery in the early sixteenth century that the Earth orbited the sun directly contradicted the literal understanding of the Bible, which placed the Earth at the center of the universe. With his inventive improvement to the telescope, Galileo confirmed Copernicus's heliocentric view the following century. Galileo's contemporary, Sir Francis

Bacon, developed an experimental, inductive approach to analyzing the natural world for which he has come to be known as the "father of the scientific method."

In advocating the triumph of reasoned investigation over faith, these early scientists and the Enlightenment intellectuals who followed in their footsteps rebuked existing knowledge as fraught with prejudice and mindless tradition. Not surprisingly, such views were dangerous because they challenged the authority of religious beliefs and those charged with advancing them. Indeed, Galileo was convicted of heresy by the Catholic Church, had his work banned, and spent the last ten years of his life under house arrest for advocating a heliocentric view of the universe.

Enlightenment thinkers and scientists viewed the universe as a mechanical system composed of matter in motion that obeyed natural laws that could be uncovered by means of methodical observation and empirical research. Thus, when Newton developed his theory of gravity, a giant leap forward in the development of mathematics and physics, he was offering proof of God's existence. For Newton, only the intelligence of a divine power could have ordered the universe so perfectly around the sun as to prevent the planets from colliding under forces of gravity.

Similarly, Rene Descartes was convinced that reason and mathematics could provide certainty of God whose existence could be demonstrated rationally, much like a geometric proof. Faith and reason for these individuals were not irreconcilable. The heresy committed by the Enlightenment thinkers was their attempt to solve the mystery of God's design of the natural world through the methodical, empirical discovery of eternal laws. Miracles were for the ignorant and superstitious.

Thus, the rise of science and empiricism ushered in by the Enlightenment would give birth to sociology in the mid-nineteenth century. The central idea behind the emerging discipline was that society could be the subject of scientific examination in the same manner

as biological organisms or the physical properties of material objects. Indeed, the French intellectual Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who coined the term “sociology” in 1839, also used the term “social physics” to refer to this new discipline and his organic conceptualization of society. The term “social physics” reflects the Enlightenment view that the discipline of sociology parallels other natural sciences. Comte argued that, like natural scientists, sociologists should uncover, rationally and scientifically, the laws of the social world.

### 5.4.French Revolution

As we mentioned the energy created and expressed by the Enlightenment thinkers contributes to the growing wave of social unrest in France in the eighteenth century. The social unrest comes to a head in the violent political upheaval which sweeps away the traditionally and hierarchically structured of French society such asthe monarchy, the privileges of the nobility and the political power of the Catholic Church. The French revolutionaries tried to establish a new reason-based order instituting the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality.

The emergence of sociological theories can be traced to that period of European history, which saw such tremendous social, political and economic changes as embodied in different revolutions. The long series of political revolutions that were accompanied with the French Revolution in 1789 and carried over through the nineteenth century was the most immediate factor in the rise of sociological theorizing. The impact of these revolutions on manysocieties was enormous, and many positive changes resulted.

The French Revolution, which erupted in 1789 marked a turning point in the history of human struggle for freedom and equality. It put an end to the age of feudalism and ushered in a new order of society. An outline of this revolution will explain to you the kind of turmoil that occurred in Europe. This revolution brought about far reaching changes in not only

French society but in societies throughout Europe. Even countries in other continents such as, India, were influenced by the ideas generated during this revolution. Ideas like liberty, fraternity and equality, which now form a part of the preamble to the Constitution of India, owe their origin to the French Revolution. Let us first examine some of the major aspects of this revolution.

The French society was divided into feudal ‘estates’. The structure of thefeudal French society comprised the ‘Three Estates’. Estates are definedas a system of stratification found in feudal European societies wherebyone section or estate is distinguished from the other in terms of status,privileges and restrictions accorded to that estate.

- **The First Estate** consisted of the clergy, which was stratified intohigher clergy, such as the cardinal, the archbishops, the bishops andthe abbots. They lived a life of luxury and gave very little attention toreligion. In fact, some of them preferred the life of politics to religion.They spent much of their time in wasteful activities like drinking,gambling, etc. In comparison to the higher clergy, the lower parishpriests were over worked and poverty-stricken.
- **The Second Estate** consisted of the nobility. There were two kindsof nobles, the nobles of the sword and the nobles of the robe.The nobles of the sword were big landlords. They were the protectorsof the people in principle but in reality they led a life of a parasite,living off the hard work of the peasants. They led the life of pompand show and were nothing more than ‘high born wastrels’; that is,they spent extravagantly and did not work themselves. They can becompared to the erstwhile zamindars in India.The nobles of the robe were nobles not by birth by title. They werethe magistrates and judges. Among these nobles, some were veryprogressive and liberal as they had moved in their positions fromcommon citizens who belonged to the third estate.

- **The Third Estate** comprised the rest of the society and included thepeasants, the merchants, the artisans, and others. There was a vastdifference between the condition of the peasants and that of the clergyand the nobility. The peasants worked day and night but wereoverloaded with so many taxes that they lived a hand to mouthexistence. They produced the food on which the whole societydepended. Yet they could barely survive due to failure of any kind ofprotection from the government. The King, in order to maintain thegood will of the other two estates, the clergy and the nobility, continuedto exploit the poor. The poor peasants had no power against him. Whilethe clergy and the nobility kept on pampering and flattering the King.

As compared to the peasants, the condition of the middle classes, alsoknown as the bourgeoisie comparising the merchants, bankers, lawyers,manufacturers, etc. was much better. These classes too belonged to thethird estate. But the poverty of the state, which led to a price rise during1720-1789, instead of adversely affecting them, helped them. They derivedprofit from this rise and the fact that French trade had improved enormouslyalso helped the commercial classes to a great extent. Thus, this class wasrich and secure. But it had no social prestige as compared with the highprestige of the members of the first and the second estates.

In spite of controlling trade, industries, banking etc. the bourgeoisie hadno power to influence the court or administration. The other two estateslooked them down upon and the King paid very little attention to them.Thus, gaining political power became a necessity for them.The clergy and the nobility both constituted only two per cent of thepopulation but they owned about 35 per cent of the land. The peasantswho formed 80 per cent of the population owned only 30 per cent of theland. The first two estates paid almost no taxes to the government. Thepeasantry, on the other hand, was burdened with taxes of various kinds. Itpaid taxes to the Church, the feudal lord, taxed in the form of income tax,poll tax, and land

tax to the state. Thus, you can see how much burdenedand poverty stricken the peasants had become at this time. They werevirtually carrying the burden of the first two estates on their shoulders. Ontop of it all the prices had generally risen by about 65 per cent during theperiod, 1720-1789.

Let us look at the chronological event that took place during the French Revolution. As we know in France there was a parliamentary body called the Estates-General in which all the three estates were represented but which had met last in 1614. It was in 1778 that the King, Louis XVI, was forced to impose a tax on everyone irrespective of his or her social status. The French government had become bankrupt due to the extravagance of the King, as well as, the help that they had given to the Americans in their War of Independence.This imposition of tax led the rich nobles and the clergy to demand a meeting of the Estate-General, which they felt, was the only body, which could levy tax. The Estate-General met on May 5, 178, but in this meeting, unlike the earlier practice, the representatives of the third estate wanted all the estates to meet and vote as one assembly. But the first two estates did not agree to this.

The refusal of the first two Estates to meet with the third Estate as a single body led to the formation of the National Assembly. The meeting of the National Assembly led by middle class leaders and some liberal minded nobles was met with stiff resistance. On 20th June 1789 when a meeting was to be held in the Hall at Versailles near Paris, the members found that it was closed and guarded by the King’s men.Therefore, the National Assembly members led by their leader Bailey went to the next building which was an indoor tennis court. It was here that they took an Oath to draw a new constitution for France. This Oath, which marks the beginning of the French Revolution, is popularly known as the Oath of the Tennis Court.

On July 14th, 1789 took place one of the most important events of the French Revolution. It was the storming of the Bastille, an ancient royal prison that stood as a symbol of oppression. On this date the mobs of Paris, led by some middle class leaders, broke open this prison and set its inmates free. The causes for this event were the shortage of food, on the one hand, and the dismissal of a very popular minister called Necker, on the other. The mobs of Paris rebelled against the ruling class, especially the King. This day is celebrated in France as its Independence Day.

Declaration of Rights of Man by the Constituent Assembly, (1789-1791), comprising the members of the third estate and some liberal minded members of the other two estates, guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom from arbitrary punishments. It abolished the special rights and privileges of the clergy and the nobility. The King was no longer to rule by Divine Right and several important social and economic changes were brought about. According to this declaration 'all men were born and remains equal before law. They have a right to choose their government and to resist oppression.

Personal liberty becomes a right given to all individuals. Thus, the ideas of liberty and equality put an end to the age of serfdom, despotism and hereditary privileges found in the old feudal society. In 1791 the king tried to escape from France but was recognised at the frontier and brought back. Since then he become a virtual prisoner. In Paris, the new Legislative Assembly (1791-1792) was formed. It comprised two very radical groups, namely the Girondin and the Jacobin. These groups considered the king a traitor and were in favour of establishing a Republic. The King, Louis XVI, was beheaded in public on 21st January 1793 after being proved guilty of treason. The Queen was also beheaded later in the same year. France was declared a Republic.

A period referred to as "Reign of Terror" took place in France when several of the nobles, priests, some of the revolutionaries themselves were guillotined i.e. beheaded. This

period lasted for three years. Establishment of the Directorate took place in 1795. It lasted for four years till a young artillery officer from Corsica, a neighbouring island, overthrew the Directorate in 1799. He was Napoleon Bonaparte. He made himself the new Director and provided a much sought after stable government to the people of France. Thus the French Revolution ended with the overthrow of the Directorate by Napoleon.

You would have by now developed a rough idea of what the FrenchRevolution was and how significant its role has been in the history ofhuman civilisation. It changed the political structure of European societyand replaced the age of feudalism by heralding the arrival of democracy.There were many significant themes, which arose due to the impact of thisRevolution, which have been the focus of interest of the early sociologists.These significant themes included the transformation of property, the socialdisorder, caused by the change in the political structure and its impact onthe economic structure. A new class of power holders emerged – thebourgeoisie. In order to understand more about these themes, we need tolearn the details of the Industrial Revolution.

So, the long series of political revolutions that were ushered in by the French Revolution in 1789 and carried over through the nineteenth century was the most immediate factor in the rise of sociological theorizing. The impact of these revolutions on many societies was enormous, and many positive changes resulted. However, what attracted the attention of many early theorists was not the positive consequences but the negative effects of such changes. These writers were particularly disturbed by the resulting chaos and disorder, especially in France. They were united in a desire to restore order to society.

Some of the more extreme thinkers of this period literally wanted a return to the peaceful and relatively orderly days of the Middle Ages. The more sophisticated thinkers recognized that social change had made such a return impossible. Thus they sought instead to find new bases of order in societies that had been overturned by the political revolutions of

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This interest in the issue of social order was one of the major concerns of classical sociological theorists, especially Comte and Durkheim.

### 5.5.Industrial Revolution

As a result of enlightenment, 18th century Europeanswitnessed to a major scientific, technological, and social movement that reshaped work, wealth, and environments across the globe. The Industrial Revolution is the rapid increase in the use of machines powered by inanimate forms of energy (such as waterfalls, steam engines powered by coal, or electricity) that began in England in the later part of the eighteenth century. Over the 150-year period, the Industrial Revolution changed power generation, transportation, and communication. It also generated important breakthroughs in pure science, as physicists, chemists, and biologists developed theoretical explanations for technologies often already in use.

Industrial Revolution was the result of the accumulation of technological information in agrarian societies of western Europe in the centuries that preceded the revolution. Among these were innovations in shipbuilding and navigation that made possible transoceanic travel and the discovery of the New World. This event would contribute to increase trade activity, especially in the North Atlantic area, and infuse the European economy with large quantities of gold and silver. The resulting inflation favored the ascent of commercial classes relative to the landed aristocracy, and motivated the latter to try improving productivity of their land, spurring great progress in agricultural production.

Another specific technological innovation was the mid fifteenth century invention of the printing press, which favored the spread of literacy and information in general and perhaps the rise of the rationalism associated with the Enlightenment. The printing press also facilitated the success of the Protestant Reformation, which was premised ondirect access to sacred texts by believers.

The Industrial Revolution replaced ancient energy sources—human and animal labor, wind, fire, and water—with new systems of power, initially the use of coal to run steam engines that were massively more powerful than hundreds of human workers. In 1765 Scotsman James Watt, building on the earlier work of Thomas Newcomen and others, developed the first efficient steam engine. Among its earliest applications was steam-powered machinery for turning wool, cotton, and flax into finished textiles, a process previously done almost entirely by hand. This transformation of work from a home-based system to centralized factories relying on complex machinery was the central element of the Industrial Revolution.

Britain's newly automated spinning and weaving machinery quickly pushed the island nation into the forefront of economic production and soon set off efforts by competing nations, including the new United States, to equal Britain's industrial achievements. Bribes paid to British mechanics and industrial espionage was among the tactics used. In 1793, with the invaluable assistance of British immigrant and skilled textile machinist Samuel Slater, a limited but successful textile factory opened in Rhode Island.

In the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution, water wheels competed with the new steam engine. But as the reliability of steam power increased and its sitting flexibility became obvious, energy-dense coal became Europe's and, later, North America's major industrial fuel source. At the U.S. centennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1876, George H. Corliss's steam engine, the largest in the world, was both a major attraction and sole power source for the entire exhibition. Within 40years, steam engines would be largely replaced by electrical devices, although the electrical power these new machines used would, in most cases, still be generated by burning coal.

Some of the earliest experiments with static electricity were done by American Benjamin Franklin, whose 1751 article, "Experiments and Observations on Electricity," made

him a Fellow of Britain's Royal Society. By 1753 Franklin had developed the protective lightning rod. Between the 1780sand 1800 Italian scientists Luigi Galvani and Alessandro Volta would discover electrical current and how to produce electricity chemically through the medium of the battery.

In 1831 Englishman Michael Faraday's discovery of electromagnetism, scientifically refined by James Clerk Maxwell, paved the way for practical uses of electrical power. George Westinghouse, who first gained fame in1873 as the inventor of air brakes for trains, soon thereafter became fellow U.S. inventor ThomasA. Edison's chief rival for the implementation of commercial electric power. Westinghouse's alternating current, developed for him by Nikola Tesla, became the standard. Edison, inventor of the incandescent light bulb and many other devices powered by electricity, lost his bid for direct current but nevertheless profited mightily.

As the Industrial Revolution spread, the need to provide fuel and raw materials to new factories and ship their finished products helped set off a transportation revolution in many industrializing nations. Efforts were made in Britain and elsewhere to improve road surfaces to facilitate safer passage for wheeled vehicles, at first drawn by horses or other draft animals. In1819 Scotsman John Macadam developed a crushed stone surface, significantly smoothing roadways. The United States began building a National Road, starting in Baltimore after the War of1812, but regional squabbles and high costs meant that, after 44 years, the road project ended 65miles short of its projected St. Louis terminus. Similarly, imperial powers in Africa, Muhammad Aliin Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire in western Asia all financed projects to enlarge ports and build roads and railroads to facilitate the transport of cash crops and raw materials.

In 1757 and 1764 two canals built in England made it easier to move coal to emerging factories. Other European nations and the United States soon joined in the canal-building

boom. In 1825New York State's Erie Canal, a water route connecting New York City to the Great Lakes and beyond, became one of the most successful projects in what would prove to be the brief golden age of canal transport. The major transport successes of the early 19th century were steam-powered ships and railroads.

In 1807 on the Hudson River Robert Fulton demonstrated a new kind of water-going vessel, powered by an English steam engine. Its success led to steamboats on most large U.S. rivers and the Great Lakes. In 1800 Englishman Richard Trevithick devised a much smaller, high-pressure steam engine ideal for railroad transportation. Locomotives were used for industrial freight hauling in Britain for some years before the first public passenger line between Liverpool and Manchester opened in 1830.

A worldwide frenzy of railroad construction ensued. With their dedicated trackage and modular assembly, railroads, powered by coal-fired steam engines, were well suited to hauling huge loads of both goods and people. Major increases in the fabrication and use of iron and steel provided the sinews of the Industrial Revolution, especially the building of rail tracks. Developed in Britain, the Bessemer steel process was widely adopted in the United States and helped steel magnate, Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish-born immigrant, become one of the world's wealthiest men.

The late 19th century saw the first examples of transport based on internal combustion engines—the automobile, bus, and truck. Although the Swiss inventor Nicholas Cugnot is credited with making such a device as early as 1769, European experiments that led to workable internal combustion engines began in the 1860s. The Germans Gottlieb Daimler, Wilhelm Maybach, and Carl Benz produced workable prototypes in the 1880s, while France's Peugeot firm began to perfect auto design in 1890. In 1897 the German Rudolf Diesel produced a new type of engine that now bears his name. By the end of the century Americans, too, were making cars, notably the 1893 Duryea. Ransom Olds's first Michigan

auto factory opened in 1899, but the United States lagged behind European engineering by a decade.

Instantaneous communications were essential to the business and technical needs of the Industrial Revolution. Weather events, wars, and other crises could easily disrupt, even derail, factory production. Charles Wheatstone's early telegraph of 1837, systematized and improved in 1844 by Samuel F. B. Morse, made it possible to circulate information much faster than mail systems. By1866 telegraph signals could be reliably sent and received across the Atlantic; by the end of the century, much of the world had access to telegraph communication. The Canadian Alexander Graham Bell displayed his telephone at the 1876 U.S. Centennial Exposition; within a few years it becamean important business tool. In 1899 the Italian Guglielmo Marconi sent his first radio signal across the English Channel. Both telephone and radio later made the telegraph obsolete.

Western science developed dramatically during the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, sparked by "untutored" mechanical geniuses like Thomas Edison, as well as growing cadres of university-trained scientists and engineers. Major breakthroughs in chemistry in the later 1700s included Frenchman Antoine Lavoisier's and Englishman Joseph Priestley's identification of oxygen and other atmospheric components, and Russian Dmitry Mendeleyev's development in1869 of a systematic table of chemical elements. In physics, discoveries in thermodynamics were spearheaded by such theorists as William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, who postulated a temperature of absolute zero at which all motion would cease.

Thermodynamics provided theoretical underpinnings for methods of creating and preserving cold conditions. By the 1870s refrigerated train cars were in wide use, preserving and enhancing food products traveling from farms to distant urban areas. Some important innovations in biological science, especially as applied to health and medicine, included Swede Carolus Linnaeus's (Carl von Linne's) 1753 classification of biological organisms, a

system still in use today. The discovery of anesthetic agents such as ether and chloroform in the1830s and 1840s soon radically improved outcomes of painful and invasive surgeries. In 1896 Xrays were first used to diagnose human ailments.

But the two most spectacular breakthroughs in this period would be evolutionary theory and the germ theory of disease. Made public in 1858, evolution was an explanation of the diversity and complexity of living organisms, reached almost simultaneously by two English naturalists, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace. Both men had relied heavily on the early 19th-century geologic and fossil findings of Charles Lyell. In 1859 Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in which he postulated natural selection as the mechanism that allowed some species to survive while others disappeared. His direct challenge to most religious explanations for the development of human life,evolution, was labeled blasphemous and, outside scientifi c circles, remains embroiled in controversy to this day. In the 1870s biologists Louis Pasteur of France and Robert Koch of Germany proved that microorganisms—germs—were responsible for most human, animal, and plant diseases. This rethinking of disease transmission revolutionized medical practice and gave new credibility to the emerging practice of sanitation.

Although the Industrial Revolution took place mostly in the West and helped it dominate other sections of the globe in the years between 1750 and 1900, it would be a mistake to see this burst of technological and scientific growth as an unchallenged success. From its inception, the new factory system was strongly criticized for making humans interchangeable and also forcing them to adaptto ever-faster and more complex machines.

Opposition by a group of early challengers, the Luddites, reached its peak in England in 1812 when highly skilled workers, concentrated in the woolen industry, smashed installations of new machinery destined to implement the new factory system of production. By 1867 in their work *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, both Germanborn, had

developed a broad critique of the Industrial Revolution and the laissez-faire capitalism that underpinned it. Engels was particularly qualified to evaluate the factory system; his father was an owner of a textile factory in Manchester, England.

A result of the Industrial Revolution less often mentioned during its 19th-century zenith was massive pollution created by industrial processes based on the unfettered burning of coal, soon to be supplemented with the combustion of petroleum products. It is no wonder that U.S. writer Edward Bellamy, in his 1887 utopian best seller and critique of industrialism, *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*, recalled 1887 Boston as squalid and "malodorous," and reeking of "fetid air" compared to the shiny, bright, and clean Boston of a postindustrial future.

As a result of different developments we witness a short time and a long time consequences of Industrial Revolution. Labor demand associated with the rise of factories exacerbated the influx of rural population to towns and cities. In the mid 1700s only15 percent of the population of England livedin towns of 10,000 or more; this proportion increased to a quarter by 1800 and one half by 1840. Immediate consequences of rapid urbanization were crowding, pollution, disease, poverty, crime, and other social ills.

On another level, Industrialization has transformed the predominant types of economic activity carried out by the population of industrial societies. The proportion of the labor force employed in the primary sector (extractive activities such as agriculture and mining) dwindled in most Industrial societies from an overwhelming majority in 1750 to less than 5 percent by the close of the twentieth century. The secondary sector (manufacturing industries) rose to approximately a third of the labor force, reaching a maximum early in the second half of the twentieth century before declining in later decades.

It is employment in the tertiary sector (services, or the production of intangible goods) that rose steadily throughout the course of industrialization, up to some three quarters of the

labor force in many industrial societies today. These trends in the nature of work activities have radically changed the daily life and worldviews of members of industrial societies (Nielsen, Francois: 2007).

## 6. Early Social Philosophers: Montesquieu, Condorcet, Saint Simone

### 5.1.Montesquieu

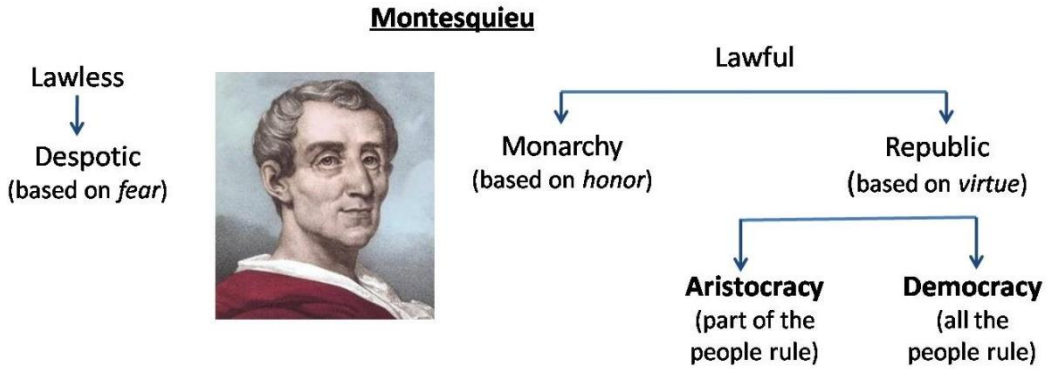
Montesquieu was one of the great political philosophers of the Enlightenment. He was born in France in 1689. Montesquieu's early life occurred at a time of significant governmental change. England had declared itself a constitutional monarchy in the wake of its Glorious Revolution (1688-89), and had joined with Scotland in the Union of 1707 to form the Kingdom of Great Britain. In France, the long-reigning Louis XIV died in 1715, and was succeeded by five year-old Louis XV. He became a counselor of the Bordeaux Parliament in 1714. A year later, he married Jeanne de Lartigue, a Protestant, who bore him three children.

These national transformations had a great impact on Montesquieu, who would refer to them repeatedly in his work. Montesquieu withdrew from the practice of law to devote himself to study and writing. Besides writing works on society and politics, Montesquieu traveled for a number of years through Europe, including Austria and Hungary, spending a year in Italy and 18 months in England, where he became a freemason before resettling in France. He was troubled by poor eyesight and was completely blind by the time he died from a high fever in 1755.

He constructed a naturalistic account of the various forms of government and their advances or constrains. He used this account to explain how governments might be preserved from corruption. He saw despotism, in particular, as a standing danger for any government not already despotic, and argued that it could best be prevented by a system in which different bodies exercised legislative, executive, and judicial power, and in which all those bodies were bound by the rule of law.

*The Spirit of the Laws* is a treatise on political theory first published anonymously by Montesquieu in 1748. The book was originally published anonymously partly because Montesquieu's works were subject to censorship, but its influence outside France grew with rapid translation into other languages. He spent around 21 years researching and writing *The Spirit of the Laws*, covering many things, including the law, social life, and the study of anthropology, and providing more than 3,000 commendations. In this political treatise, Montesquieu pleaded in favor of a constitutional system of government and the separation of powers, the ending of slavery, the preservation of civil liberties and the law, and the idea that political institutions should reflect the social and geographical aspects of each community.

In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu defines three main political systems: republican, monarchical, and despotic. As he defines them, republican political systems vary depending on how broadly they extend citizenship rights—those that extend citizenship relatively broadly are termed democratic republics, while those that restrict citizenship more narrowly are termed aristocratic republics. The distinction between monarchy and despotism hinges on whether or not a fixed set of laws exists that can restrain the authority of the ruler. If so, the regime counts as a monarchy. If not, it counts as despotism.




Montesquieu argues that the executive, legislative, and judicial functions of government (the so-called tripartite system) should be assigned to different bodies, so that attempts by one

branch of government to infringe on political liberty might be restrained by the other branches (checks and balances).Montesquieu described the various forms of distribution of political power among a legislature, an executive, and a judiciary. Montesquieu's approach was to present and defend a form of government whose powers were not excessively centralized in a single monarch or similar ruler (a form known then as "aristocracy").

> In every government there are three sorts of power: the legislative; the executive in respect to things dependent on the law of nations; and the executive in regard to matters that depend on the civil law. By virtue of the first, the prince or magistrate enacts temporary or perpetual laws, and amends or abrogates those that have been already enacted. By the second, he makes peace or war, sends or receives embassies, establishes the public security, and provides against invasions. By the third, he punishes criminals, or determines the disputes that arise between individuals. The latter we shall call the judiciary power, and the other, simply, the executive power of the state ( *The Spirit of the Laws).*

According to him, separation of powers requires a different source of legitimization, or a different act of legitimization from the same source, for each of the separate powers. If the legislative branch appoints the executive and judicial powers, as Montesquieu indicated, there will be no separation or division of its powers, since the power to appoint carries with it the power to revoke.

> The executive power ought to be in the hands of a monarch, because this branch of government, having need of dispatch, is better administered by one than by many: on the other hand, whatever depends on the legislative power is oftentimes better regulated by many than by a single person. But if there were no monarch, and the executive power should be committed to a certain number of persons selected from the legislative body, there would be

> an end then of liberty; by reason the two powers would be united, as the same persons would sometimes possess, and would be always able to possess, a share in both.

Montesquieu actually specified that the independence of the judiciary has to be real, and not merely apparent. The judiciary was generally seen as the most important of the three powers, independent and unchecked. Through this Montesquieu produced his own analysis and assigned to each form of government an animating principle: the republic, based on virtue; the monarchy, based on honour; and despotism, based on fear. His definitions show that this classification rests not on the location of political power but on the government's manner of conducting policy; it involves a historical and not a narrow descriptive approach.

To sum up, Montesquieu made a significant impact on the intellectual history of the 18th century and played important role in the development of social and political thought. The first of these is his classification of governments, a subject that was de rigueur for a political theorist. Abandoning the classical divisions of his predecessors into monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. The second of his most-noted arguments, the theory of the separation of powers, is treated differently. Dividing political authority into the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, he asserted that, in the state that most effectively promotes liberty, these three powers must be confided to different individuals or bodies, acting independently. And finally, in his most-celebrated doctrines he tried to the political influence of climate. Basing himself on doctrines met in his reading, on the experience of his travels, and on experiments—admittedly somewhat naive—conducted at Bordeaux, he stressed the effect of climate, primarily thinking of heat and cold, on the physical frame of the individual, and, as a consequence, on the intellectual outlook of society.

### 5.2 Condorcet

MarquisdeCondorcet was a well known French philosopher of the Enlightenment and advocate of educational reform and women's rights. He born in September 17, 1743, Ribemont, France. He was one of the proponent of human rights. He shifted his attention from mathematics into public service, with the aim of applying to social and political affairs a scientific model that he termed a "social arithmetic". Through educational and constitutional reforms, he hoped to create a liberal, rational and democratic polity. He was one of the major Revolutionary formulators of the ideas of progress, or the indefinite perfectibility of humankind.

As a Feminist, abolitionist, and a democratic republican Condorcet stood for justice, morality, and human rights. He publicly addressed the woman question and argued vociferously for the humanity and rights of enslaved Africans, and proposed the abolition of slavery in France's overseas colonies. In his *Reflections on Black Slavery* published in 1781, he developed his insights on the abolitionist movement in France and in early 1788 he became the president of newly created Society of the Friends of Blacks.

In the first of his 1791 writings on public instruction in the The Public Man's Library, he emphasized a cooperative model of education. And he advocated for a secular state; considering that since religious views are a matter of one's conscience of which one is the sole legitimate judge, "it is evident that the expense of maintaining such worship should be voluntarily borne by those who believe in it" As early as 1774, undoubtedly under the sway of his initial meeting with the illustrious Voltaire in 1770, he addressed the problem of religious intolerance in an anonymous work that was frequently attributed to Voltaire himself. However, most significant, were the evolution of his political views, from support of a reformed, constitutional monarchy to defense of a democratic republic, from defense of a property-based franchise to universal suffrage.

As an Enlightenment thinker Condorcet sought to extend the empire of reason to social affairs. He advocated economic freedom, religious toleration, legal and educational reform, the abolition of slavery, and—unusually for his time—equal rights for women, including woman suffrage. He rejected the almost-universal prejudice, even among "enlightened" thinkers, that women were intellectually inferior to men, regarding it as an illegitimate excuse for excluding women from public life as well as from many forms of education. Condorcet's most extensive arguments on women's rights appear in two essays. The first was authored in 1787, prior to the Revolution; the second, published in 1790 in the *Journal of the Society of 1789*, was composed in the context of a debate over the appropriate constitutional arrangements for the new French nation. In his 1791 *Memoirs on Public Instruction*, he demands that public education be open to women and men, and that women not be excluded from any curriculum, including science**.**

> The rights of men stem exclusively from the fact that they are sentient beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning upon them. Since women have the same qualities, they necessarily also have the same rights. Either no member of the human race has any true rights, or else they all have the same ones; and anyone who votes against the rights of another, whatever his religion, colour or sex, automatically forfeits his own.

Above quote is from his essay *On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship* published in 1790. In this essay he argued that the widely shared assumption that the natural rights of men are based on their capacities for reason and moral action logically implies that women possess the very same rights.

**5. 3 Saint Simone**

Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), French social philosopher and reformer, is a controversial figure in modern social thought, who—without writing a single enduring

work—had a crucial role in the early nineteenth-century developments of industrial socialism, positivism, sociology, political economics, and the philosophy of history.He believed that the problems of his society could be best solved by reorganising economic production. This will deprive the class of property owners from their means of production and thus they will lose their economic freedom which was an important value of his time.

If you recall the main ideas about the French Revolution, you will remember that the feudal French society was divided into three estates, the first being the clergy, second the nobility and the third, the commoners. The first two estates between themselves owned the major portion of the landed property as well as wealth and status. It is this social and economic structure that Saint-Simon wanted to reorganise.

Saint-Simon's main significance for the social sciences is threefold. He was one of the first to grasp the revolutionary implications of "industrialization" (a word he himself coined) for traditional institutions and morality and to conceptualize the industrial system as a distinctive type. He was also among the earliest to advocate a naturalistic science of society as a rational guide to social reconstruction. But he is most important as provisional formulator of an "evolutionary organicist" theory, whose influence is reflected in social evolutionary doctrines as diverse as those of Herbert Spencer, Lester Ward, and Karl Marx.

He directly inaugurated the "positivist organicist" school—most notably represented by Comte and Emile Durkheim—which for a century thereafter was to vie with utilitarianism, Marxism, and Hegelian historicism for theoretical predominance in the social sciences (Martindale 1960, part 2). Through Durkheim, his organicist concept of social order carries over into contemporary "functionalism" in anthropology and sociology.

In a joint publication *Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for the Reorganising of Society*, (1822) Saint-Simon and Comte wrote aboutthe law of three stages through which each branch of knowledge mustpass. They said that the object of social physics, the positive

science of society later renamed as ‘sociology’, is to discover the natural and immutable laws of progress. These laws are as important to the science of society as the laws of gravity, discovered by Newton, are to the natural sciences. The intellectual alliance between Saint-Simon andAuguste Comte did not last long and in fact ended in a bitter quarrel.

The most interesting aspect of Saint-Simon was his significance to the development of *both* conservative (like Comte’s) and radical Marxian theory. On the conservative side, Saint-Simon wanted to preserve society as it was, but he did not seek a return to life as it had been in the Middle Ages, as did Bonald and Maistre. In addition, he was a *positivist* (Durkheim, 1928/1962:142), which meant that he believed that the study of social phenomena should employ the same scientific techniques that were used in the natural sciences.

On the radical side, Saint-Simon saw the need for socialist reforms, especially the centralized planning of the economic system. But Saint-Simon did not go nearly as far as Marx did later. Although he, like Marx, saw the capitalists superseding the feudal nobility, he felt it inconceivable that the working class would come to replace the capitalists. Many of Saint-Simon’s ideas are found in Comte’s work, but Comte developed them in a more systematic fashion. These three classical enlightenment scholars developed systematic philosophical and social accounts on different issues related with state, law, politics and religions.

7. **Founding Fathers**: **Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim**

In the previous sections we looked at how different social, political and economic conditions affect the development of sociological theorizing. And we understood that certain changes taking place in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Europe bothered social thinkers. Just as natural scientists sought to explain the mysteries of life and nature, sociologists sought to explain the complexities of social life. A scienceof society was founded. Thus, Sociology as a discipline emerged as a product of the reflections of the great

thinkers reflecting on society they are live in. To begin with the very beginning we shall start with Auguste Comte (1798-1857), commonly regarded as the founder of Sociology. It was he who coined the name ‘sociology’. He was a French man. Next, we will discuss the second founding father of sociology, Spencer (1820-1903), who was a British. In this part we will discuss about the ideas of the founding fathers of sociology and contributions of these ideas to development of modern sociology.

### 6.1.Auguste Comte: Positivism

Before going to Auguste Comte's theoretical contributions to Sociology we will have a shot biographical sketch. It will help us to locate him in a socio-political context in which he born and brought up. He had born in Montpelier, France, on January 19, 1798. His parents were middle class, and his father eventually rose to the position of official local agent for the tax collector. Although a precocious student, Comte never received a college-level degree. He and his whole class were dismissed from the Ecole Polytechnique for their rebelliousness and their political ideas.

This expulsion had an adverse effect on Comte’s academic career. In 1817 he became secretary to Claude Henri Saint-Simon, a philosopher forty years Comte’s senior. They worked closely together for several years. Saint-Simon helped Comte to develop an orientation towards philosophical thinking. Thus, with Saint-Simon, he developed several major ideas. However, their partnership was short lived and they ended up quarreling with each other. Later Auguste Comte published some of his lecture notes in, *Cours de Philosophie Positive.*

Comte is known as father of sociology and he was the first to use the term *sociology*. He had an enormous influence on later sociological theorists (especially Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim). And he believed that the study of sociology should be scientific, just as many classical theorists did and most contemporary sociologists do. Comte was greatly

disturbed by the anarchy that pervaded French society and was critical of those thinkers who had spawned both the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

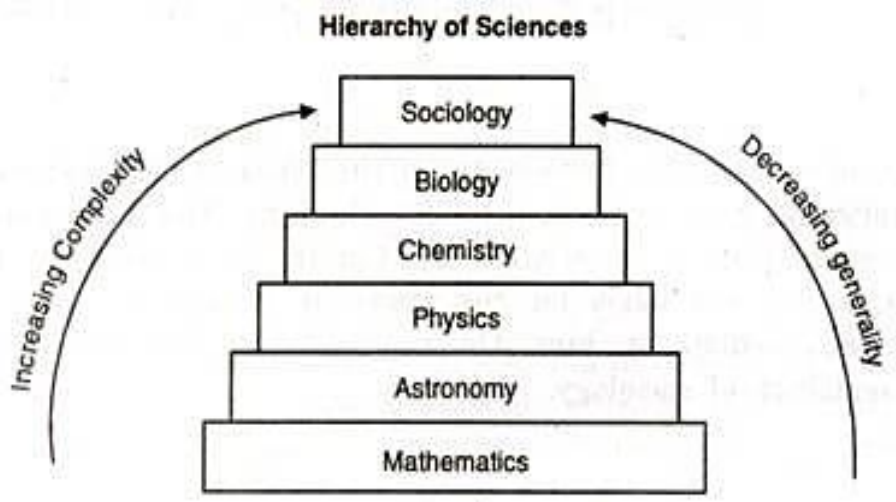
He developed his scientific view, “positivism,” or “positive philosophy,” to combat what he considered to be the negative and destructive philosophy of the Enlightenment. Comte was in line with, and influenced by, the French counterrevolutionary Catholics (especially Bonald and Maistre). However, his work can be set apart from theirs on at least two grounds. First, he did not think it possible to returnto the Middle Ages; advances in science and industry made that impossible. Second, he developed a much more sophisticated theoretical system than his predecessors, one that was adequate to shape a good portion of early sociology.

Comte developed *social physics,* or what in 1839 he called *sociology*. The use of the term *social physics* made it clear that Comte sought to model sociology after the “hard sciences.” This new science, which in his view would ultimately become *the* dominant science, was to be concerned with both social statics (existing social structures) and social dynamics (social change). Although both involved the search for laws of social life, he felt that social dynamics was more important than social statics. This focus on change reflected his interest in social reform, particularly reform of the ills created by the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. Comte did not urge revolutionary change, because he felt the natural evolution of society would make things better. Reforms were needed only to assist the process a bit.

Comte's major work *The Positive Philosophy* included his arguments for a science of society detailing its areas of focus, methodological approach, and applied use. In early remarks he called that science social physics, but then switched to sociology, a term he had previously used in private correspondence. He modified and expanded on his conception of

sociology in numerous later writings, the most important of which is the System of Positive Polity.

One of the important pillars of positive philosophy, the law of the classification of the sciences, has withstood the test of time much better than the law of the three stages. Of the various classifications that have been proposed, it is Comte's that is still the most popular today. This classification, too, structures the *Course*, which examines each of the six fundamental sciences—mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology—in turn. It provides a way to do justice to the diversity of the sciences without thereby losing sight of their unity. This classification also makes Comte the founder of the philosophy of science in the modern sense.




For Comte sociology is to be based on empirical observation in order to discover determinate social laws and how these laws can be used to improve social harmony. For Comte, the discovery of such laws constitutes pure sociology; discovery of how to use those laws in order to engineer a better society constitutes applied sociology. Sociology is conceived by Comte as part of a larger system of knowledge – the positive philosophy. This system assumes a series of increasingly complex levels of reality. Each level of reality is governed by a distinct set of determinant laws that cannot be reduced to (i.e., logically deduced from) those of another level. Each level thus requires a separate science to discover

its particular laws. These sciences themselves are presented as social evolutionary developments that emerge from pre scientific explanation.

Comte used positivism in two ways. In the first version of Comte's positivism, these laws can be derived from doing research on the social world and/or from theorizing about that world. Research is needed to uncover these laws, but in Comte's view the facts derived from research are of secondary importance to sound speculation. Thus, Comte's positivism involves empirical research, but that research is subordinated to theory. There are two basic ways of getting at the real world that exists out there—doing research and theorizing.

Although Comte recognized the importance of research, he emphasized the need for theory and speculation. In emphasizing theory and speculation, Comte was at variance with what has now come to be thought of as positivism, especially pure empiricism through sensory observations and the belief in quantification. he defined *sociology* as a positivistic science. In fact, in defining *sociology*, Comte related it to one of the most positivistic sciences, physics: "Sociology … is the term I may be allowed to invent to designate social physics".

In the second vision, he used it as the opposite of the negativism that, in his view, dominated the social world of his day. More specifically, that negativity was the moral and political disorder and chaos that occurred in France, and throughout Western Europe, in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789. Among the symptoms of this malaise were intellectual anarchy, political corruption, and incompetence of political leaders. Comte's positive philosophy was designed to counter the negative philosophy and its symptoms that he found all around him.

### 6.1.1 The Law of the Three Stages

In his early works Auguste Comte tried to discover the successive stages through which human race had evolved. In his study he began from the state of human race, not much

superior to the great apes, to the state at which he found the civilised society of Europe. In this study he applied scientific methods of comparison and arrived at The Law of Human Progress or The Law of three Stages. Auguste Comte in his book *Systeme de politique positive* noted;

> Each of our leading conceptions—each branch of our knowledge, passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological or ficticious; the Metaphysical or abstract; and the Scientific or positive. ... In the theological state, the human mind, seeking the essential nature of beings, the first and final causes (the origin and purpose) of all effects . . . supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings. In the metaphysical state . . . the mind supposes . . . abstract forces, veritable entities (that is, personified abstractions) . . . capable of producing all phenomena. ... In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws—that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance.

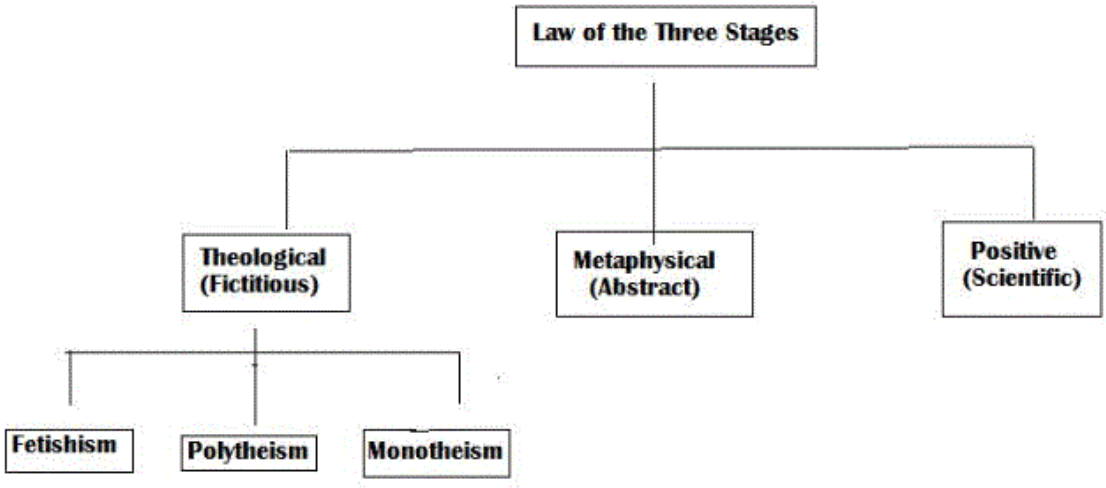
According to him, knowledge originates as theological, becomes metaphysical, and culminates as positive (or scientific). Theological explanations ascribe events to actions of supernatural agencies. Metaphysical explanation assumes that outcomes reflect underlying essences. And positive explanation, according to Comte, relies solely on the objective observation of relationships. The three stages of the evolution of human thought are

1. **Theological Stage:**In the theological stage, the mind explains phenomena by ascribing them to beings or forces comparable to human beings. In this stage, human being attempts to discover the first and the final causes (the origin and purpose) of all effects. Thus, human mind at this level supposes that all phenomena are produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings. For example, some tribes believed that diseases like small pox, cholera were the expressions of God's anger.

2. **Metaphysical Stage:**In the metaphysical stage, the mind explains phenomenon by invoking abstract entities like ‘nature’. These abstract entities are personified abstractions. Human beings pursue meaning and explanation of the world in term of ‘essences’, ‘ideals’, ‘forms’, i.e. in short, in a conception of some ultimate reality, such as God.

3. **Positive Stage:**In the positive stage human beings cease to look for ‘original sources’or final causes because these can be neither checked against facts norutilised to serve our needs. Human mind at this stage applies itself tothe study of their laws, i.e. their invariable relations of succession andresemblance. Human beings seek to establish lawswhich link facts and which govern social life (Coser 1971).

In this ‘The Law of Three Stages’ of knowledge we can see three types of knowledge such as, first, theological or fictitious knowledge, second, metaphysical or abstract knowledge and, third, scientific or positive knowledge (Comte, 1998: 71). Knowledge begins by trying to explain things on the basis of supernatural phenomena (theology). This is then challenged by the negative critique of philosophy (metaphysics). Finally, the entire process culminates in positive science.



Intellectual stages correspond to three stages of social organization from a warrior-military society (theological), a professional-commercial society (metaphysical), to a human-industrial society (science). This ‘Law’ is seen as an inevitable series of evolutionary stages that every (Western) society is fated to pass through as it progresses from the childhood of the family unit to the adolescence of the state before reaching maturity by covering the whole of humanity. The bellow table illustrates Comte’s three stages of theoretical knowledge.

| | Form of knowledge | Social basis | Organization | Social type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Theological | The family | Military | Warrior |
| 2 | Metaphysical | The state | Commercial | Lawyer |
| 3 | Positive science | Society/ Races/ Humanity | Industrial | Scientist |

On the basis of the scientific stage Comte developed his method of sociological inquiry. According to him, the resources upon which sociology can explain the laws of progress and of social order through three methods. They are, first of all, the same that have been used so successfully in the natural sciences: observation, experimentation, and comparison. Observation does not mean the unguided quest for miscellaneous facts. "But for the guidance of a preparatory theory," the observer would not know what facts to look at". "No social fact can have any scientific meaning till it is connected with some other social fact" by a preliminary theory. Hence, observation can come into its own only when it is subordinated to the statical and dynamic laws of phenomena but within these limits it remains indispensable.

The second scientific method of investigation, experimentation, is only partly applicable in the social sciences. Direct experimentation is not feasible in the human world. But "experimentation takes place whenever the regular course of the phenomenon is interfered with in any determinate manner. . . . Pathological cases are the true scientific

equivalent of pure experimentation." Disturbances in the social body are "analogous to diseases in the individual organism, and so the study of the pathological gives, as it were, privileged access to an understanding of the normal (Coser 1971).

The scientific method of inquiry of central importance to the sociologistis comparison, above all, because it "performs the great service of casting outthe . . . spirit [of absolutism]." Comparisons of human with animal societies will give us precious clues to "the first germs of the social relations" and to the borderlines between the human and the animal. Yet comparisons within the human species are even more central to sociology. The chief method here "consists in a comparison of the different co-existing states of human society on the various parts of the earth's surface—these states being completely independent of each other.

Although all three conventional methods of science must be used in sociology, it relies above all on a fourth one, the historical method. "The historical comparison of the consecutive states of humanity is not only the chief scientific device of the new political philosophy ... it constitutes the substratum of the science, in whatever is essential to it." Historical comparisons throughout the time in which humanity has evolved are at the very core of sociological inquiry. Sociology is nothing if it is not informed by a sense of historical evolution (Coser 1971).

According to Comte 'the universe is empirical (without spiritual force), operates according to law-like principles, and that humans can discover those laws and use them to understand, control, and predict the forces that influence their lives. On the one hand fatalism puts a spiritual force at the center of existence; positivism puts humanity at the center of existence. Thus, it is positive in a humanistic sense. Positivism, then, is a philosophy that confines itself to sense data, denies any spiritual forces or metaphysical considerations, and emphasizes the ability of the human being to affect their own fate generally through science.

According to Comte, society is broken into two distinct spheres in his 'positivist' theory of society, on the one hand, 'social statics' (order) and, on the other, 'social dynamics' (progress):

1. Social statics: a concept of social order, stability, and integration.
2. Social dynamics: a concept of social change, fragmentation and progress.

Social statics studies society at rest in a fixed space. Social dynamics studies the laws of motion as things change over time. This follows a similar division in biology between fixed anatomy and changes in physiology. Statics, or 'social anatomy', and dynamics, or 'social physiology', may be divided for purposes of scientific analysis but in practice they are always inseparable. Social statics are those 'laws of harmony of human society', involving the core institutions of the family, the state and, ultimately, humanity (or at least the 'white race' as Comte, 1998: 263, put it). Statics refer to the essential capacities of all types of societies – forms of social organization, intellectual culture, material production and moral norms. Statics are therefore more basic than dynamics. Social dynamics refers to the necessary progress of society from more simple to more complex forms of social organization through the successive stages of conquest, trade and production. There can be no laws of social development without movement.

7. **Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)**

Herbert Spencer was born in Derby, England, on April 27, 1820. He was not schooled in the arts and humanities, but rather in technical and utilitarian matters. Spencer never went to a conventional school but was taught at home by his father and uncle. He went to some small private schools but only for short periods, according to his autobiography, his training in mathematics was the best. In spite of not receiving a systematic training in other subjects like natural sciences, literature, history, he wrote outstanding treatises on biology and psychology. At a young age Spencer started working as an Engineer in the railroad engineering field.

In 1837 he began work as a civil engineer for a railway, an occupation he held until 1846. During this period, Spencer continued to study on his own and began to publish scientific and political works. In 1848 Spencer was appointed an editor of *The Economist,* and his intellectual ideas began to solidify. By 1850, he had completed his first major work, *Social Statics*. During the writing of this work, Spencer first began to experience insomnia, and over the years his mental and physical problems mounted. He was to suffer a series of nervous breakdowns throughout the rest of his life.

In 1853 Spencer received an inheritance that allowed him to quit his job and live for the rest of his life as a gentleman scholar. He never earned a university degree or held an academic position. As he grew more isolated, and physical and mental illness mounted, Spencer's productivity as a scholar increased. Eventually, Spencer began to achieve not only fame within England but also an international reputation. As Richard Hofstadter put it: "In the three decades after the Civil War it was impossible to be active in any field of intellectual work without mastering Spencer" (1959:33).

Herbert Spencer contributed several key ideas to the field of sociology. As a contemporary of Auguste Comte, he too was trying to establish sociology as the science of society. Spencer had come into contact with Comte's ideas but he did not accept them. Instead, he brought about a shift in the study of society. His sociology is based on the evolutionary doctrine and the organic analogy.

The *Social Statics* (1850), *The Study of Sociology* (1873), and *Principles of Sociology* (1876-96) are three major works of Herbert Spencer. He was influenced by the idea of Darwin and his evolutionary theory. Spencer believed that throughout all times there actually has been social evolution from a simple, uniform or homogeneous structure to a complex, multiform or heterogeneous one. Spencer has been influenced deeply by Charles Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species* (1859). It had brought a revolutionary change in the

understanding of how life evolved on earth from a simple unicellular organism to multicellular complex organisms like, human beings themselves.

Although Spencer wrote several books on sociology, he did not give a formal definition of the discipline. According to him, the social process is unique and so sociology as a science must explain the present state of society by explaining the initial stages of evolution and applying to them the laws of evolution. Thus, the evolutionary doctrine is central to his thesis. After explaining this doctrine, we will explain the meaning and significance of organic analogy. You will also learn about Spencer's classification of societies according to their place in social evolution.

Spencer had to find a way of reconciling his thoroughgoing individualism with his organicist approach. In this he differed sharply from Comte, who, it will be remembered, was basically anti-individualistic in his general philosophy and developed an organicist theory in which the individual was conceived as firmly subordinated to society. Spencer, in contrast, not only conceived of the origins of society in individualistic and utilitarian terms, but saw society as avehicle for the enhancement of the purposes of individuals.

According to Spencer, men had originally banded together because it wasadvantageous for them to do so. "Living together arose because, on the average, it proved more advantageous to each than living apart." And once society had come into being, it was perpetuated because, "maintenance of combination [of individuals] is maintenance of conditions . . . more satisfactory [to] living than the combined persons would otherwise have." In line with his individualistic perspective, he saw the quality of a society as depending to a large extent on the quality of the individuals who formed it.

"There is no way of coming at a true theory of society, but by inquiry into the nature of its component individuals. , . . Every phenomenon exhibited by an aggregation of men originates in some quality of man himself." Spencer held as a general principle that "the

properties of the units determine the properties of the aggregate," In spite of these individualistic underpinnings of his philosophy, Spencer developed an overall system in which the organicist analogy is pursued with even more rigor than in Comte's work. The ingenious way Spencer attempted to overcome the basic incompatibility between individualism and organicism is best described in his own words. After having shown the similarity between social and biological organisms, he turned to show how they were unlike each other. A biological organism is encased in a skin, but a society is bound together by the medium of language.

Spencer believed that all inorganic, organic, and superorganic (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 turned 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" (1902/1958:308).

The combination of induction and deduction led 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” (Spencer, 1902/1958:361)

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 was concerned with these elements and his general theory of evolution as they apply to both *structures* and *functions.* At the most general level, Spencer associated structures with “matter” and saw 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. We will have occasion to deal with Spencer’s more concrete thoughts on the evolution of functions and structures in his work on society.

One of the important contributions of Herbert Spencer was developing an analogy between the social system and biological organisms. On the basis of this developed a complex threefold scheme for categorizing social systems based on whether they displayed complex or simple structures and whether they were essentially stable or unstable. Firstly, a ‘‘simple’’ system is undifferentiated by sections, groups, or tribal formations. Secondly, a ‘‘compound’’ system amounts to an amalgamation of communities with a rudimentary hierarchy and division of labor. Thirdly, ‘‘doubly compound’’ systems are more complex still and united under one organized authority (Spencer 1971).

It was Herbert Spencer who used the organismic analogy to create an explicit form of functional analysis. Drawing upon materials from his monumental *The Principles of Biology* (1864–1867), Spencer’s *The Principles of Sociology* (1874–1896) is filled with analogies between organisms and society as well as between ecological processes (variation, competition, and selection) and societal evolution (which he saw as driven by war). Spencer

did not see society as an actual organism; rather, he conceptualized ‘‘superorganic systems’’ (organization of organisms) as revealing certain similarities in their ‘‘principles of arrangement’’ to biological organisms (1874–1896, pp. 451–462).

In so doing, he introduced the notion of ‘‘functional requisites’’ or ‘‘needs,’’ thereby creating functionalism. For Spencer, there were three basic requisites of superorganic systems: (1) the need to secure and circulate resources, (2) the need to produce usable substances, and (3) the need to regulate, control, and administer system activities (1874–1896, p. 477). Thus, any pattern of social organization reveals these three classes of functional requisites, and the goal of sociological analysis is to see how these needs are met in empirical social systems.

To conclude, Herbert Spencer’s theory is more powerful, and his work has more contemporary significance, than that of the other significant figure in the “prehistory” of sociological theory, Auguste Comte. Their theories have some similarities (e.g., positivism) but far more differences (e.g., Comte’s faith in a positivist religion and Spencer’s opposition to any centralized system of control). Spencer offered a series of general principles from which he deduced an evolutionary theory: increasing integration, heterogeneity, and definiteness of both structures and functions. Indeed, sociology, in Spencer’s work, is the study of the evolution of societies. Although Spencer sought to legitimize sociology as a science, he also felt that sociology is linked to, and should draw upon, other sciences such as biology (especially the idea of survival of the fittest) and psychology (especially the importance of sentiments). In part from his concern with psychology, Spencer developed his methodological-individualist approach to the study of society.

Spencer addressed a number of the methodological difficulties confronting sociology as a science. He was especially concerned with various biases the sociologist must overcome—educational, patriotic, class, political, and theological. In seeking to exclude these

biases, Spencer articulated a "value-free" position for sociology. In much of his substantive work, Spencer employed the comparative-historical method. The evolution of society occupies a central place in Spencer's sociology.

In his analysis of societal evolution, Spencer employed the three general aspects of evolution mentioned previously—increasing integration (increasing size and coalescence of masses of people), heterogeneity, and definiteness (here, clearly demarcated institutions)—as well as a fourth aspect—the increasing coherence of social groups. In his evolutionary social theory, Spencer traced, among other things, the movement from simple to compounded societies and from militant to industrial societies.

Spencer also articulated a series of ethical and political ideals. Consistent with his methodological individualism, Spencer argued that people must be free to exercise their abilities; they must have liberty. The only role for the state is the protection of individual liberty. Such a laissez-faire political perspective fits well with Spencer's ideas on evolution and survival of the fittest. Given his perspective on the gradual evolution of society, Spencer also rejected the idea of any radical solution (e.g., communism) to society's problems.

## 8. Conclusion

In the first part of this module we studied how social conditions contributed for the development of social thought. We have learnt how different changes taking place in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Europe bothered social thinkers. Sociology thus grew essentially as a product of the reflections of the great thinkers reflecting on society. We discussed about the sociologically significant themes of the French and the Industrial Revolutions. Finally, you read about the intellectual development such as enlightenment, renaissances and scientific revolutions.

In the second part of this module we will discussed about the ideas of the early thinkers and founding fathers of sociology and contributions of these ideas to development of

sociology. In this part we studied about social and political context in which Auguste Comte (1798-1857) formed his theoretical and intellectual basis. As the founding father of sociology we discussed the central ideas of Comte, such as the law of the three stages (the theological state, the metaphysical stage, and the positive stage), the hierarchy of the sciences, the static and dynamic sociology.

And we also discussed about the contributions of Harbert Spencer and the social and intellectual environment in which he developed his theoretical perspectives. He is considered to be the second founding father of sociology. We focused on his central ideas, such as the evolutionary doctrine, the organic analogy and finally the evolution of societies, firstly in terms of composition from simple to compound and so on; and then in terms of transition from military to industrial societies.

**KEY WORDS**

**Counter-Enlightenment:** A conservative reaction to the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century that was wary of the unabashed embrace of rationality, technology, and progress and that focused on the importance of non-rational factors (such as tradition) rather than reason.

**Enlightenment:** A period of remarkable intellectual development that occurred in Europe during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that emphasized reason. It refers to that period in European history, which embodies the spirit of the French philosophers of the eighteenth century. During this period a belief developed that both nature and society can be studied scientifically. Human reason and the ideas of progress developed.

**Estate** The system of stratification followed in medieval European society of around 17th-18th century, in which society was divided into different social groups having a different set of laws and social status for each

**Evolution** The process of slow changes through a long period of time in which life forms have developed from simple unicellular beings, such as amoeba, to complex multicellular beings, such as human beings.

**Feudal:** A system of tenure in agricultural areas whereby a vassal or serf served the landlord to whom the land belonged. In return the landlord allowed the serf to till his land and live on his land

**Industrial Revolution:** The revolution that occurred in England in the eighteenth century that applied power-driven machinery to manufacturing.

**Law of Natural Selection** It is a part of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Herbert Spencer too has talked about this law of natural selection in social evolution. It means that in the struggle for survival in both the physical world, as well as, the social world there exists an automatic process of selection. Only those who are the fittest or best suited to their physical or social environment survive and those who are weak die.

**Metaphysical** Metaphysics literally means that branch of philosophy which investigates the first principles of nature and thought. For Comte it is a stage of development of mind in which the mind explains phenomenon by invoking abstract entities or forces like "nature". In this stage human beings explain the meaning of the world in terms of "essences", "ideas", etc.

**Positive** Positive literally means anything in the affirmative. For Comte it is the last stage of the development of mind. Here the search for 'original sources' 'final ends' about existence of human beings stops. Instead human beings start observing phenomena and establishing

regular links which exist between these phenomena. Thus, in the positive stage human beings search for social laws which link facts and which govern social life.

**Static** Any mass or object or force which is at an equilibrium, i.e. which does not move. In society it corresponds to the notion of the structure of society.

**Theological** Theology is the study of religion. For Comte it is the first stage of development of mind. In this stage mind explains phenomenon by ascribing them to beings or forces comparable to human beings. Here explanations take the form of myths concerning spirits and supernatural beings.

**Theory:** A system of generalized statements or propositions about phenomena.

**Reference**


- Comte, A. (1998) *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*. G. Lenzer, (ed.), New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Allan, Kenneth (2005) Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory - Seeing the Social World, Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks.
- Bok, Hilary, (2018 ), "Baron de Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Edward N. Zalta (ed.).
- Bourdeau, Michel, ( 2020) "Auguste Comte", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* , Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
- Coser, Lewis A. (1971). *Masters of Sociology Thought Ideas in Historical and Social Context.* Second Edition, Harcourt Brace Jovonovich, Inc.: New York.
- Edgar F. Borgatta and Rhonda J. V. Montgomery (2000) Encyclopedia of Sociology, New York
- Hubert, Rene, (1963). *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*. Vol. 1-IV, pp. 151-152. 15th printing. The MacMillan Co.: New York.
- Ritzer, George (ed) (2007) Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology, Blackwell Publishing, Main Street, Malden.
- Ritzer, George and Stepnisky, Jeffrey (2018) Classical Sociological Theory, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.
- Indira Gandhi National Open University Course Material. (2005). *Sociological Thought*, New Delhi: IGNOU.

# Emile Durkheim

## Chapter Outline

1. Social Fact
2. Division of Labour
3. Suicide
4. Elementary forms of Religious life

## Objective of this Module

- Describe social and biographical details of Émile Durkheim and outline important ideas and perspectives developed by him.
- Defining and classify social facts
- Understanding the relationship between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity and examine its specific social structure
- Examine the concept of Division of Labour in traditional and modern societies
- Understand Suicide and its sociological relevance
- Examine the Durkheimian perspective on religion and understand elementary forms of religious life

## 1. Introduction

In this section we will discuss about the contribution of Durkheim for the classical sociological theories. Emile Durkheim, often referred to as the founder of sociology, was born April 15, 1858 in Epinal, France. Appointed to the first professorship of sociology in the world, he worked tirelessly over three decades as a lecturer and writer to establish sociology as a distinct discipline with its own unique theoretical and methodological foundation. After

an illustrious career, first in Bordeaux and then after 1902in Paris at the Sorbonne, Durkheim died in November 1917.

Durkheim legitimized sociology in France, and his work ultimately became a dominant force in the development of sociology in general and of sociological theory in particular. His work was informed by the disorders produced by the general social changes discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as by others (such as industrial strikes, disruption of the ruling class, church-state discord, the rise of political anti-Semitism) more specific to the France of Durkheim's time. In fact, most of his work was devoted to the study of social order. His view was that social disorders are not a necessary part of the modern world and could be reduced by social reforms.

**2. Social Fact**

The concept of social fact was defined by the French sociologist E ´ mile Durkheim, in his book on the Rules of Sociological Method (1982), as ways of feeling, thinking, and acting external to and exercising constraint over the individual. Durkheim's emphasis on social facts was part of his critique of psychological theories of human behavior and society. In his book, *The Rules of Sociological Method,* published in 1895, Durkheim (1950: 3) is concerned with the second task and calls social facts the subject matter of sociology. Durkheim (1950) defines social facts as "ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual and endowed with a power of coercion by reason of which they control him". To Durkheim society is a reality suigeneris**.** He considered society as sui generis. It is always present and has no point of origin. Society comes into being by the association of individuals.

Hence society represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics. This unique reality of society is separate from other realities studied by physical or biological sciences. Further, societal reality is apart from individuals and is over and above them. Thus the reality of society must be the subject matter of sociology. A scientific understanding of

any social phenomenon must emerge from the 'collective' or associational characteristics manifest in the social structure of a society. While working towards this end, Durkheim developed and made use of a variety of sociological concepts. Collective representations are one of the leading concepts to be found in the social thought of Durkheim. Before learning about 'collective representations' it is necessary that you understand what Durkheim meant by 'social facts'.

For Durkheim, sociology was the "science of civilization". He thus embarked on the analysis of what he called social facts, that is, all those *external* and *collective* ways in which society shapes, structures, and constrains our behavior. Durkheim states: "A social fact is any way of acting … [that is] capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; or which is general over the whole of a given society, whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations". Social facts – "the beliefs, tendencies, and practices of the group taken collectively" – are what sociologists study (and not individual psychological facts or physical or biological facts, though these may impinge on social facts).

Durkheim based his scientific vision of sociology on the fundamental principle, i.e., the objective reality of social facts. Social fact is that way of acting, thinking or feeling etc., which is more or less general in a given society. Durkheim treated social facts as things. They are real and exist independent of the individual's will or desire. They are external to individuals and are capable of exerting constraint upon them. In other words they are coercive in nature. Further social facts exist in their own right. They are independent of individual manifestations. The true nature of social facts lies in the collective or associational characteristics inherent in society. Legal codes and customs, moral rules, religious beliefs and practices, language etc. are all social facts.

As we discussed, Durkheim developed a distinctive conception of the subject matter of sociology and then tested it in an empirical study. In *The Rules of Sociological Method*

(1895/1982), Durkheim argued that it is the special task of sociology to study what he called *social lfacts* (Nielsen, 2005a, 2007a). He conceived of social facts as forces (Takla and Pope, 1985) and structures that are external to, and coercive of, the individual. The study of these large-scale structures and forces—for example, institutionalized law and shared moral beliefs—and their impact on people became the concern of many later sociological theorists (Parsons, for example). In *Suicide* (1897/1951), Durkheim reasoned that if he could link such an individual behavior as suicide to social causes (social facts), he would have made a persuasive case for the importance of the discipline of sociology.

But Durkheim did not examine why individual *A* or *B* committed suicide; rather, he was interested in the causes of differences in suicide rates among groups, regions, countries, and different categories of people (for example, married and single). His basic argument was that it was the nature of, and changes in, social facts that led to differences in suicide rates. For example, a war or an economic depression would create a collective mood of depression that would in turn lead to increases in suicide rates. More will be said on this subject in Chapter 3, but the key point is that Durkheim developed a distinctive view of sociology and sought to demonstrate its usefulness in a scientific study of suicide.

In *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1982), Durkheim differentiated between two types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. Although he dealt with both in the course of his work, his main focus was on *nonmaterial social facts* (for example, culture, social institutions) rather than *material social facts* (for example, bureaucracy, law). This concern for nonmaterial social facts was already clear in his earliest major work, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1964). His focus there was a comparative analysis of what held society together in the primitive and modern cases. He concluded that earlier societies were held together primarily by nonmaterial social facts, specifically, a strongly held common morality, or what he called a strong *collective conscience*. However, because of the

complexities of modern society, there had been a decline in the strength of the collective conscience.

The primary bond in the modern world was an intricate division of labor, which tied people to others in dependency relationships. However, Durkheim felt that the modern division of labor brought with it several “pathologies”; it was, in other words, an inadequate method of holding society together. Given his conservative sociology, Durkheim did not feel that revolution was needed to solve these problems. Rather, he suggested a variety of reforms that could “patch up” the modern system and keep it functioning. Although he recognized that there was no going back to the age when a powerful collective conscience predominated, he did feel that the common morality could be strengthened in modern society and that people thereby could cope better with the pathologies that they were experiencing.

According to Durkheim, social facts are collective phenomena and, as such, make up the distinctive subject matter of sociology. Social facts can be embodied in social institutions, such as religions, political forms, kinship structures, or legal codes. There are also more diffuse social facts; for example, mass behavior of crowds and the collective trends identifiable in statistical rates of social phenomena such as suicide and crime. Institutions are an especially central concern of sociology as a social science.

Durkheim insisted that social facts should be treated as things. They are realities in their own right, with their own laws of organization, apart from the ways these facts might appear to the individual’s consciousness. Durkheim thought that sociology would have no distinctive subject matter if society itself did not exist as an objective reality. Thus, sociology and psychology represent independent levels of analysis.

### 3. 1. Types of Social Facts

Durkheim saw social facts as lying along a continuum. First, on one extreme are structural or morphological social phenomena. They make up the substratum of collective life. By this he

meant the number and nature of elementary parts of which society is composed, the way in which the morphological constituents are arranged and the degree to which they are fused together. In this category of social facts are included the distribution of population over the surface of the territory, the forms of dwellings, nature of communication system etc.

Secondly, there are institutionalized forms of social facts. They are more or less general and widely spread in society. They represent the collective nature of the society as a whole. Under this category fall legal and moral rules, religious dogma and established beliefs and practices prevalent in a society.

Thirdly, there are social facts, which are not institutionalised. Such social facts have not yet acquired crystallized forms. They lie beyond the institutionalised norms of society. Also this category of social facts has not attained a total objective and independent existence comparable to the institutionalised ones. Also their externality to and ascendancy over and above individuals is not yet complete. These social facts have been termed as social currents. Forexample, sporadic currents of opinion generated in specific situations; enthusiasm generated in a crowd; transitory outbreaks in an assembly of people; sense of indignity or pity aroused by specific incidents, etc.

All the above mentioned social facts form a continuum and constitute social milieu of society. Further Durkheim made an important distinction in terms of normal and pathological social facts. A social fact is normal when it is generally encountered in a society of a certain type at a certain phase in its evolution. Every deviation from this standard is a pathological fact. For example, some degree of crime is inevitable in any society. Hence according to Durkheim crime to that extent is a normal fact. However, an extraordinary increase in the rate of crime is pathological. A general weakening in the moral condemnation of crime and certain type of economic crisis leading to anarchy in society are other examples of pathological facts.

### 3. 2. Main Characteristics of Social Facts

In Durkheim's view sociology as an objective science must conform to the model of the other sciences. It posed two requirements: first the 'subject' of sociology must be specific. And it must be distinguished from the 'subjects' of all other sciences. Secondly the 'subject' of sociology mustbe such as to be observed and explained. Similar to the way in which facts are observed and explained in other sciences. For Durkheim this 'subject'of sociology is the social fact, and that social facts must be regarded as 'things'.

The main characteristics of social facts are (i) externality, (ii) constraint,(iii) independence, and (iv) generality. Social facts, according to Durkheim, exist outside individual consciences. Their existence is external to the individuals. For example, domestic orcivic or contractual obligations are defined externally to the individual in laws and customs. Religious beliefs and practices exist outside and prior to the individual. An individual takes birth in a society and leaves it afterbirth death, however social facts are already given in society and remain in existence irrespective of birth or death of an individual. For example language continues to function independently of any single individual.

The other characteristic of social fact is that it exercises a constraint on individuals. Social fact is recognized because it forces itself on the individual. For example, the institutions of law, education, beliefs etc. are already given to everyone from without. They are commanding and obligatory for all. There is constraint, when in a crowd, a feeling or thinking imposes itself on everyone. Such a phenomenon is typically social because its basis, its subject is the group as a whole and not one individual inparticular. A social fact is that which has more or less a general occurrence in a society. Also it is independent of the personal features of individuals or universal attributes of human nature. Examples are the beliefs, feelings and practices of the group taken collectively. In sum, the social fact is specific. It is born of the association of individuals. It represents a collective content of social

group or society. It differs in kind from what occurs in individual consciousness. Social facts can be subjected to categorisation and classification. Above all social facts form the subject matter of the science of sociology

In his classic study Suicide, Durkheim introduced the sociological use of statistics, demonstrating that different suicide rates could be explained on the basis of differential patterns of social connectedness when they could not be explained on the basis of individual psychology. For instance, individual characteristics do not explain why older men commit more suicide, but their unmarried – unconnected – status does. In addition to introducing the use of statistics, Durkheim also used various qualitative and archival methods, particularly in his research on law and religion.

Durkheim's method, whether statistical or qualitative, focused on the character of forms of association and on the consequences of those associations for the health of the social individual and/or group. By contrast, statistics in contemporary sociology are generally used to measure relationships between the demographic character of individual actions and various institutional constraints (values, goals, sanctions). This has been the predominant sociological method since the 1940s and is often equated with ''macro'' sociological concerns. It is, however, a later interpretation of Durkheim's method, influenced by structuralism and not entirely consistent with his own approach. Durkheim used statistics as indicators of social facts. For Durkheim, social facts in a modern differentiated society consist of forms and patterns of association, not beliefs and values. What matters are the ways in which members of various groups are associated with one another, not their orientation toward valued courses of action, which had been important in earlier social forms. Where statistics such as suicide rates provide indicators of these associations, they may be of use to sociologists.

Durkheim's approach did not correlate individual characteristics with value oriented behavior, however. He used statistics to indicate the strength and character of various forms

of association. For instance, if the forms of association in a group were very weak, then people in the group could be expected to have a greater number of moral and psychological problems. If the forms of association in a group were too strong, then people could be expected to sacrifice themselves for the group whenever necessary. The tricky part is specifying the ideal forms of association. Durkheim argued that this varies across societies.

### 4. Division of Labour

Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society*, his doctoral dissertation and his first major work, was published in 1893. According to Durkheime division of labour is a social phenomenon and merits social explanation. He held that as volume and density of population increases in a given area there is an increase in interaction and struggle for survival. Social differentiation is practised in modern societies to overcome this struggle for survival between individuals.

The individuals are more dependent on one another for specialized functions and this leads to social cohesion and increase in individual autonomy. In modern societies there is an increase of individualism but there is also a need to maintain social solidarity. In his writings, Durkheim explained how individuals relate to one another and to society by the social bonds. His doctoral dissertation on *Division of Labour in Society* focused on the concept of 'social solidarity'. He was influenced by Rousseau's thinking that social solidarity is neither dependent on politics nor economy.

Durkheim held that solidarity can be expressed in two distinct ways which are 'mechanical' and 'organic'. In small societies with mechanical solidarity, individual autonomy is lowest and society is characterized by likeness of beliefs. There is no specialization of tasks and very little division of labour. Collective conscience pervades amongst all individuals in the group. The links bonding the individual to the social whole is intense and there is perfect social integration. In such a society the institution of religion is

dominant and an individual's place in society is determined by kinship. There is a system of penal law which punishes crimes violently so as to reaffirm the core beliefs and values. This law is repressive and severely punishes the offence.

On the other hand, in societies with organic solidarity there is greater division of labour and individuals are dependent on one another for specialized tasks rather than on society as a whole. Such societies are dense and cover a large geographical area. The political, legal and economic institutions are more specialized and the force of the collective conscience over the individuals is weakened. There are greater individual differences between individuals and the integration of individuals when the social whole is weakened. Restitutive law is operative and aims at restoring the wrongs to their original state.

While the foregoing theorists contributed substantially to the understanding of the division oflabor, Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) stands as the classic sociological statement of the causes and consequences of the historical shift from ''mechanical solidarity'' to ''organic solidarity.'' The former is found in smaller, less-advanced societies where families and villages are mostly self-sufficient, independent, and united by similarities. The latter is found in larger, urbanized societies where specialization creates interdependence among social units.

Following Spencer's lead, Durkheim noted that the specialization of functions always accompanies the growth of a society; he also observed that increasing population density—the urbanization of society that accompanies modernization—greatly increases the opportunities for further increases in the division of labor. It should be noted that the shift to a modern division of labor could not have occurred without a preexisting solidarity; in his chapter on ''organic and contractual solidarity'' he departed from Spencer's utilitarian explanation of social cohesion, and noted that the advanced division of labor can occur only among members of an existing society, where individuals and groups are united by preexisting similarities (of language, religion, etc.).

A sense of trust, obligation, and interdependencies essential for any large group in which there are many diverse roles; indirect exchanges occur; and individuals form smaller sub groupings based on occupational specialization. All of these changes create high levels of interdependence, but within creasing specialization, and different world views develop, along with different interests, values, and belief systems. This is the problem Durkheim saw in the shift from mechanical to organic solidarity; he feared the ‘‘anomie’’ or lack of cohesion that might result from a multiplicity of views, languages, and religions within a society (as in the France of his times, and even more so today).

The problems of inequality in modern industrial society were not lost on Durkheim, either; he noted how the ‘‘pathological form of the division of labor’’ posed a threat to the full development of social solidarity (Giddens 1971). Although many simplistic analyses of Durkheim’s approach suggest otherwise, he dealt at length with the problems of ‘‘the class war’’ and the need for justice and fraternity.

As we mentioned, in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) he examined the transformation of societies from mechanical to organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity was based on a strong collective consciousness and organized around segmental groups, primarily extended kinship structures. The result was a society based on the similarity among its individual members and social units.

Organic solidarity was rooted in mutual interdependence of activities in the division of labor, where the collective consciousness became less strong and, thus, there appeared a greater individuation of thought and conduct. The cause of the change from mechanical to organic solidarity was found in social morphology; in particular, an increase in the overall population volume, an increase in society’s material density (i.e., the number of people in a given territory), and an increased moral or dynamic density (i.e., communication and interaction among groups).

## 5. Mechanical Solidarity and Organic Solidarity

Durkheim, as we have seen, identifies two opposing social types. The first— pre-modern society—is characterized by an undifferentiated social structure, a strong collective consciousness, a homogeneous population, and a legal code consisting primarily of penal laws with repressive sanctions. The second— modern society—is characterized by a highly differentiated social structure, a weak collective consciousness, a heterogeneous population, and a legal code consisting primarily of cooperative laws with restitutive sanctions.

This dichotomy goes even deeper. The process of social evolution, Durkheim insists, is simultaneously a process of "moral evolution." The contrast between these two social types extends to the moral rules and bonds of social solidarity characteristic of each. This is the crux of Durkheim's argument. Pre-modern and modern society differ in the glue that holds them together, "mechanical solidarity" for the first and "organic solidarity" for the second. In the pre-modern era, social solidarity derives from people's resemblances.

Individuals form a cohesive community because they live similar lives and think similar thoughts. The collective consciousness is the fundamental basis of this type of social solidarity. When individuals threaten this sacred order, when they deviate from shared values, beliefs, and practices, they face the wrath of a punitive penal system. The strength of the collective consciousness and the continuity of society are ultimately dependent on the coercive power of repressive sanctions. This kind of solidarity, which Durkheim calls "mechanical," requires the complete suppression of individuality. Where mechanical solidarity prevails, the individual "does not belong to himself; he is literally a thing at the disposal of society." The moral order of the pre-modern world is strong "only if the individual is weak."

| | Mechanical solidarity | Organic solidarity |
|---|---|---|
| Basis of solidarity | Resemblances | Differences |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nature of society | Pre-industrial | Industrial |
| Substratum | Segmental | Organized |
| Population | Low volume | High volume |
| Moral and physical density | Low | High |
| Interdependence | Low | High |
| Social bonds | Weak | Strong |
| Law | Repressive | Restitutive |

As the above table shows, in mechanical solidarity individuals are strongly attracted to each other through what Durkheim calls ‘resemblance’. An integral solidarity based on a similarity and a common identity reaches its highest stage through the *conscience collective* which exercises a strong centripetal pull on individual members. Personal identity and collective identity become fused: ‘From this results a solidarity *sui generis*, which, born of resemblances, directly links the individual to society’ (Durkheim, 1933).

This is found in highly cohesive, relatively small-scale societies based on kinship relations and cooperation. Typically reaching for naturalistic analogies, Durkheim compares mechanical solidarity to the molecules of inorganic bodies that have no independent existence of their own. We call it [mechanical solidarity] only by analogy to the cohesion which unites the elements of an inanimate body, as opposed to that which makes a unity out of the elements of a living body. What justifies the term is that the link which thus unites the individual to society is wholly analogous to that which attaches a thing to a person. The individual conscience considered in this light, is a simple dependent upon the collective type

and follows all of its movements, as the possessed object follows that of its owner. (Durkheim, 1933)

In extreme cases of mechanical solidarity the individual personality is completely submerged by an undifferentiated homogeneous social mass. Any infringement of mechanical solidarity is met with brutally repressive sanctions. This type of solidarity is expressed in a large number of repressive laws against any violation of the collective will. Mechanical solidarity is 'positive', direct, unconditional and unmediated. It produces inner unity through collective feelings of inclusion and belonging. Durkheim gives the example of the Iroquois tribes of North America as an almost 'pure' example of a people who live without specialized functions or privileged hierarchies or private property in a sort of early communism. The individual is wholly absorbed by the clan (Durkheim, 1933).

The same basic clan structure is repeated across 'a segmental society', defined by strong similarities: For segmental organization to be possible, the segments must resemble one another; without that they would not be united. And they must differ; without this, they would lose themselves in each other and be effaced (Durkheim, 1933). In some cases they form a simple linear series of contiguous groups like families or villages. In others cases, several clans form a definite and distinctly new union, like a tribe or a confederation. Mechanical solidarity is most sharply defined when the *conscience collective* is expressed through the medium of a defined focal point of family or kin, 'a community of blood'.

Durkheim tried to avoid idealizing early societies and noted the existence of despotic forms of mechanical solidarity under the unilateral centralized power invested in a chief or master. In societies where the main form of solidarity is 'organic' individuals are engaged in specialized functions in an advanced division of labour. Here individuals cohere precisely because of their difference or dissimilarity from each other. Durkheim names this solidarity 'organic' from another analogy drawn from nature. Each organ, in effect, has it special

physiognomy, its autonomy. And, moreover, the unity of the organism is as great as the individuation of the parts is more marked. On one side, the more labour is socially divided, the more dependent individuals become on society. On the other side, the more labour is socially divided, the more uniquely personal and specialized it becomes.

Social heterogeneity expresses the development of peculiar, unique personalities. Compared to the almost total control exercised over individuals by mechanical solidarity, the organic variant allows for greater individual autonomy, spontaneity and enterprise. Social obligations are not quite so repressive and limiting. Individuals are linked by particular functions, primarily occupation, rather than by kinship structures. Functional integration of occupational specialization displaces and opposes alternative traditional sources of integration such as heredity.

Integration based on specialized function strengthens personal conscienceat the expense of the *conscience collective*. Occupational structure assumes a more central place for coordinating social cohesion. Occupational morality is not subject to the same harsh punishments as breaches of public morality. Recitative law becomes more widespread than repressive law. Occupational functions depend upon cooperation and compromise rather than coercion and repression.

Consequently, even where society relies most completely upon the division of labour, it does not become a jumble of juxtaposed atoms, between which it can establish only external, transient contacts. Rather the members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which the exchange is made. Each of the functions that they exercise is, in a fixedway, dependent upon others, and with them forms a solidary system.(Durkheim, 1933)Spontaneous cooperation in the advanced division of labour is intrinsically moral in nature. A new ‘moral or dynamic density’ emerges from the growing size of population, urban living and improved communications.

## 6. Suicide

*On Suicide*, Durkheim continued his quest to legitimate the discipline of sociology and establish its scientific credentials. The topic of suicide, which on the surface would seem to be anything but a social phenomenon, presented him with a challenging opportunity to further substantiate the existence of a realm of distinctly social facts and to apply and illustrate the methodological principles set forth in *The Rules*.

With *Suicide* he also resumed his exploration of key themes from earlier writings, including the problem of social solidarity and the relationship between the individual and society. Beyond all this, however, Durkheim had an even more far-reaching agenda. The study of suicide, he promised, would also serve a more practical purpose. It would shed light on "the causes of the general contemporary maladjustment being undergone by European societies" and suggest "remedies which may relieve it."

As with crime or any other form of deviance, Durkheim explains, a certain amount of suicide is to be expected in any society. While such "normal" cases are tragic for those affected, they do not constitute a social problem properly speaking. The rate of suicide throughout much of Europe in the nineteenth century was on the rise, however, reaching levels that could only imply the existence of a "pathological state."

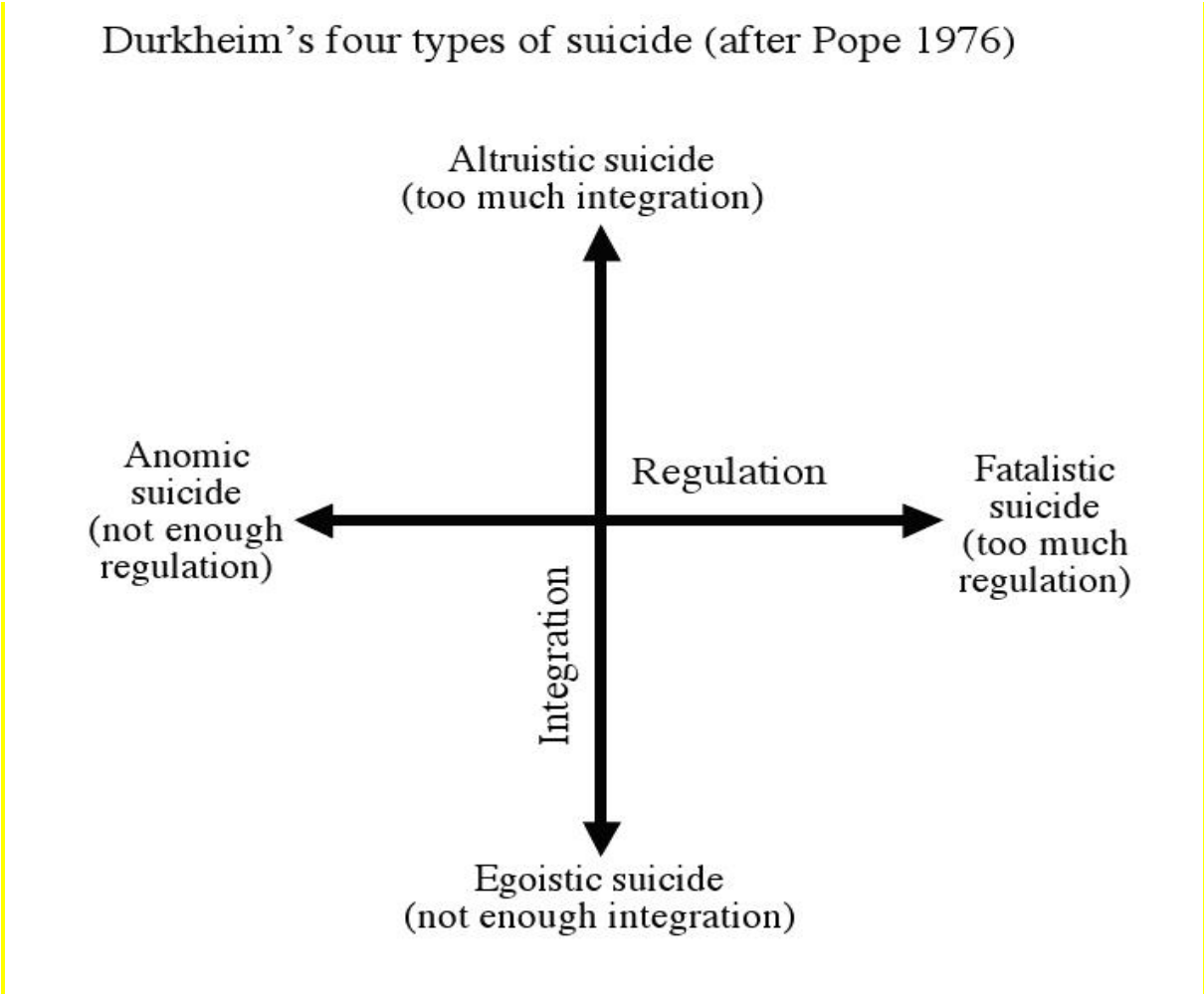
Along with many of his contemporaries, Durkheim looked upon the high incidence of suicide as yet another symptom of social dissolution, a product of the wrenching changes occurring with the emergence and rapid development of industrial society. "What we see in the rising tide of voluntary deaths is . . . a state of crisis and upheaval which cannot continue without danger." Durkheim took up the study of suicide to demonstrate not only the explanatory value of sociology, but its diagnostic and practical value as well.

In *Suicide* (1897) Durkheim studied suicide rates as measurable manifestations of prior social facts. He argued that suicide rates were correlated with differing social

circumstances and created a theory of four social causes of suicide, two of them endemic to modern society. Egoistic suicide emerged from a lack of integration of the individual into social groups, especially the family, the religious group, and the political community. Since familial, religious, and political ties were weakening in modern society, egoism was the most frequent contemporary cause of suicide. He suggested that the reintegration of the individual into society might be performed by strengthening the role of occupational or professional groups.

Anomic suicide resulted from the failure of another class of social facts, namely social norms, to regulate the individual's desires. It occurred especially during fluctuating economic circumstances, but could emerge in any setting where the individual's existing standards of conduct and expectations were radically disrupted. Durkheim emphasized that such social causes operated independently from the individual incidence of suicide and represented a level ofsocial facts which could be understood only through a new science of sociology.

Suicide in traditional and modern societies would therefore have to be understood in entirely different terms – for Durkheim, more proof that suicide was a function of social relations. This approach differs from that of many contemporary sociologists who use statistics to measure and predict the behavior of individuals as effected by their orientations toward social goals, values, and sanctions. The focus on individuals and their relationship to social factors runs counter to the method Durkheim proposed: demonstrating the impact of social facts, assessing solidarity mechanisms, and measuring the group level effects of beliefs and values.




As Ritzer () explained, Durkheim's theory of suicide can be seen more clearly if we examine the relation between the types of suicide and his two underlying social facts—integration andregulation. Integration refers to the strength of the attachment thatwe have to society. Regulation refers to the degree of external constraint on people.For Durkheim, the two social currents are continuous variables, and suiciderates go up when either of these currents is too low or too high. We thereforehave four types of suicide. If integration is high, Durkheim callsthat type of suicide altruistic. Low integration results in an increase in egoisticsuicides. Fatalistic suicide is associated with high regulation, and anomic suicidewith low regulation.

- ***Egoistic Suicide:*** High rates of *egoistic suicide* are likely to be found in societies or groupsin which the individual is not well integrated into the larger social unit. This

lack ofintegration leads to a feeling that the individual is not part of society, but this alsomeans that society is not part of the individual. Durkheim believed that the best partsof a human being—our morality, values, and sense of purpose—come from society.An integrated society provides us with these things, as well as a general feeling ofmoral support to get us through the daily small indignities and trivial disappointments.Without this, we are liable to commit suicide at the smallest frustration.

- ***Altruistic Suicide:*** The second type of suicide discussed by Durkheim is altruistic suicide. Whereas egoistic suicide is more likely to occur when social integration is too weak, *altruistic suicide* is more likely to occur when "social integration is too strong". The individual is literally forced into committing suicide. When integration is low, people will commit suicide because they have no greater good to sustain them. When integration is high, they commit suicide in the name of that greater good.
- ***Anomic Suicide:*** The third major form of suicide discussed by Durkheim is *anomic suicide,* which is more likely to occur when the regulative powers of society are disrupted. Such disruptions are likely to leave individuals dissatisfied because there is little control over their passions, which are free to run wild in an insatiable race for gratification. Rates of anomic suicide are likely to rise whether the nature of the disruption is positive (for example, an economic boom) or negative (an economic depression). Either type of disruption renders the collectivity temporarily incapable of exercising its authority over individuals. Such changes put people in new situations in which the old norms no longer apply but new ones have yet to develop.
- ***Fatalistic Suicide***: There is a little-mentioned fourth type of suicide—fatalisticSuicide. Whereas anomic suicide is more likely to occur in situations in which regulation is too weak, *fatalistic suicide* is more likely to occur when regulation

is excessive. Durkheim described those who are more likely to commit fatalistic suicide as “persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline.”

Durkheim concludes his study of suicide with an examination of what reforms could be undertaken to prevent it. Most attempts to prevent suicide have failed because it has been seen as an individual problem. For Durkheim, attempts to directly convince individuals not to commit suicide are futile, since its real causes are in society. Of course, the first question to be asked is whether suicide should be prevented or whether it counts among those social phenomena that Durkheim would call normal because of its widespread prevalence.

This is an especially important question for Durkheim because his theory says that suicides result from social currents that, in a less exaggerated form, are good for society. We would not want to stop all economic booms because they lead to anomic suicides, nor would we stop valuing individuality because it leads to egoistic suicide. Similarly, altruistic suicide results from our virtuous tendency to sacrifice ourselves for the community. The pursuit of progress, the belief in the individual, and the spirit of sacrifice all have their place in society, and cannot exist without generating some suicides.

**7. Elementary forms of Religious life**

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life was published in 1912. Durkheim was interested in the study of religion as early as 1902 because he regarded as a major institution in society. Also most of the articles in his sociological journal, L Année Sociologique focused on the subject of religion. In The Elementary Forms of Religious Life he wanted to explore the elements or the constituents of religion which make religious life possible. He turned towards primitive religion and took an evolutionary approach by assuming that by studying the basic structure of primitive religion the constituents of religion in general could be

understood. He propounded a scientific study of religion based on observation and exploration. He defined religion as

> a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions – beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church. (2001: 46)

For Durkheim, religion helped people make sense of the world and religion personifies the society. He held that religion is made up of beliefs and rituals. Beliefs for Durkheim were the ideas that were focused towards the sacred. Rituals on the other hand were the actions that were directed towards the sacred. He held that universally the religious worldview is divided into two domains that is the sacred and the profane. A thing, belief or act is sacred because it is believed to be sacred by the society.

### 7.1 Totemism

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (2001) wanted to understand how moral authority produces social solidarity by examining what he thought was its simplest or most elementary form: 'totemism'. A totem is 'a symbol, a material expression of something else' (2001: 154). On the totem can be inscribed as any emblem or blazon considered sacred, usually animals or plants. Totemism is the name given to the visible sacred object that social groups worship. It is the tangible expression of 'god' and, at the same time, the symbol of a particular society. It is a moral force given material form.

For Durkheim, totemism is the original form of all subsequent religious life and, by extension, collective life in general. Social life is only made possible by a vast organization of collective representations. The collective only becomes self-conscious of its own existence by fixing on some material object. Objects and society facilitate each other. The totem both expresses collective life and helps to create it (Durkheim, 2001: 175). The totem's 'real

essence' is that it is only the material form taken by an immaterial substance or unseen energy of a permanent, anonymous and impersonal social force (2001: 140–41). Totemism outlives individuals and lends the social group a sense of eternal existence.

Totemism could not merely superimpose onto reality an unreal world of monstrous aberrations and 'inexplicable hallucinations'. The scared object – the totem – is merely a focal point for collective identity and social structure. Religious exaltation is real exaltation about the moral authority of society. Totems are misrecognized only to the extent that the symbol seems to be an autonomous force. In reality, the god of the clan is really the clan itself, 'but transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal species that serve as totems' (2001: 154).

### 8.2 The Sacred and the Profane

According to Durkheim (2001) all religious belief systems, from the most basic to the most complex, fundamentally divide the world into two mutually exclusive spheres: the sacred and the profane. The sacred represents the ideal that society sets for itself in contrast to the profane world of private egos and mundane interests. Any object might be considered sacred – a tree, a rock, a house, an animal, human hair, ashes and so on – as might any words, phrases or gestures carried out by a specially consecrated person. The sacred can be 'superimposed' on a wide range of objects. Since nothing is inherently 'sacred' this quality must be acquired from somewhere else.

In religion everything can be assigned to a class of sacred things radically divided from a class of profane things. Religious belief structures the world into the pure and impure, holy and sacrilegious, divine and diabolical, consecration and contamination. Durkheim takes this as the starting point for understanding how all human groups are based on a radical duality that assigns dignity, privilege or distinction to one thing, not given by palpable

experience, over other things that are based in more practical and mundane activities of everyday life. When things are considered sacred they are arranged into a unified system.

Every homogeneous group of sacred things, or indeed every sacred thing of any importance, constitutes a centre of organization around which a group of beliefs and rites, a particular cult, gravitates. And no religion, however unified, fails to recognise the plurality of sacred things. Even Christianity, at least in its Catholic form, includes, in addition, to the divine being – the Virgin, angels, saints, souls of the dead, and so on. (Durkheim, 2001)

This same mental structure later gives rise to scientific knowledge set apart from ordinary common sense. Because this basic duality has survived for millennia it cannot be illusory but must fulfill a profound human need. That need is society. What makes a thing sacred is the collective feeling that attaches to it. Collective life 'awakens' religious thought in order for society to remake itself. Sacred objects will disappear over time, but society will return again and again to create sacred replacements to reaffirm its collective unity.

**Conclusion**

In this module we started our discussion with social and intellectual context in which Durkheim developed his conception of sociology as an independent scientific discipline with its distinct subject matter. His life and works are regarded as a sustained effort at laying the legitimate base of sociology as a discipline. He identified sociology as a study of social facts and developed rules for their observation and explanation. In his studies on sociological methods he explain different aspects of social facts. He demonstrated the nature of these studies through the study of division of labour in different types of solidarities, of suicide-rates in different types of societies, and the study of Religion in a single type.

In this module we discussed Durkheim's three mojor works. First work was *The Division of Labor in Society,* in which he argued that the collective conscience of societies with mechanical solidarity had been replaced by a new organic solidarity based on mutual

interdependence in a society organized by a division of labor. He investigated the difference between mechanical and organic solidarity through an analysis of their different legal systems. He argued that mechanical solidarity is associated with repressive laws while organic solidarity is associated with legal systems based on restitution.

In the second one Durkheim studied suicide. He looked at different aspects of suicide and its social causes and consequences. Durkheim differentiated among four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic—and showed how each is affected by different changes in social currents. The study of suicide was taken by Durkheim and his supporters as evidence that sociology has a legitimate place in the social sciences. After all, it was argued, if sociology could explain so individualistic an act as suicide, it certainly could be used to explain other, less individual aspects of social life.

In his last major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim focused on another aspect of culture: religion. In his analysis of primitive religion, Durkheim sought to show the roots of religion in the social structure of society. It is society that defines certain things as sacred and others as profane. Durkheim demonstrated the social sources of religion in his analysis of primitive totemism and its roots in the social structure of the clan. Durkheim concluded that religion and society are one and the same, two manifestations of the same general process.

## KEY CONCEPTS

**Anomie:** Moral disorder; lack of moral regulation.

**Profane:** That which is of the everyday world; mundane, routine.

**Ritual:** Highly routinized act, such as taking communion.

**Sacred:** That which is extraordinary, set apart, above and beyond, the everyday world.

**Social Facts:** Conditions and circumstances external to the individual that, nevertheless, determine one's course of action.

**Social Solidarity:** Feeling of "oneness" of a group.

**Solidarity (Mechanical):** Solidarity that is typified by feelings of *likeness.*

**Solidarity (Organic):** Solidarity that is a function of *interdependence.*

**Symbol :** Something that stands for something else.

**Reference and Further Readings**


- Durkheim, E. (1947) Suicide — A Study in Sociology, Macmillan: New York
- Durkheim, E. (1950) *The Rules of Sociological Method*, The Free Press of Glencoe: New York
- Durkheim, E. (1961) The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. Collier-Macmillan: New York
- Durkheim, E. (1964) *The Division of Labour in Society*, The Free Press Glencoe: New York
- Giddens, A. (1971) *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Weber*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1972) *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1978) *Durkheim*. Glasgow: Fontana.
- Indira Gandhi National Open University Course Material. (2005). *Sociological Thought*, New Delhi: IGNOU.
- Morrison, K. (1995). Marx, *Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*, London: Sage. Wilson.
- Nisbet, R.A. (1974) *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim* Oxford University Press: New York.
- Rex, John (1961) *Key Problems in Sociological Theory*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London

# MODULE 2

# KARL MARX

## Chapter Outline

2.1 Karl Marx: Dialectical and Historical Materialism

2.2 Class and Class conflict

2.3 Theory of Alienation, Commodity Fetishism

2.4 Theory of Social Change

## Objectives of this Module

- Discuss the theory of historical materialism and outline the contribution of historical materialism to sociology
- Discuss the Marxian concepts of dialectics and social change
- Define the concept of class and discuss Marx's view of society and social change
- Describe the various criteria for class formation
- Understand Marx's concept of alienation and commodity fetishism.
- Outline Marx's ideas on social change and revolution.

## 1. Introduction

In the previous module we looked at the development of modern sociological theories in the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century Europe. We have looked the context in which sociology emerged in Europe and learnt about the impact of the Industrial Revolution on its founders. In this module we will deal with one of the founders, namely, Karl Marx. Though he focused on economic analysis of the 19$^{th}$ century Europe and capitalist development, his idea was full of sociological insights.

We start with the concept of historical materialism, which is the scientific core of Marx's sociological thought. Therefore, it is necessary to situate historical materialism within the overall context of Marx's work and his contributions to sociological theory. With this background we will discuss about the notion of class as used by Karl Marx. To understand class and its meaning, we have to study in detail about the constitution of a class and different criteria to call any collectivity a class. And we will looks at how and why classes come into conflict with each other. We will seek to understand the impact of these class conflicts on the history of development of society.

In the last part we will discuss two key concepts in Marxian sociology, namely, alienation and commodity fetishism. And we will looks at how these two concepts will help us to understand modern capitalist system. This final part also looks at the concept of social change in the society. Marx identified class conflict and class straggle as a way forward for social change. Historically, Marx identified different stages of social evolution according to the mode of production.

## 2. Karl Marx: Biographic Sketch

Marx was born into a middle class household, the oldest male of six surviving children. His parents had Jewish origins, but converted to Protestantism in response to Prussian anti Semitism. Marx was exposed to Enlightenment thought and socialist ideas in his teenage years. He had born on May 5, 1818, in Trier, one of the oldest cities in Germany, to Heinrich and Henrietta Marx. Both parents came from a long line of rabbis. His father was the first in his family to receive a secular education (he could recite numerous passages from Enlightenment thinkers)—Heinrich was a lawyer who allowed himself to be baptized Protestant in order to avoid anti-Semitism; a move that was not entirely successful.

As a university student, he joined the Berlin Doctors Club, a group of left wing intellectuals who embraced Hegel's philosophical vision of humanity, making itself

historically through its own labor. They opposed right wing Hegelians, who stressed his theory of the state and justified the Prussian regime. Left Hegelians wanted to complete philosophy's break with religion and fashion an approach that favored progressive change. Marx finished his doctoral dissertation in 1841, but did not complete the second thesis required to enter German academe. After left Hegelian Bruno Bauer lost his academic position for political reasons, Marx knew, especially given his Jewish roots, that this door was closed to him. He decided to try journalism. In 1842 Marx wrote for the progressive Rheinische Zeitung and soon became its editor.

Politically, Marx's childhood and youth fell in that period of European history when the reactionary powers (favoring monarchical political order) were attempting to eradicate from post Napoleonic Europe all traces of the French Revolution. There was, at the same time, a liberal movement (favoring autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties) in Germany that was making itself felt. The movement was given impetus by the Revolution in France. In the late 1830s a further step toward radical criticism for extreme changes in existing socio-political conditions was made by the young Hegelians (a group of people following the philosophy of Hegel). This was the group with which Marx became formally associated when he was studying law and philosophy at the University of Berlin.

Because of his political affiliations, Marx was denied a university position by the government. Marx turned to writing and editing, but had to battle government censorship continually. In 1843, Marx moved to Paris with his new wife, Jenny von Westphalen. In Paris, he read the works of reformist thinkers who had been suppressed in Germany and began his association with Friedrich Engels. During his time in Paris, Marx wrote several documents that were intended for self clarification (they were never published in his lifetime)

but have since become important Marxian texts (Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and The German Ideology, which was finished in Brussels).

Over the next several years, Marx moved from Brussels, back to Paris, and then to Germany. Much of his movement was associated with revolutions that broke out in Paris and Germany in 1848. That year also marks the publication of The Communist Manifesto. Finally, in 1849, Marx moved to London, where he remained. He spent the early years of the 1850s writing several historical and political pamphlets. In 1852, Marx began his studies at the British Museum. There he would sit daily from 10am to 7pm, studying the reports of factory inspectors and other documents that described the abuses of early capitalism. This research formed the basis of Das Kapital, his largest work. During this time, three of his children died of malnutrition.

Although he was the youngest member of the young Hegelians, Karl Marx inspired their confidence, respect and even admiration. They saw in him a ‘new Hegel’ or rather a powerful anti-Hegelian. Among other influences the intensive study of B.deSpinoza(1632-1677) and A. Hume(1711-1776) helped Marx to develop a positive conception of democracy. It went far beyond the notions held at the time by radical in Germany. The radicals consisted of a political group associated with views, practices and policies of extreme change.

The workers' movements were quiet after 1848, until the founding of the First International. Founded by French and British labor leaders at the opening of the London Exhibition of Modern Industry, the union soon had members from most industrialized countries. Its goal was to replace capitalism with collective ownership. Marx spent the next decade of his life working with the International. The movement continued to gain strength worldwide until the Paris Commune of 1871. The Commune was the first worker revolution and government. Three months after its formation, Paris was attacked by the French government. Thirty thousand unarmed workers were massacred. Marx continued to study but

never produced another major writing. His wife died in 1881 and his remaining daughter a year later. Marx died in his home on March 14, 1883.

### 3. Marx as Sociologist

Marx was not a sociologist and did not consider himself one. Although his work is too broad to be encompassed by the term *sociology*, there is a sociological theory to be found in Marx's work. From the beginning, there were those who were heavily influenced by Marx, and there has been a continuous strand of Marxian sociology, primarily in Europe. But for the majority of early sociologists, his work was a negative force, something against which to shape their sociology. Until very recently, sociological theory, especially in America, has been characterized by either hostility to or ignorance of Marxian theory.

The basic reason for this rejection of Marx was ideological. Many of the early sociological theorists were inheritors of the conservative reaction to the disruptions of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Marx's radical ideas and the radical social changes he foretold and sought to bring to life were clearly feared and hated by such thinkers. Marx was dismissedas an ideologist. It was argued that he was not a serious sociological theorist. However, ideology per se could not have been the real reason for the rejection of Marx, because the work of Comte, Durkheim, and other conservative thinkers also was heavily ideological. It was the nature of the ideology, not the existence of ideology as such, that put off many sociological theorists. They were ready and eager to buy conservative ideology wrapped in a cloak of sociological theory, but not the radical ideology offered by Marx and his followers.

1. There were, of course, other reasons why Marx was not accepted by many early theorists. He seemed to be more an economist than a sociologist. Although the early sociologists would certainly admit the importance of the economy, they would also argue that it was only one of a number of components of social life.

2. Another reason for the early rejection of Marx was the nature of his interests. Whereas the early sociologists were reacting to the disorder created by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and later the Industrial Revolution, Marx was not upset by these disorders—or by disorder in general. Rather, what interested and concerned Marx most was the oppressiveness of the capitalist system that was emerging out of the Industrial Revolution. Marx wanted to develop a theory that explained this oppressiveness and that would help overthrow that system. Marx's interest was in revolution, which stood in contrast to the conservative concern for reform and orderly change.
3. Another difference worth noting is the difference in philosophical roots between Marxian and conservative sociological theory. Most of the conservative theorists were heavily influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Among other things, this led them to think in linear, cause-and-effect terms. That is, they tended to argue that a change in *A* (say, the change in ideas during the Enlightenment) leads to a change in *B* (say, the political changes of the French Revolution). In contrast, Marx was most heavily influenced, as we have seen, by Hegel, who thought in dialectical rather than cause-and-effect terms. Among other things, the dialectic attunes us to the ongoing reciprocal effects of social forces. Thus, a dialectician would reconceptualize the example discussed above as a continual, ongoing interplay of ideas and politics.

## 4. Karl Marx: Dialectical and Historical Materialism

In this section we will discuss about historical materialism which is the scientific core of Marx's sociological thought. Therefore, it is necessary to situate historical materialism within the overall context of Marx's work and his contributions to sociological theory. For this purpose the unit deals first with the brief background of the philosophical and theoretical

origins of historical materialism in the context of its intellectual and social milieu. Then we go on to a discussion of certain basic assumptions upon which the theory of historical materialism is built. This is followed by an exposition of the theory of historical materialism and Marx's reasons for refuting economic determinism. Finally, the unit lists certain important contributions of historical materialism to sociological theory. A proper understanding of the above sections will help you to study the coming units related to other aspects of Marx's thought.

'Historical materialism', the name given to the methodological approach developed by Marx, recognizes the essentially social character of life. Its central postulates can be stated succinctly.

'Materialism' refers to the following premises:

- social being determines consciousness
- human beings necessarily act collectively in society to establish the means of their own physical and social reproduction
- physical and social reproduction are mutually dependent on each other
- in the course of its reproduction societies develop distinctive structures of cooperation and competition known as modes of production
- beyond a minimal level of subsistence societies divide into antagonistic classes.

'Historical' refers to additional premises:

- there is a tendency for the productive forces of society to grow over time
- human beings make their own history within pre-given social conditions
- societies develop inner contradictions which are resolved either by revolutionary transformation or social implosion.

In Marx's time, there were two important ways of understanding the issue of reality: idealism and materialism. Idealism posits that reality only exists in our idea of it. While there

may indeed be a material world that exists in and of itself, that world exists for humans only as it appears. The world around us is perceived through the senses, but this sense data is structured by innate cognitive categories. Thus, what appears to humans is not the world itself but our idea of it. On the other hand, materialism argues that all reality may be reduced to physical properties. In materialism, our ideas about the world are simple reflections; those ideas are structured by the innate physical characteristics of the universe.

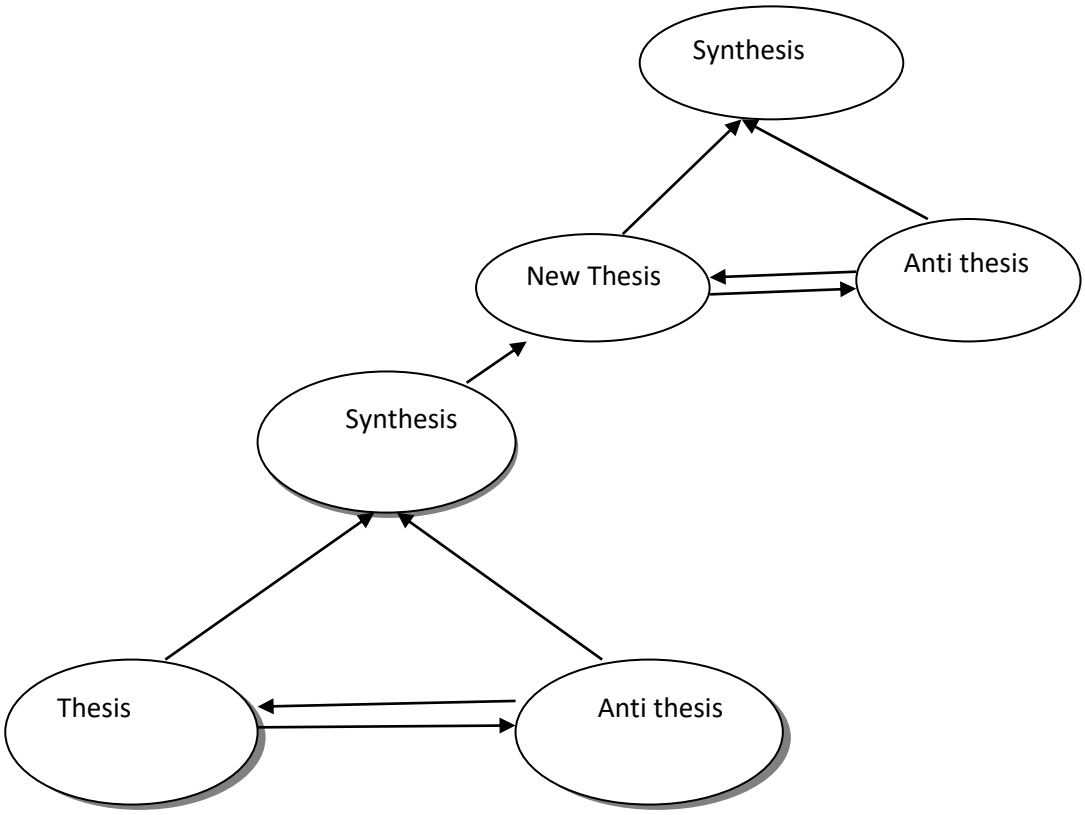
Marx feels that both of these extremes do not correctly consider humans as social animals. He proposes another way of understanding reality and consciousness; he terms this way of thinking naturalism, or humanism. Marx rejects brute materialism out of hand, but he has to consider idealism more carefully. One of idealism's strongest supporters, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, died just four years prior to Marx enrolling at the University of Bonn, and at the time, Hegel still held a significant place in the thinking of German philosophers ( in fact, Hegel is still a powerful figure in philosophy).

Hegel was an idealist and argued that material objects (like a chair or a rock) truly and completely only exist in our concept of them. But Hegel took idealism to another level, using it to argue for the existence of God (the ultimate concept); he argued that the ideal took priority over the material world. According to Hegel, human history is a dialectical unfolding of the Truth that reality consists of ideas and that the material world is nothing more than shadow.

> For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of ‘the Idea’, is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought.

Dialectic contains different elements that are naturally antagonistic to one another; Hegel called them the thesis and antithesis. The dialectic is like an argument or a dialog between elements that are locked together (The word dialectic comes from the Greek word

dialektikos, meaning discourse or discussion.). For example, to understand "good," you must at the same time understand "bad." To comprehend one, you must understand the other: good and bad are locked in a continual dialog. Hegel argued that these kinds of conflicts would resolve themselves into a new element or synthesis, which in turn sets up a new dialectic: every synthesis contains a thesis that by definition has conflicting elements.




Marx liked the historical process implied in Hegel's dialectic, but he disagreed with its ideational base. Marx, as we have seen, argues that human beings are unique because they creatively produce materials to fill their own material needs. Since the defining feature of humanity is production, not ideas and concepts, then Hegel's notion of idealism is false, and the dialectic is oriented around material production and not ideas—the material dialectic. Thus, the dynamics of the historical dialectic are to be found in the economic system, with

each economic system inherently containing antagonistic elements. As the antagonistic elements work themselves out, they form a new economic system.

In *The German Ideology* Marx presents the most detailed account of the theory of history. In it, Marx set out to reformulate the work of the eminent German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel. In contrast to previous philosophers who focused on explaining the roots of stability in the physical and social worlds (i.e., why things seemingly stayed the same), Hegel saw change as the motor of history. For Hegel, change was driven by a dialectical process in which a given state of being or idea contains within it the seeds of an opposing state of being or opposing idea. The resolution of the conflict produces yet a new state of being or idea. This synthesis, in turn, forms the basis of a new contradiction, thus continuing the process of change.

On the other hand, Marx breaks decisively from Hegel by insisting that it is *material* existence, not consciousness, that fuels historical change and the inevitable march toward freedom. Thus, Marx sought to take Hegel's idealism, which had the evolution of history "standing on its head," and "turn it right side up" in order to discover the real basis of the progression of human societies. Theoretically, this inversion is of utmost significance because it reflects a shift from a nonrationalist to a rationalist theoretical orientation.

*The German Ideology* is a pivotal writing because it offers the fullest treatment of Marx's materialist conception of history. It is in Marx's theory of historical materialism that we find one of his most important philosophical contributions, namely his conviction that ideas or interests have no existence independent of physical reality. In numerous passages, you will see Marx's rejection of Hegel's notion that ideas determine experience in favor of the materialist view that experience determines ideas. For instance, Marx asserts, "Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process" (Marx and Engels 1846/1978:154). And again, "Life is not

determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (ibid.:155). In short, Marx argues that the essence of individuals, what they truly are and how they see the world, is determined by their material, economic conditions—"both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce"—in which they live out their very existence (ibid.:150).

In 'Preface' to *A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1959) Marx said that the actual basis of society is its economicstructure. For Marx economic structure of society is made of its relationsof production. The legal and political superstructureof society is basedon relations of production. Marx says that relations of production reflectthe stage of society's force of means of production. Thus, the term such as relations of production, forces of means of production and superstructure carry special connotations in Marxist thought. His contention is that the process of socio-political and intellectual life in general is conditioned by the mode of production of material life.

On the basis of this logic, Marx tries to constructs his entire view of history. He says that new developments of productive forces of society come in conflict with existing relations of production. When people become conscious of the state of conflict, they wish to bring an end to it. This period of history is called by Marx the period of social revolution. The revolution brings about resolution of conflict. It means that new forces of production take roots and give rise to new relations of production. Thus, you can see that for Marx, it is the growth of new productive forces which outlines the course of human history. The productive forces are the powers society uses to produce material conditions of life. For Marx, human history is an account of development and consequences of new forces of material production. This is the reason why his view of history is given the name of historical materialism. In a nutshell, this is the theory of historical materialism.

In brief, we can say that Marx's theory of historical materialism states that all objects, whether living or inanimate, are subject to continuous change. The rate of this change is

determined by the laws of dialectics. In other words, there are forces which bring about the change. You can call it the stage of antithesis. The actual nature of change, i.e., the stage of synthesis, will be, according to Marx, determined by the interaction of these two types of forces. Before explaining in some detail further connections which Marx makes to elaborate this theory, it is necessary to point out that different schools of Marxism provide differing explanations of this theory. We are here confined to a kind of standard version in our rendering of historical materialism. We should keep in mind that materialistic conception of history is not a rough and ready formulation for explaining different forms of social organisation.

To sum up, historical materialist perspective takes economic power as the prime dimension of social stratification and holds that the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles. The main classes in the societies Engels and Marx studied most intensively were the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. More particularly, classical historical materialism postulated several trends supposedly characteristic of any society with private ownership of the means of production, such as machines and factories (capital goods) and free markets for capital, labor, and consumption goods.

According to the ‘‘general law of capitalist accumulation,’’ the longer the capitalist mode of production prevails, the more capital will have accumulated, leading to both higher profits for capital owners (the bourgeoisie) and to worsening living conditions for the people who live by their labor (the proletariat). Although recognizing in the early phases of the capitalist mode of production the presence of small and large proprietors as well as skilled and unskilled workers, the persistence of the capitalist mode of production would lead to a disappearance of the middle classes.

Small proprietors would become less common, as they lose out in the fierce competition from large proprietors. Workers skilled in using their hand tools would also

become less common as proprietors replace them with cheaper unskilled workers operating machines. In addition, since the persistence of the capitalist mode of production is accompanied by ever deeper economic downturns, wages tend to fall while the percentage of unemployed workers rises.

**5. Class and Class conflict**

Marx's sociology is, in fact, Sociology of the class struggle. This means one has to understand the Marxian concept of class in order to appreciate Marxian philosophy and thought. Marx has used the term social class throughout his works but explained it only in a fragmented form. The clearest passages on the concept of class structure can be found in the third volume of his famous work, *Capital* (1894). Under the title of 'Social Classes' Marx distinguished three classes, related to the three sources of income:

(a) owners of simple labour power or labourers whose main source of income is labour;

(b) owners of capital or capitalists whose main source of income is profit or surplus value;

(c) land owners whose main source of income is ground rent.

In this way the class structure of modern capitalist society is composed of three major classes viz., salaried labourers or workers, capitalists and landowners. At a broader level, society could be divided into two major classes i.e. the 'haves' (owners of land and / or capital) often called as bourgeoisie and the 'have-nots' (those who own nothing but their own labour power), often called as proletariats. Marx has tried to even give a concrete definition of social class. According to him 'a social class occupies a fixed place in the process of production'.

Marx and Engels famously set out the historical relation of classes early in *The Communist Manifesto* where they declared:

> 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, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (1998: 34–35)

In fact, none of these earlier modes of production were overthrown by the exploited class. It was not peasants that overthrew feudalism but the new, emerging 'middling sorts' of the capitalist class. Previous societies were divided hierarchically into complex gradations of rank, somewhat obscuring the division into fundamental classes: 'In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serf; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations' (Marx and Engels, 1998: 35). In the *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels wrote,

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and

> regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an "eternal law."

Modern society, Marx and Engels claim, simplifies class antagonisms, splitting society into 'two great hostile camps': bourgeois and proletarians. Engels later added a footnote to define what he took these terms to mean:

> By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, in having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live. (Marx and Engels, 1998: 34)

Marx and Engels praise the bourgeois class for its revolutionary achievements: the overthrow of feudalism, the creation of a world market, technological dynamism, the ending of religious superstitions, urbanization, stimulating the creation of a world literature, all marvellous 'wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothiccathedrals' (1998: 38).In the process, capital organizes the proletariat into a class as 'the conditions of life are more and more equalized, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level' (1998: 45). This is a process known as 'proletarianization'.

Increasingly, the lower strata of the middle class – shopkeepers, tradespeople and peasants – fall into the class of wage labourersas they are put out of business by the power of larger capitals. The proletariat develops just so long as it increases the amount of capital accumulated by the bourgeoisie. Wage labour is reduced to the status of acommodity,

possessing only its labour power for sale, interchangeable with other commodities. Labour is alienated, a mere ‘appendage of the machine’, which controls the pace and skill of labour.

For Marx, class division and conflict between classes exist in all societies. Industrial society consists mainly of two conflicting classes: the bourgeoisie, owners of the means of production (the resources – land, factories, capital, and equipment – needed for the production and distribution of material goods); and the proletariat, who work for the owners of productive property. The owning class controls key economic, political, and ideological institutions, placing it inevitably in opposition to non owners as it seeks to protect its power and economic interests. ‘‘Class struggle’’ is the contest between opposing classes and it is through the dynamic forces that result from class awareness of conflicting interests that societal change is generated.

In terms of class conflict, or potential class conflict, Marx distinguished between a ‘‘class in itself ’’ and a ‘‘class for itself.’’ The former comprises a social grouping whose constituents share the same relationship to the forces of production. However, for Marx, a social grouping only fully becomes a class when it forms a ‘‘class for itself.’’ At this stage, its members have achieved class consciousness and solidarity – a full awareness of their true situation of exploitation and oppression. Members of a class subsequently develop a common identity, recognize their shared interest, and unite, so creating class cohesion and ultimately taking recourse to revolutionary violence.

### 6. Theory of Alienationand Commodity Fetishism

Theories of alienation start with the writings of Marx, who identified the capacity for self directed creative activity as the core distinction between humans and animals. If people cannot express their species being (their creativity), they are reduced to the status of animals or machines. In the essay “Alienated Labour” (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*), Marx examines the condition of alienation or estrangement. For Marx, alienation is inherent in capitalism, because the process of production and the results of our labor confront

us as a dominating power. It stems not from religiously rooted errors of consciousness, as Hegel argued, but from the material conditions in which we apply our essential productive capacities.

Marx argued that, under capitalism, workers lose control over their work and, as a consequence, are alienated in at least four ways.

1. They are alienated from the products of their labor. They no longer determine what isto be made or what use will be made of it. Work is reduced to being a means to an end – a means to acquire money to buy the material necessities of life.
2. Workers are alienated from the process of work. Someone else controls the pace, pattern, tools, and techniques of their work.
3. Because workers are separated from their activity, they become alienated from themselves. Non alienated work, in contrast, entails the same enthusiastic absorption and self realization as hobbies and leisure pursuits.
4. Alienated labor is an isolated endeavor, not part of a collectively planned effort to meet a group need.

Consequently, workers are alienated from others as well as from themselves. Marx argued that these four aspects of alienation reach their peak under industrial capitalism and that alienated work, which is inherently dissatisfying, would naturally produce in workers a desire to change the existing system. Alienation, in Marx's view, thus plays a crucial role in leading to social revolution to change society toward a non alienated future.

The study of alienation has probably inspired more writing and research in the social sciences than any other single topic. Today, the core of that research has moved away from the social philosophical approach of Marx, based on projecting a future that could be, and towards more empirical study of the causes and consequences of alienation within the world

of work as it actually exists. Although less weeping than Marx's original vision, this approach has produced insights that are largely consistent with his views. The contemporary approach substitutes measures of job satisfaction for Marx's more expansive conception of alienation. Related concepts include job commitment, effort bargaining, and, conversely, resistance. In the political sphere voting behavior and a sense of political efficacy have emerged as central empirical indicators of underlying alienation from society's power structures.

The intellectual movement from a social philosophy of alienation to a social science of alienation has produced a wealth of research on the causes of job satisfaction and related empirical measures of political and social disengagement. Autonomy to decide on the details of one's own work tasks and freedom from oppressive supervision have been identified as among the most important determinants of experiencing satisfaction and meaning in one's work. Other determinants of job satisfaction include both positive foundations for self realization, such as perceptions of justice at work and supportive coworkers, and corrosive factors, such as large organizational size, bureaucracy, and control of local operations by remote corporate entities.

The absence of work can also generate a sense of alienation because one has no useful role in society. High levels of unemployment have been empirically linked with increased depression, higher rates of illness, and even suicide. Globalization has contributed to job loss for many workers who are displaced by workers elsewhere in the world who either have access to better technology or are willing to accept lower pay. In the political sphere alienation arises from a sense of estrangement from political power.

Such estrangement arises because political institutions have become increasingly distant in large complex societies, but also, importantly, because effective channels of participation have been blocked for many people or simply do not exist. The role of

individual and corporate wealth as determinants of political influence has led many people to a lackof confidence and trust that the political institutions of society either represent their interests or are open to their participation. Political alienation appears to be on the increase. In western nations, particularly in the United States, the proportion of people who bother to vote has fallen to a historic low.

In the1960s in the United States about three quarters of the population felt that the government was run for the benefit of all. Today, this number has fallen to roughly one quarter. Even for those who have good jobs and some opportunity to exercise political power, overwork and the experience of feeling chronically rushed and pulled in multiple directions have become increasingly common sources of disaffection. Such stresses can lead to feelings of alienation and separation from one's life. In spite of widespread overwork, however, surveys indicate that many people prefer work activities over family and leisure activities, further contributing to overwork even in the face of work that may be less than fulfilling.

It appears that at least some work in modern society may compete well with alternative activities in the private spheres of life. If people prefer work to family and leisure, does this imply that alienation from work has ended? Or does it simply suggest that the roles of community and family are fading as these assume a smaller and smaller place in people's lives? These changes, if true, present a challenge to traditional alienation theory as it struggles to understand the increasingly diverse experience of life in modern society.

Theories of alienation, as scientific explorations of the causes of job satisfaction and political behavior, serve a pivotal function in moving us beyond workplace and societal practices that destroy human motivation and toward practices that liberate human involvement and creativity. Theories of alienation, as exercises in social philosophy, help to keep alive questions about the future of society by envisioning possible alternatives that do

not yet exist. Such exercises are necessary if the social sciences are to retain a transformative potential beyond the tyranny of what is and toward what could be.

## 7. Commodity Fetishism

In Marx's pioneering critique of capitalism, he brought the commodity to the fore as a unit of analysis in the study of capitalist social relations. In his works, Marx refined the meaning of the term, suggesting that commodities were not simply objects that fulfilled needs, but that their seeming simpleutility served to mask the social and material relations that brought them into existence –particularly the human labor necessary to produce them. For Marx, commodities had a ‘‘dual nature,’’ which was comprised of their utility(or use value) and their value in the market (or exchange value).

Although a commodity was useful to the person who bought it because it satisfied some need, it was also useful to the person who sold it because its sale yielded value in excess of the cost of the labor and materials necessary to produce it, either in the form of other commodities or in money. Marx’s refinement of the term was in response to the work of economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who treated commodities as if their value were strictly further facilitate the introduction of the notion of commodity fetishism into social theory. At the end of the nineteenth century, even as the role of fetishism in the evolution of human social life was called into question, the centrality of capitalism and commodity exchange in the social organization of the Americas and Europe captured the attention of an emerging sociological discipline.

The rapid rise and rationalization of industrial development framed Max Weber’s discussion of the relationship of (Christian) religious orientation and capitalist accumulation, and the attendant availability of a wider range of consumer goods informed Thorstein Veblen’s analysis of the role of the commodity in bourgeois status hierarchies. What had been for Marx a sarcastic metaphor for the misapprehension of social relations as natural

became increasingly a sincere heuristic for examining the role of commodities in the organization of daily social life: like its archaic precursor, the commodity fetish mediated between abstract economic forces and the actions of individuals.

**8. Theory of Social Change**

In Marx's analysis of the history of human society he identified four modes of productions and he mapped social change in the history according to the mode of productions may exist within any particular society at a given point in time. But in all forms of society there is one determinate kind of production which assigns rank and influence to all the others. Here we shall discuss each of the four modes of production, identified by Marx.

1. **Asiatic Mode of Production:** The concept of Asiatic mode of production refers to a specific original mode of production. This is distinct from the ancient slave mode of production or the feudal mode of production. The Asiatic mode of production is characteristic of primitive communities in which ownership of land is communal. These communities are still partly organised on the basis of kinship relations. State power, which expresses the real or imaginary unity of these communities, controls the use of essential economic resources, and directly appropriates part of the labour and production of the community.
2. **Ancient Mode of Production:** It refers to the forms which precede capitalist production. In some of these terms slavery is seen as the foundation of the productive system. The relation of masters to slaves is considered as the very essence of slavery. In this system of production the master has the right of ownership over the slave and appropriates the products of the slave’s labour. The slave is not allowed to reproduce. If we restrict ourselves to agricultural slavery, exploitation operates according to the following modalities: the slaves work the master’s land and receive their subsistence in return. The master’s profit is constituted by the difference between what the slaves produce and what they consume. But what is usually forgotten is that beyond this, the

slaves are deprived of their own means of reproduction. The reproduction of slavery depends on the capacity of the society to acquire new slaves, that is, on an apparatus which is not directly linked to the capacities of demographic reproduction of the enslaving population. The rate of accumulation depends on the number of slaves acquired, and not directly on their productivity.

3. **Feudal Mode of Production:** Marx and Engels writing about feudalism tended to focus on the transition between the feudal and the capitalist modes of production. They were concerned with the 'existence form' of labour and the manner in which the products of labour were appropriated by ruling classes. Just as capitalists exploited the workers or the 'proletariat', so did the feudal lords exploit their tenants or 'serfs'. Capitalists grabbed surplus value and feudal lords appropriated land rent from their serfs.
4. **Capitalist Mode of Production**: Capitalism refers to a mode of production in which capital is the dominant means of production. Capital can be in various forms. It can take the form of money or credit for the purchase of labour power and materials of production. It can be money or credit for buying physical machinery. In capitalist mode of production**,** the private ownership of capital in its various forms is in the hands of a class of capitalists. The ownership by capitalists is to the exclusion of the mass of the population.

In the *German Ideology* (1845-6), both Marx and Engels outlined their scheme of history. Here, the main idea was that based on a mode of production there was a succession of historical phases. Change from one phase to the next was viewed by them as a state of revolution brought about by conflicts between old institutions and new productive forces. It was only later on that both Marx and Engels devoted more time and studied English, French and American revolutions. They named them as bourgeois revolutions. Marx's hypothesis of

bourgeois revolution has given us a perspective to look at social changes in Europe and America. But more than this, it has stimulated further research by scholars on this subject.

Secondly, Marx spoke of another kind of revolution. It pertained to communism. Marx viewed communism as a sequel to capitalism. Communism, according to Marx, would wipe out all class divisions and therefore would allow for a fresh start with moral and social transformation. This was the vision both Marx and Engels carried in their minds for future society. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find that their vision has not come true and communism has not had its sway around the world. All the same Marx's ideas have influenced the nature of growth of capitalism. Tempered with socialist ideas it is now beginning to acquire a human face.

Marx's concept of socialist revolution presupposes an era of shift from capitalism to socialism. He explained bourgeois revolution as a defeat of the aristocracy. This defeat came at the end of a long period of growth of capitalism. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie is, on the other hand, only the first phase of the revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism. According to Marx the socialistic phase of revolution would not be without classes, occupational division of labour and market economy etc. It is only in the higher phase of revolution there would be distribution of goods to each according to his needs. This would be the phase of communism. Thus, change to communism was perceived by Marx as a series of steps to completely revolutionise the entire mode of production.

In fact, Marx conceived intensification of class antagonism in capitalism, because the new forces of production do not correspond to the relations of production. There will be increasing gap between the levels of distribution of gains between the two classes. This shall leave the have-nots extremely alienated and conscious of their class interests. The new forces of production in capitalism are capable of mass production and will dump heaps of prosperity at the feet of bourgeoisie without helping the lot of proletariat, who would continue to suffer

from misery and poverty. This shall accentuate the class consciousness and hasten the maturation of the conditions for socialist revolution. The socialist revolution according to Marx would be qualitatively different from all the revolutions of the past as it would for the first time, after the beginning of history of inequality and exploitation, usher in a stage of classless society with a hope for all members of society.

## 9. Conclusion

This module we started with a biographical sketch of Marx and why he considered as an important figure in the history of sociological thought. Then we looked at the concept of historical materialism as a materialist interpretation of social, cultural and political phenomena. It propounds that social institutions and related values are determined by the mode of production processes rather than ideas in the explanation of history. However, the word ‘determined’, in the Marxian sense, refers to determination in the last analysis and should not be taken in an absolute sense.

According to Marx historical materialism is a dialectical theory of human progress. It regards history as the development of human beings’ efforts to master the forces of nature and, hence, of production. Since all production is carried out within social organisation, history is the succession of changes in social system, the development of human relations gearedto productive activity (mode of production) in which the economic system forms the base and all other relationships, institutions, activities, and idea systems are “superstructural”.

Marx had rejected the strong emphasis of the determining influence of cultural ideas as reflected in German historicism. For him, the development of sociology required an analysis of how the actual material and social conditions of people’s lives influenced their consciousness and behavior aswell as their opportunities to develop their full human potential. With his focus on the economic class structure, he saw class divisions in modern society deepening as a result of the advancing centralization of the means of production and

capitalists' expanding levels of exploitation of workers in their efforts to increase their profits. Although the capitalist system was subject to periodic crises, their resolution should not be expected to end the process of exploitation and class conflict until the capitalist system is eventually overthrown through revolutionary struggle.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

**Alienation:** Dehumanizing estrangement or separation of workers from the means of production, the product of their labor, their own species being, and humanity as a whole, in capitalism.

**Ancient Mode of Production:** A production system where the master has the right of ownership over the slave and appropriates the products of his labour through servitude, without allowing the slave to reproduce.

**Asiatic Mode of Production:** Community-based production system where ownership of land is communal and the existence of *is* expressed through the real or imaginary unity of these communities.

**Bourgeoisie:** Owners of the means of production. Also known as 'Haves' are those people who own the means of production for example – landowners, capitalists in industrial societies. They are class of capitalists who, in all developed countries, are now almost exclusively in possession of all the means of consumption and of all the raw materials and instruments (machines, factories necessary for their production

**Capital:** The raw materials and machinery used in the production of commodities.

**Capitalism** It is one of the historical stages of society where the means of production are mainly machinery, capital and labour.

**Capitalist Mode of Production** Refers to a production system where the owners of means of production, capitalists, extract surplus labour from the proletariats in the form of profits.

**Capitalists** The ruling class in capitalism who control the means of production.

**Class:** Groups of individuals who share a common position in relation to the means of production. A fundamental social group or a tangible collectivity which has the capacity to act as a real social force. It is positioned in relation to the (non) ownership of the means of

material production. When people share the same relationship to the means of production and also share the similar consciousness regarding their common interest, they constitute a class.

**Class Consciousness:** It is awareness on the part of the members of a class of their common relationship to the means of production.

**Class Interest:** The aims, aspirations and assumptions of a social class which are collectively shared by the members. Class Consciousness Awareness of the objective class position vis-à-vis others and an awareness of its historic role in the transformation of society.

**Class Struggle** Conflict between two antagonistic social classes which is the motive force of history.

**Class-conflict** When two classes having basic antagonism of class interests struggle or clash in order to safeguard their class interests then it is called class conflict.

**Commodity Fetishism:** Treating goods as if they have magical powers capable of transforming an individual's capabilities.

**Dialectical Materialism:** It is the Marxian theory that seeks to explain everything in terms of change which is caused due to constant contradiction of mutually opposite forces found in matter.

**Dialectics:** The conflict between two mutually opposite forces or tendencies.

**Exploitation:** Laborers' objective production of more value in the form of commodities than they receive in the form of wages, and lack of voice in exchange.

**Feudal Mode of Production:** Refers to a production system where the lords appropriate surplus labour from the serfs in the form of rent.

**Feudalism:** It is also one of the historical stages of society where the means of production are mainly land and labour.

**Forces (Means) of Production:** The raw materials, technology, and land necessary for production. Both the materials worked on and the tools and techniques employed in

production of material goods. These material-technical aspects should not be confused with social relations of production. In other words, it means the ways in which production is done; the technological 'know-how', the types of equipments in use and types of goods being produced, e.g., tools, machinery, labour, etc.

**Infrastructure:** According to Marx, the materialistic structure or economic structure is the foundation or base of society. In other words, it is also called the infrastructure. The superstructure of society rests on it. Infrastructure includes mode of production and hence forces of production and relations of production.

**Labor Theory of Value:** Theory stating that the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labor time it takes to produce it.

**Lords:** The ruling class in feudalism, who exercise indirect control over serfs.

**Masters:** The ruling class in slavery who exercise control over slaves.

**Means of Production:** It includes all the elements necessary for production, e.g., land, raw material, factory, labour and capital, etc.

**Mode of Production:** A mode of production is the relationship between the relations of production and the forces of production. Modes of production can be distinguished from one another by different relationships between the forces and relations of production. It refers to the general economic institution i.e., the particular manner in which people produce and distribute the means that sustain life. The forces of production and the relations of production together define the mode of production.

**Proletariat:** Those who sell their labor for a wage. Proletarian are representatives of the lowest socioeconomic class of a community. These people are also known as 'Have-nots' and these are the people who do not own any means of production except their own labour power. Hence all the landless peasants or agricultural labourers in feudal societies and industrial workers in capitalist societies are the proletariat.

**Relations of Production:** Refer to social relationships that arise directly out of the process of production. These social relationships include the relationships between the owners and non-owners of the means of production. These relationships decide and even determine the control and the capacity to possess the product.

**Revolution:** It is the sudden, total and radical change in society brought in by the matured conditions of class conflict.

**Serfs:** Class of producers in the feudal mode of production whose surplus labour is appropriated through rent.

**Slaves:** Class of producers in the ancient mode of production, who are directly controlled by the masters as their private 'property'.

**Superstructure:** All social, political and cultural institutions of societies excepting economic institutions constitute the superstructure of a society. Metaphor to represent the social conditions of the existence of the infrastructure. It includes *state,* schools, religions, institutions, culture, ideas, values and philosophy, etc.

**Surplus Value:** The difference between what workers earn for their labor and the price of the goods they produce.

**Surplus Value (Absolute):** Increasing productivity of labor by extending the workday.

**Surplus Value (Relative):** Increasing productivity of labor through the introduction of timesaving procedures, e.g., specialization, mechanization.

**Workers:** Class of producers in the capitalist mode of production who have nothing except their labour power as their only means of livelihood. Their surplus labour is appropriated by the capitalists through profit.

**Reference and Further Readings**


- Bottomore et al. (ed.) (1983). *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi
- Aron, Raymond 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. PenguinBooks: London
- Bottomore, T.B. 1975. *Marxist Sociology*, MacMillan: London
- Coser, Lewis A. 1971. *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historicaland Social Context*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc. : New York
- Marx, K. (1859). *A Contribution of the Critique of Political Economy*. Franz Duncker: Berlin
- Marx, K.(1861-1879). *Capital* (vol. I, ii & iii). Otto Meissner: Hanbury
- Marx, K. (1844). 1959. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript*. Edited by Disk J. Stnik & translated by Martin Milligan. Larence and Wishart: London
- Marx, K. and Engels F. (1845-6), 1937. *The German Ideology*. Historisch Kritische Gesamtausgabe
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (Manuscript of 1848). *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Burghard: London

# MODULE 3

# MAX WEBER

## Chapter Outline



## Objective of this Module

- Discuss the meaning and characteristics of Verstehen, Social Action, Ideal Type
- Describe Weber's types of social action and describe three types of authority namely, traditional, charismatic and rational-legal.
- Discuss Weber's views on rationality in sociological investigation and value-free sociology.
- Describe bureaucracy as the instrument for the operation of rational-legal authority.
- Explain the meanings of the terms rationality and rationalization
- Discuss the meaning of religion and economy and their interconnections
- Understand the influence of the Protestant ethic on the development of modern capitalism as discussed by Weber
- Review Weber's comparative studies on three world religions, i.e. Confucianism in China, Judaism in West Asia and Hinduism in India
- Evaluate Max Weber's studies on religion and economy in the context of Protestant ethics and spirit of Capitalism

## 1. Introduction

In this module we will look at the contribution of Max Weber to the development of classical sociological theory. We will start with a brief biographical sketch of Weber's life and times. It will help us to understand intellectual ideas and perspectives that influenced his thought. This module is divided in to four parts. First part looks at three important concepts developed by Weber as a part of methodological inquiry in to the social world. These three concepts are Verstehen, Social Action and Ideal Type. Though this concepts we will discuss how Weber conceptualized Sociology as a mode of inquiry distinct from the natural sciences, with a distinctive subject matter concerning the meanings attributed by social actors to their actions in a specific historical context.

In the second part of the chapter we will find some of Weber's important contributions in understanding power and authority. We will start with a brief discussion of the sociological concepts of power and authority with special reference to Weber understands of the terms. And we discuss the three types of authorities Weber identifies such as traditional charismatic and rational-legal authority. And we will focus on bureaucracy though which the rational-legal authority is exercised in modern time.

In the third part of this module we will discuss one of the central themes in his work, namely, the idea of rationality and the process of rationalisation. The process of rationalization is a concept that touches almost all of Weber's work. This part of this module is divided into three sections. In the first section, you will get a brief description of the meanings of the terms 'rationality' and 'rationalisation'. The second section will highlight how Weber used the concept of rationality in his work. The issues taken up will be Protestantism, capitalism, bureaucracy and types of rationality.

In the last section of this module we will look at the relation between religious ethics and economic behavior. It examines the inter-relationship between religious beliefs and

economic activity. And explain what Weber meant by the "spirit of capitalism" and contrasts it with "traditionalism". We then discuss certain aspects of the "Protestant ethic" which according to Weber, contributed to the development of capitalism in the West. This unit further clarifies the relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity by describing three of Weber's 'comparative religious studies', namely those of Confucianism in China, Judaism in ancient West Asia and Hinduism in India.

## 2. Biographical Sketch

Max Weber was born in Erfurt, Germany, in 1864. He was the eldest of eight children born to Max Weber Sr. and Helene Fallenstein Weber, although only six survived to adulthood. Max Jr. was a sickly child. When he was four years old, he became seriously ill with meningitis. Though he eventually recovered, throughout the rest of his life he suffered the physical and emotional after-effects of the disease, most apparently anxiety and nervous tension. From an early age, books were central in Weber's life. He read whatever he could get his hands on, including Kant, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Goethe, and Schopenhauer, and he wrote two historical essays before his 14$^{th}$ birthday.

In 1882, at 18 years old, Weber took his final high school examinations. Weber went to the University of Heidelberg for three semesters and then completed one year of military service in Strasbourg. When his service ended, he enrolled at the University of Berlin and, for the next eight years, lived at his parents' home. Upon passing his first examination in law in 1886, Weber began work as a full-time legal apprentice. While working as a junior barrister, he earned a PhD in economic and legal history in 1889. He then took a position as lecturer at the University of Berlin. Weber followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a lawyer and joining the same organizations that his father had at the University of Heidelberg. Like his father, he was active in government affairs as well.

In 1893, at the age of 29, Weber married Marianne Schnitger, a distant cousin, and finally left his childhood home. Today, Marianne Weber is recognized as an important feminist, intellectual, and sociologist in her own right. She was a popular public speaker on social and sexual ethics and wrote many books and articles. Her most influential works, *Marriage and Motherhood in the Development of Law* (1907) and *Women and Love* (1935), examined feminist issues and the reform of marriage. However, Marianne is known best as the intellectual partner of her husband. She and Max made a conscious effort to establish an egalitarian relationship, and they worked together on intellectual projects. Interestingly, Marianne referred to Max as her "companion" and implied that theirs was an unconsummated marriage. Despite her own intellectual accomplishments, Marianne's 700-page treatise, *Max Weber: A Biography*, first published in 1926, has received the most attention, serving as the central source of biographical information on her husband.

In 1894, Max Weber joined the faculty at Freiburg University as a full professor of economics. Shortly thereafter, in 1896, Weber accepted a position as chair of economics at the University of Heidelberg, where he first began his academic career. In 1904, Weber traveled to the United States and began to formulate the argument of what would be his most celebrated work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1904–5/1958). After returning to Europe, Weber resumed his intellectual activity. He met with the brilliant thinkers of his day, including Werner Sombart, Paul Hensel, Ferdinand Tönnies, Ernst Troeltsch, and Georg Simmel.

He helped establish the Heidelberg Academy of the Sciences in 1909 and the Sociological Society in 1910 (Marianne Weber 1926/1975:425). However, Weber was still plagued by compulsive anxiety. In 1918, he helped draft the constitution of the Weimar Republic while giving his first university lectures in 19 years at the University of Vienna. He

suffered tremendously, however, and turned down an offer for a permanent post (Weber 1958:23). In 1920, at the age of 56, Max Weber died of pneumonia.

### 3. Verstehen, Social Action, and Ideal Type

In this part we will discuss about three central ideas that defined Weber's work in the discipline of sociology. In the first part on Max Weber we will deals with three concepts such as Verstehen, Social Action and Ideal Type. These three concepts focus on Max Weber's concern with methodology of social sciences. These three concepts give a perspective and a background to analyse the major theoretical formulations and empirical context developed by Max Weber. So, a clear understanding of these ideas is necessary in dealing with Weber's substantive and theoretical ideas. Weber was opposed to pure abstract theorizing. Instead, his theoretical ideas are embedded in his empirical, usually historical, research. Weber's methodology shaped his research, and the combination of the two lies at the base of his theoretical orientation.

### 3.1 Verstehen

Verstehen is a German word usually translated as ''understanding,'' the concept of verstehen has become part of a critique of positivist approaches to the social sciences. Associated with the sociology of Max Weber, verstehen derives from the hermeneutic critique of positivism that emerged in German universities in the 1880s and 1890s that gave rise to a dispute over method in the social sciences. 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. 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.

Verstehen refers to understanding the meaning of action from the actor's point of view. It is entering into the shoes of the other, and adopting this research stance requires treating the actor as a subject, rather than an object of one's observations. It also implies that unlike objects in the natural world, human actors are not simply the product of causal forces. Individuals are seen to create the world by organizing their own understanding of it and giving it meaning.

Weber defined sociology as "a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects" (Weber 1947:88). In casting "interpretive understanding," or *Verstehen,* as the principal objective, Weber's vision of sociology offers a distinctive counter to those who sought to base the young discipline on the effort to uncover universal laws applicable to all societies. Weber's view of the task of sociology combines his emphasis on *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding) with his view of social action: for Weber the task of the sociologist is to *understand* the meanings individuals assign to the contexts in which they are acting and to determine the *effects* that such meanings have on their conduct and the world.

One of the most systematic uses of this method by Weber is in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism where he supplements structural and economic accounts of the origin of capitalism in Europe with empathetic reconstruction of the worldview of verstehen seventeenth century Calvinist and other Protestant groups. He argues that Calvinist belief in predestination, which precluded achieving salvation through good works, provoked ''an unprecedented inner loneliness'' and search for signs of salvation. Through attempting to resolve this paradox the theological quest for evidence of divine grace was transposed into the worldly but ascetic pursuit of capital accumulation, success in which was interpreted by Calvinists as signaling divine selection.

What above example illustrates is that only through empathetic reconstruction of actors' meanings is it possible to explain critical events like the growth of capitalism. At the same time 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.

In his methodology, Weber emphasizes understanding of the subjective meanings of the actions to the actors by contextualizing it in some way. It is important to note that when Weber talks about meaning in this context, he has in mind the motivations of the actor. These motives may be intellectual in the sense that the actor has an observable and rational motive for his or her actions in terms of means and ends; or they may be emotional in the sense that the behavior may be understood in terms of being motivated by some underlying feeling like anger.

### 3.2 Social Action

According to Max Weber, "Sociology is a science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its cause and effects". 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. In another word, 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" (Weber, 1921/1978). Here we can point out the following important elements of social action

- Social action includes all human behaviour.
- Social action attaches a subjective meaning to it.
- The acting individual or individuals take into account the behavior of others.
- Social action is oriented in its course.

Hence the construction of a pure type of social action helps the sociologists as an ideal type "which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity'" (Weber 1964).Weber has talked about four types of social actions. These are

i) Zweckrational or rational action with reference to goals,

ii) Wertrational or rational action with reference to values,

iii) traditional action and

iv) affective action.

These are classified according to their modes of orientation. Rational action with reference to goals is classified in terms of the conditions or means for the successful attainment of the actor's own rationally chosen ends. Rational action with reference to value is classified in terms of rational orientation to an absolute value, that is, action which is directed to overriding ideals of duty, honour or devotion to a cause.

Traditional action type is classified as one which is under the influence of long practice, customs and habits. Affective action is classified in terms of affectual orientation, especially emotional, determined by the specific states of feeling of the actor. Since reality presents a mixture of the four pure types of action, for our analysis and understanding we separate them analytically into pure or ideal types. For instance, the use of rational ideal types can help in measuring irrational deviation and we can understand particular empirical action by interpreting as to which of the four types of action it most closely approximates.

### 3.3 Ideal Type

Ideal type is another methodological and conceptual innovation of Weber. This methodological contribution helped Weber to get a wide recognizion in contemporary sociology. An ideal type is an analytical or conceptual construct that highlights certain specific features of people's orientations and actions for purposes of analysis and comparison. According to Weber ideal type is a mental construct, like a model, for the scrutiny and systematic characterisation of a concrete situation. Indeed, he used ideal type as a methodological tool to understand and analyse social reality.

"The ideal typical concept will develop our skill in imputation in research. It is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description". In other words, ideal types are concepts formulated on the basis of facts collected carefully and analytically for empirical research. In this sense, ideal types are constructs or concepts which are used as methodological devices or tools in our understanding and analysis of any social problem.

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, 1903–1917).

> "Its function is the comparison with empirical reality in order to establish its divergences or similarities, to describe them with the *mostunambiguously intelligible concepts,* and to understand and explain them causally" (Weber, 1903–1917).

Between 1903 and 1908 Weber published several so called ‘‘methodological’’ essays in which he addressed a wide range of questions concerning the goals, subject matter, and methods of the social sciences. The most famous of these essays was ‘‘‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy,’’ published in 1904 as Weber was assuming the co editorship of the influential journal. He sketched his vision of the social sciences as grounded in cognitive interests that are in part historical and in part theoretical, and as seeking relevance to questions of value and contemporary social policy. Weber's extended discussion of concept formation focused on his notion of ‘‘ideal type’’ concepts.

Ideal types are conceptual instruments that seek to represent the most relevant aspects of a given object (e.g., ‘‘city,’’ ‘‘patriarchy,’’ ‘‘capitalism’’) for purposes of social scientific inquiry. They are formed as deliberate constructs through a process of selection, abstraction, and idealization. Ideal type concepts aim to be useful rather than descriptive, for they are not intended to represent actual phenomena. Weber maintained that they were in fact indispensable for purposes of inquiry and clear exposition. Moreover, ideal types are well suited to a vision of social science concerned with representing the cultural significance and value oriented aspects of social phenomena within the context of historically oriented causal inquiries.

For example, Weber distinguished four "ideal types" of social action, reflecting differences in underlying subjective orientations. These include two types of rational action (instrumental versus value-oriented rationality) and two types of nonrationalaction (traditional and affective). Instrumental rationality involves conscious deliberation and

explicit choice with regard to both ends and means; that is, a choice is consciously made from among alternative ends (or goals) and then the appropriate means are selected to achieve the end that has been chosen.

Value- oriented rationality, in contrast, involves a subjective commitment to an end or goal that is not compared to alternative ends but instead is regarded as ultimate. For such actions the individual's rational choices are limited to selecting the appropriate means. In contrast to these types of rational action involving conscious deliberation and choice, traditional action is followed simply because it is consistent with well-established patterns or is habitual. Affective action expresses feelings or emotions (or affect) without conscious deliberation. All four of these are ideal types, of course; in real life, individuals' actions may reflect varying mixtures.

According to Weber conceived them, ideal types were hypothetical and a reference not to something that is normatively ideal but to an ideational type, which serves as a mental model that can be widely shared and used because analysts agree that it captures some essential features of a phenomenon. The ideal type does not correspond to reality but seeks to condense essential features of it in the model so that one can better recognize its real characteristics when it is met. It is not an embodiment of one side or aspect but the synthetic ideational representation of complex phenomena from reality.

For instance, Weber's analysis took emergent terms and ideas that were current in actual bureaucracies at the time that he was writing and used them as the basis for theoretical construction of an ideal type of bureaucracy. They were a reconstruction of ordinary language in use into the ideal type. Now a certain normative slippage occurs in this process, because he is using ordinary language terms, as defined by members of organizations, to describe what it is that these members do. The members were those of the Prussian and German bureaucracies of the state and military. They were bounded by a ferociously strong sense of duty and

conformance. From the conceptual and empirical usages scholars identified some important characteristics of ideal types. They are,

- Ideal types are not general or average types. That is, they are not defined by the characteristics common to all phenomena or objects of study. They are formulated on the basis of certain typical traits, which are essential to the construction of an ideal type concept.
- Ideal types are not a presentation of total reality or they do not explain everything. They exhibit partial conception of the whole.
- Ideal types are neither a description of any definite concept of reality, nor a hypothesis, but they can aid both in description and explanation. Ideal types are different in scope and usage from descriptive concepts.
- In this sense we can say that ideal types are also related to the analytic conception of causality, though not, in deterministic terms.
- They also help in reaching to general propositions and in comparative analysis.
- Ideal types serve to guide empirical research, and are used in systematisation of data on historical and social reality.

Weber used ideal types in three distinctive ways. Indeed, his three kinds of ideal types are distinguished by three levels of abstraction. The first kind of ideal types are rooted in the historical particularities namely, Western city, the Protestant ethics etc. In reality, this kind of ideal types refer to the phenomena that appear only in the specific historical periods and in particular cultural areas. The second kind relates to the abstract elements of social reality, for example, the concepts of bureaucracy or feudalism. These elements of social reality are found in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. The third kind of ideal type relates to the reconstruction of a particular kind of behaviour (Coser 1977). In another word,Weber offered several varieties of ideal types:

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

To sum up, according to Weber an ideal-type is *not*. First, as a logical construct the ideal type does not *describe* empirical reality. Rather, it clarifies our conceptual understanding of what to look for in empirical data. Second, the ideal-type does not directly provide a *hypothesis* about reality. As a regulative principle it indirectly helps social scientists to construct research questions and hypotheses about social reality. Third, as a one-sided exaggeration the ideal-type does not provide an account of some '*average*' level of social reality.

**4. Theory of Power and Authority, Bureaucracy**

**4.1 Power**

For Max Weber, power is an aspect of social relationships. It refers to the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of another person. Power is present in social interaction and creates situations of inequality since the one who has power imposes it on others. The impact of power varies from situation to situation. On the one hand, it depends on the capacity of the powerful individual to exercise power. On the other hand it depends upon the extent to which it is opposed or resisted by the others. Weber says that power can be exercised in all walks of life. It is not restricted to a battlefield or to politics. It is to be observed in the market place, on a lecture platform, at a social gathering, in sports, scientific

discussions and even through charity. Weber discusses two contrasting sources of power. These are as follows:

1. Power which is derived from a constellation of interests that develop in a formally free market. For example, a group of producers of sugar controls supply of their production in the market to maximise their profit.
2. An established system of authority that allocates the right to command and the duty to obey. For example, in the army, a jawan is obliged to obey the command of his officer. The officer derives his power through an established system of authority.

As you have seen in the last point, any discussion of power leads us to think about its legitimacy. It is legitimacy, which according to Weber constitutes the core point of authority. Let us now examine the concept of authority.

**4. 2 Authority**

Authority is another important concept developed by Weber. Weber used the German word "Herrschaft", to expline dominance or authorities exercised in society. Different scholars translated this word in different ways such as 'authority', others as 'domination' or 'command'. Herrschaft is a situation in which a 'Herr' or master dominates or commands others. Raymond Aron (1967) defines Herrschaft as the master's ability to obtain the obedience of those who theoretically owe it to him. As we saw, power refers to the ability or capacity to control another. Authority refers to legitimised power. It means that the master has the right to command and can expect to be obeyed. For a system of authority to exist the following elements must be present:

1. An individual ruler/master or a group of rulers/masters.
2. An individual/group that is ruled.

3. The will of the ruler to influence the conduct of the ruled which may be expressed through commands.
4. Evidence of the influence of the rulers in terms of compliance or obedience shown by the ruled.
5. Direct or indirect evidence which shows that the ruled have internalised and accepted the fact that the ruler's commands must be obeyed.

We see that authority implies a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers believe that they have the legitimate right to exercise their authority. On the other hand, the ruled accept this power and comply with it, reinforcing its legitimacy. According to Weber, there are three systems of legitimation, each with its corresponding norms, which justify the power to command. It is these systems of legitimation which are designated as the following types of authority.

1. Traditional authority
2. Charismatic authority
3. Rational-legal authority

**Traditional Authority:** This system of legitimation flows from traditional action. In other words, it is based on customary law and the sanctity of ancient traditions. It is based on the belief that a certain authority is to be respected because it has existed since time immemorial.In traditional authority, rulers enjoy personal authority by virtue of their inherited status. Their commands are in accordance with customs and they also possess the right to extract compliance from the ruled. Often, they abuse their power. The persons who obey them are 'subjects' in the fullest sense of the term. They obey their master out of personal loyalty or a pious regard for his time-honoured status.

Briefly, traditional authority derives its legitimacy from longstanding traditions, which enable some to command and compel others to obey. It is hereditary authority and

does not require written rules. The ‘masters’ exercise their authority with the help of loyal relatives and friends. Weber considers this kind of authority as irrational. It is therefore rarely found in modern developed societies.

**Charismatic Authority:** Charisma means an extraordinary quality possessed by some individuals. This gives such people unique powers to capture the fancy and devotion of ordinary people. Charismatic authority is based on extraordinary devotion to an individual and to the way of life preached by this person. The legitimacy of such authority rests upon the belief in the supernatural or magical powers of the person. The charismatic leader ‘proves’ his/her power through miracles, military and other victories or the dramatic prosperity of the disciples. As long as charismatic leaders continue to ‘prove’ their miraculous powers in the eyes of their disciples, their authority stays intact. You may have realised that the type of social action that charismatic authority is related to is affective action. The disciples are in a highly charged emotional state as a result of the teachings and appeal of the charismatic leaders. They worship their hero.

**Rational-legal Authority:** The term refers to a system of authority, which are both, rational and legal. It is vested in a regular administrative staff who operate in accordance with certain written rules and laws. Those who exercise authority are appointed to do soon the basis of their achieved qualifications, which are prescribed and codified. Those in authority consider it a profession and are paid a salary. Thus, it is a rational system. It is legal because it is in accordance with the laws of the land which people recognise and feel obliged to obey. The people acknowledge and respect the legality of both, the ordinance and rules as well as the positions or titles of those who implement the rules. Rational-legal authority is a typical feature of modern society. It is the reflection of the process of rationalisation. Remember that Weber considers rationalisation as the key feature of western civilisation. It is, according to Weber, a specific product of human thought and deliberation. By now you have clearly

grasped the connection between rational-legal authority and rational action for obtaining goals.

**4. Bureaucracy**

According to Weber bureaucracy represents the pure ideal-type of legal-rational authority and it is a defining feature of modernity. Bureaucracy is organized on a hierarchical and rational basis. Individuals and departments are coordinated through explicit rules and procedures, records and files, functions and positions, a transparent line of command, and entry qualifications. It represents the most efficient exercise of power in conditions of complex and large-scale populations. In its most perfected form, bureaucracy organizes the permanent staff of the modern state.

He studied bureaucracy in detail and constructed an ideal type which contained the most prominent characteristics of bureaucracy. He identified six major characteristics of the ideal type bureaucracy:

1. Official duties and functions are performed by accredited staff.
2. Offices are structured into a hierarchy of command and supervision from higher authority to lower functions.
3. 'The bureau' or modern office is based on an accumulation of written documents and files, kept completely separate from private property.
4. Specialized office functions require personnel to acquire expert qualifications and training.
5. 'The bureau' demands that the official is fully dedicated to working conscientiously at full capacity.
6. General office rules are comprehensive, stable and must be learned as the special technical competence of the official.

According to Weber being a bureaucrat is a ‘vocation’. This involves a demanding set of prescribed duties and training and an unswerving, methodical and impersonal loyalty to ‘the office’ in return for ‘a secure existence’. Higher grades of officialdom demand ‘social esteem’ for their expertise in bureaucratic matters and qualifications. Unlike elected officials who are appointed or promoted ‘from below’, pure bureaucrats are appointed ‘from above’ by a superior authority. A legal right to ‘tenure for life’ allows them to discharge their duties free from personal interference and in strict accord with the rules. This independence is enhanced by a regular, albeit relatively modest, salary and pension. They also follow a fixed career structure that allows them to move up the hierarchy through examinations and qualifications.

**Class, Status and Party**

Weber’s concepts and contributions to stratification theory expanded and refined Marxianunderstandings of advanced industrial society.Like Marx, Weber believed that economic stratification produces social classes: ‘‘We mayspeak of a class when (1) a number of peoplehave in common a specific causal componentof their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economicinterests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is representedunder the conditions of the commodity or labormarkets.’’ Weber defines class as a situation where:

1. a large number of men have in common a specific causal factor influencing their chances in life, insofar as
2. this factor has to do only with the possession of economic goods and the interests involved in earning a living, and furthermore
3. the conditions of the market in commodities or labour.

Class situation depends on the probability of individuals using skills and resources to acquire goods, a position and ‘inner satisfaction’ under ‘pure’ competitive market conditions. In turn this always depends on the prior ownership and non-ownership of property.

But Weber suggested that classescould form in any market situation, and heargued that other forms of social stratificationcould occur independently of economics.Weber’s was a three dimensional model of stratification consisting of,

(1) social classes that areobjectively formed social groupings having aneconomic base;

(2) parties which are associations that arise through actions oriented towardthe acquisition of social power;

(3) statusgroups delineated in terms of social estimationsof honor or esteem.

In Weberian terms a class is more than apopulation segment that shares a particular economic position relative to the means of production. Classes reflect ‘‘communities of interest’’ and social prestige as well as economic position. Class members share lifestyles, preferences, and outlooks as a consequence of socialization, educational credentials, and the prestige of occupational and other power positions they hold, which also serve to cloak the economic class interests that lie beneath. This status ideology eases the way for class members to monopolize and maintain the prestige, power, and financial gain of higher socioeconomic positions, as only persons who seem like ‘‘the right kind’’ are allowed into preferred positions(Collins 1985).

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, whereas 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 groups 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 or status groups. Whatever they represent, parties are oriented to the attainment of power.

**3.3 Rationality and Modernity- Rationalisation**

According to Weber, the contemporary world is characterized by rationality. Max Weber believed that the key to understand modern society is to be found in its rational features and rationalising forces. For him, the modern Western world is characterised by rationality. As a result of this, humanactivity is marked by methodical calculation. Quantification, predictability and regularity become important. Individuals rely more on logic, reason and calculation than on supernatural beliefs.

Weber argues that one of the prime forces bringing about modernity is the process of rationalization. He uses the word rationalization in at least three different ways: He uses it to talk about means-ends calculation, in which rationality is individual and specific. Rational action is action based on the most efficient means to achieve a given end. Secondly, Weber

uses the term to talk about bureaucracies. The bureaucratic form is a method of organizing human behavior across time and space. Initially we used kinship to organize our behaviors, using the ideas of extended family, lineages, clans, moieties, and so forth. But as the contours of society changed, so did our method of organizing. Bureaucracy is a more rational form of organization than the traditional and emotive kinship system.

Finally, Weber uses the term rationalization in a more general sense. One way to think about it is to see rationalization as the opposite of enchantment. Specifically, an enchanted world is one filled with mystery and magic. Disenchantment, then, refers to the process of emptying the world of magical or spiritual forces. Part of this, of course, is in the religious sense of secularization. Peter Berger (1967) provides us with a good definition of secularization: "By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols" (p. 107).

Thus, both secularization and disenchantment refer to the narrowing of the religious or spiritual elements of the world. If we think about the world of magic or primitive religion, one filled with multiple layers of energies, spirits, demons, and gods, then in a very real way the world has been subjected to secularization from the beginning of religion. The number of spiritual entities has steadily declined from many, many gods to one; and the presence of a god has been removed from immediately available within every force (think of the gods of thunder, harvest, and so on) to completely divorced from the physical world, existing apart from time (eternal) and space (infinite). In our more recent past, secularization, and demystification and rationalization, have of course been carried further by science and capitalism.

This general process of rationalization and demystification extends beyond the realm of religion. Because of the prominence of bureaucracy, means-ends calculation, science, secularization, and so forth, our world is emptier. Weber sees this move toward

rationalization as historically unavoidable; it is above all else the defining feature of modernity. Yet it leads inexorably to an empty society. The organizational, intellectual, and cultural movements toward rationality have emptied the world of emotion, mystery, tradition, and affective human ties. We increasingly relate to our world through economic calculation, impersonal relations, and expert knowledge. Weber (1948) tells us that as a result of rationalization the "most sublime values have retreated from public life" and that the spirit "which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together" is gone (p. 155). Weber sees this not only as a condition of the religious or political institutions in society; he also sees the creative arts, like music and painting, as having lost their creative spirit as well.

In Weber's work we can identify different types of rationalities. The first type is *practical rationality*, which is defined by Kalberg as “every way of life that views and judgesworldly activity in relation to the individual’s purely pragmatic and egoistic interests” (1980:1151). 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-civilization ally 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 actionis limited. In that it involves cognitive processes, it need not affect action taken, and it has the potential tointroduce new patterns of action only indirectly. *Substantive rationality* (similar to practical rationality but unlike 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, thistype of rationality also exists trans-civilizationally and trans-historically, wherever consistent value postulates exist.

Finally, and most important from Kalberg's point of view, is *formal rationality,* which involves means–ends calculation (Cockerham, Abel, and Luschen, 1993). 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." As Brubaker puts it, "Common to the rationality of industrial capitalism, formalistic law and bureaucratic administration is its objectified, institutionalized, supra-individual form; in each sphere, rationality is embodied in the social structure and confronts individuals as something external tothem" (1984:9). 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, 1921/1978:1116)

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.

**3.4 The Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism**

First let us look at the importance of *The Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism* and the context in which Weber wrote it. He wrote *The Protestant Ethic* at a pivotal period of his intellectual career, shortly after his recovery from a depressive illness that had incapacitated him from serious academic work for a period of some four years. Prior to his sickness, most of Weber's works, although definitely presaging the themes developed in the later phase of his life, were technical researches in economic history, economics and jurisprudence. They include studies of mediaeval trading law (his doctoral dissertation), the development of Roman land-tenure, and the contemporary socioeconomic conditions of rural workers in the eastern part of Germany.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is probably Weber's best-known work. It is a clear example of his methodology. In it, he describes an ideal type of spirit of capitalism, he performs an historical-comparative analysis to determine how and when that kind of capitalism came to exist, and he uses the concept of verstehen to understand the subjective orientation and motivation of the actors.

Weber had three interrelated reasons for writing the book. First, he wanted to counter Marx's argument concerning the rise of capitalism—Weber characterizes Marx's historical materialism as "naive." The second reason is very closely linked to the first: Weber wanted to argue against brute structural force and argue for the effect that cultural values could have on

social action. The third reason that Weber wrote The Protestant Ethic was to explain why rational capitalism had risen in the West and nowhere else. Capitalism had been practiced previously. But it was traditional, not rational capitalism.

In traditional capitalism, traditional values and status positions still held; the elite would invest but would spend as little time and effort doing so in order to live as they were "accustomed to live." In other words, the elite invested in capitalistic ventures in order to maintain their lifestyle. It was, in fact, the existence of traditional values and status positions that prevented the rise of rational capitalism in some places. Rational capitalism, on the other hand, is practiced to increase wealth for its own sake and is based on utilitarian social relations.

These writings took their inspiration in some substantial part from the so-called ‘historical school’ of economics which, in conscious divergence from British political economy, stressed the need to examine economic life within the context of the historical development of culture as a whole. Weber always remained indebted to this standpoint. But the series of works hebegan on his return to health, and which preoccupied him for the remainder of his career, concern a range of problems much broader in compass than those covered in the earlier period. *The Protestant Ethic* was a first fruit of these new endeavours. An appreciation of what Weber sought to achieve in the book demands at least an elementary grasp of two aspects of the circumstances in which it was produced: the intellectual climate within which he wrote, and the connections between the work itself and the massive programme of study that he set himself in the second phase of his career.

In this earliest stage of his research Weber was interested in ascertaining the contribution made by a set of religious beliefs and practices to the development of the specific form of modern (‘‘rational’’) capitalism as found in Western Europe and the US. What marked this modern form of capitalism as new was especially the emphasis on the

systematic organization of work done by laborers hired on a formally free market, and enterprises devoted to the pursuit of increasing profit without the constraints of traditionalism. Here as elsewhere in his work

Weber recognized that there had been other prior forms of capitalism in Europe as well as non western capitalistic forms and practices. Likewise, he acknowledged that the rise of capitalism as a specific economic system in modern Europe had many causes, both material and cultural. His central problem here was, first and primarily, to explain the rise, not of capitalism as a system, but of the peculiar ‘‘spirit’’(ethos, mentality) of this new economic system, and second, to show how this new ethos made specific contributions to the intensive growth of modern capitalism in its most crucial stages, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hence, the problems he addressed were complex, yet circumscribed, as were his hypotheses, lines of argument, interpretations of evidence, and conclusions. This is not to say that his arguments were free of ambiguities, nor that the evidence he marshaled was completely convincing.

What was the new ‘‘spirit’’ of capitalism that Weber took as the object of his inquiry? He described it as an ethic, albeit a secular one, lacking immediate religious foundation or reference, yet prescribing as a moral duty the pursuit of earning more and more money as an end in itself. Whether as an entrepreneur, independent craftsman, or laborer, an individual is obliged to make the acquisition of money from their occupation the center of their life.

At the same time, the individual is also duty bound not to pursue wealth in order to spend money for the enjoyment of luxury or leisure. The acquisition of wealth is its own reward. Waste of time or money is admonished; frugality, reinvestment, and credit worthiness are virtues. Although the historical origins of this distinctly modern frame of mind are unclear, Weber believed that this new positive moral outlook on the acquisition of money had emerged in America and Western Europe by the eighteenth century. One of the

surprising claims is that Weber's spirit of capitalism grew and flourished largely independently of the system of capitalism itself.

Weber acknowledges that Benjamin Franklin, though a great exemplar of the new spirit, did not fit the model of the modern capitalist, nor was capitalism very advanced in its development in Franklin's America. This fact of the independent origin of the capitalist spirit, however, served Weber's view that it was not an ideology springing from the economic system that was its rationale, as Marxism might have posited. However, if the modern spirit of capitalism was not a product of the form or system of capitalism, the question becomes all the more urgent: Whatwere the sources of this new attitude toward the acquisition of wealth, an attitude that became, as Weber put it, a leading principle of capitalism?

In his search for the historical origins of capitalism's modern spirit, Weber took as his point of departure the contemporary controversies over the respective orientations of Roman Catholics and Protestants toward capitalistic economic activities. In this context it had been noted as a matter of empirical fact that Protestants were more likely than Catholics to be involved in the more innovative and technically skilled types of capitalistic activity and at the same time were more likely to pursue the patterns of training and education appropriate for such work. Likewise, they tended to be more prosperous than their more tradition bound Catholic counterparts. The attempts to explain these differences were the stuff of wide rangingif unproductive controversies at the time Weber himself began to take up the questions.

As Weber probed the possible sources of the differences he found them to lie in the early history of Protestantism. First, Luther and Lutheranism made key contributions, particularly in advancing the idea that worldly economic activities in pursuit of a livelihood were worthy ‘‘vocations,’’ thereby providing enterprise and work with moral sanction. This, Weber reasoned, provided the impetus for individuals to devote themselves to worldly

economic activeity to a greater extent than in circumstances where tradition had dictated that work was either morally neutral or even evil, albeit necessary for economic sustenance.

Second, Calvin and Calvinism provided additional, crucial incentives to work unstintingly in one's economic vocation. Here, Weber's line of argument about the connections between religious beliefs and economic activities becomes intricate and turn son the paradox of unintended consequences.

Weber's central problem was to explain why capitalism first arose in the West and not in other parts of the world. Core features of capitalism, 'the impulse to acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money', had been around for a long time and in many places. 'Unlimited greed' cannot be the defining feature. In fact the opposite may be the case: 'Capitalism *may* even be identical with the restraint, or at least a rational tempering, of this irrational impulse' (1930: 17).

Something else lay behind the 'peculiar rationalism of Western culture'. 'Capitalism', according to Weber, existed in other societies like China, India, Babylon, in the classical world and in the Middle Ages. But in each case the road to economic rationalism was barred. By what? 'Magical and religious forces' obstructed the development of rational capitalism according to Weber. They lacked a guiding idea, an 'ethos' or a 'spirit' favourable to rational capitalism. Crucially, only in the West did 'the rational capitalist organization of (formally) free labour' appear (1930: 21). Free labour is decisive for Weber: 'Exact calculation – the basis of everything else – is only possible on a basis of free labour' (1930: 22).

## KEY CONCEPTS

**Bureaucracy:** An organization based on impersonal, standardized rules and procedures implemented by separate, hierarchically ordered positions dedicated to performing specialized tasks.

**Charisma:** The "gift of grace" demonstrated through miracles, acts of heroism, or the pronouncement of divine revelations.

**Charismatic Authority:** Dominance based on disciples' belief, trust, and devotion in recognition of their leader's charisma.

**Calling:** The Protestant doctrine asserting that each individual has a "life-task" to be performed as a glorification of God.

**Iron Cage:** Dominance of material acquisition and impersonal, bureaucratic forms of organization resulting in the decay of the human spirit and the disenchantment of the world.

**Legitimacy:** Possessing the ability to "rightfully" exercise domination over others. Synonymous with *authority*.

**Status:** A positive or negative social estimation of honor expressed through "styles of life" or patterns of consumption.

**Class:** People who share life chances or possibilities that are determined by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income within the commodity and labor markets.

**Ideal Types :** Analytical constructs against which real-life cases can be compared.

**Nonrational Motivation for Action:** Action that is motivated primarily by values, norms, morals, traditions, the creation of meaning, and/or emotional states.

**Party:** Group aimed at influencing a communal action no matter what it content may be.

**Power:** The chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others.

**Power:** The chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others.

**Protestant Ethic:** Methodical, rational attitude toward worldly affairs that characterized Protestant asceticism.

**Rational Motivation for Action:** Action that relies on the "rational" or strategic choices of actors, where individuals and group actions are motivated primarily by the attempt to maximize benefits and reduce costs.

**Rationalization :** An ongoing process in which social interaction and institutions become increasingly governed by methodical procedures and calculable rules.

**Rational-Legal Authority:** Domination based on the rule of impersonal laws. Obedience is owed to the office or position in which authority is vested.

**Traditional Authority:** Dominance based on the established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions. Subjects owe their obedience to their "master," whose demands for compliance and loyalty are legitimated by sacred, inviolable traditions.

***Verstehen*:** Interpretive understanding.

**References and Further Readings**


1. Bendix, Reinhard. (1960). *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*, London: Heinman.
2. Freund, Julien. (1968). *The Sociology of Max Weber*, New York: Random House
3. Indira Gandhi National Open University Course Material (2005). *Sociological Thought*, IGNOU: New Delhi
4. Aron, R. (1967). *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2, London Penguin Books.
5. Mitchell, G.D. (ed.) (1968). *A Dictionary of Sociology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
6. Weber, M. (1930[1905]) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London:Unwin University Books.
7. Weber, M. (1949) *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. E.A. Shils and H. Finch(eds). New York: Free Press.
8. Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, Volumes Iand II*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

# MODULE 4

# GEORG SIMMEL

**Chapter outline**

4.1 Formal Sociology, Sociation and Group formation

4.2 Relationships and Social types

4.3 Philosophy of Money

4.4 Modernity - Metropolis

**Objective of this Chapter**

- Examine the contribution of Simmel for the development of Classical sociological theories.
- Understanding the social and biographical details of Simmel
- Examine the Simmel's contribution to Formal Sociology and to the understanding of Sociation and Group formation
- Discuss Simmel's contribution to understand social and philosophical meaning of money in the modern time.
- Discuss about the concept of modernity and metropolis in Simmel's work.

## 1. Introduction

In this fourth and final module we will discuss about the contribution of Georg Simmel to the classical sociological theories. We will discuss about four important contribution of Simmel to the discipline of Sociology. In the first part we will looks at his methodological perspective and his contributions to the development of formal Sociology. In the second part we will

examine the concept of sociation and Group formation. In the third part we will analyze Simmel's contributions to understanding of relationships and Social types in society. In the fourth section we will discuss Simmel's most important and well known contribution to understand social and philosophical meaning of money in the modern time. In the final section we will discuss about the concept of modernity and metropolis in Simmel's work.

As we know, Georg Simmel was Weber's contemporary and a cofounder of the German Sociological Society. Simmel was a somewhat atypical sociological theorist. For one thing, he had an immediate and profound effect on the development of American sociological theory, whereas Marx and Weber were largely ignored for a number of years. Simmel's work helped shape the development of one of the early centers of American sociology—the University of Chicago—and its major theory, symbolic interactionism.

The Chicago school and symbolic interactionism came, as we will see, to dominate American sociology in the 1920s and early 1930s (Bulmer, 1984). Simmel's ideas were influential at Chicago mainly because the dominant figures in the early years of Chicago, Albion Small and Robert Park, had been exposed to Simmel's theories in Berlin in the late 1800s. Park attended Simmel's lectures in 1899 and 1900, and Small carried on an extensive correspondence with Simmel during the 1890s. They were instrumental in bringing Simmel's ideas to students and faculty at Chicago, in translating some of his work, and in bringing it to the attention of a large scale American audience.

Another atypical aspect of Simmel's work is his "level" of analysis, or at least that level for which he became best known in America. Whereas Weber and Marx were preoccupied with large-scale issues like the rationalization of society and a capitalist economy, Simmel was best known for his work on smaller-scale issues, especially individual action and interaction. He became famous early for his thinking, derived from Kantian

philosophy, on *forms* of interaction (for example, conflict) and *types* of interactants (for example, the stranger).

Basically, Simmel saw that understanding interaction among people was one of the major tasks of sociology. However, it was impossible to study the massive number of interactions in social life without some conceptual tools. This is where forms of interaction and types of interactants came in. Simmel felt that he could isolate a limited number of forms of interaction that could be found in a large number of social settings. Thus equipped, one could analyze and understand these different interaction settings. The development of a limited number of types of interactants could be similarly useful in explaining interaction settings. This work had a profound effect on symbolic interactionism, which, as the name suggests, was focally concerned with interaction.

One of the ironies, however, is that Simmel also was concerned with large-scale issues similar to those that obsessed Marx and Weber. However, this work was much less influential than his work on interaction, although there are contemporary signs of a growing interest in the large-scale aspects of Simmel's sociology. It was partly Simmel's style in his work on interaction that made him accessible to early American sociological theorists. Although he wrote heavy tomes like those of Weber and Marx, he also wrote a set of deceptively simple essays on such interesting topics as poverty, the prostitute, the miser and the spendthrift, and the stranger.

The brevity of such essays and the high interest level of the material made the dissemination of Simmel's ideas much easier. Unfortunately, the essays had the negative effect of obscuring Simmel's more massive works (for example, *Philosophy of Money*, translated in 1978), which were potentially as significant to sociology. Nevertheless, it was partly through the short and clever essays that Simmel had a much more significant effect on early American sociological theory than either Marx or Weber did.

There are four basic levels of concern in Simmel's work. First are his assumptions about the psychological workings of social life. Second is his interest in the sociological workings of interpersonal relationships. Third is his work on the structure of and changes in the social and cultural "spirit" of his times. He also adopted the principle of emergence, which is the idea that higher levels emerge from the lower levels. Finally, he dealt with his views in the nature and inevitable fate of humanity. His most microscopic work dealt with forms and the interaction that takes place with different types of people. The forms include subordination, super-ordination, exchange, conflict and sociability.

## 2. Biographical Sketch

Georg Simmel was born on March 1, 1858, in the very heart of Berlin, the corner of Leipzigerstrasse and Friedrichstrasse. This was a curious birthplace--it would correspond to Times Square in New York--but it seems symbolically fitting for a man who throughout his life lived in the intersection of many movements, intensely affected by the cross-currents of intellectual traffic and by a multiplicity of moral directions. Simmel was a modern urban man, without roots in traditional folk culture.

Simmel was the youngest of seven children. His father, a prosperous Jewish businessman who had converted to Christianity, died when Simmel was still young. A friend of the family, the owner of a music publishing house, was appointed the boy's guardian. Simmel's relation to his domineering mother was rather distant; he seems not to have had any roots in a secure family environment, and a sense of marginality and insecurity came early to the young Simmel. After graduating from Gymnasium, Simmel studied history and philosophy at the University of Berlin with some of the most important academic figures of the day: the historians Mommsen, Treitschke, Sybel and Droysen, the philosophers Harms

and Zeller, the art historian Hermann Grimm, the anthropologists Lazarus and Steinthal (who were the founders of Voelkerpsychologie), and the psychologist Bastian.

By the time he received his doctorate in philosophy in 1881 (his thesis was entitled "The Nature of Matter According to Kant's Physical Monadology"), Simmel was familiar with vast field of knowledge extending from history to philosophy and from psychology to the social sciences. This catholicity of tastes and interests marked his entire subsequent career.Deeply tied to the intellectual milieu of Berlin, both inside and outside the university, Simmel did not follow the example of most German academic men who typically moved from one university to another both during their studies and after; instead, he decided to stay at the University of Berlin, where he became a Privatdozent (an unpaid lecturer dependent on student fees) in 1885.

His courses ranged from logic and the history of philosophy to ethics, social psychology, and sociology. He lectured on Kant, Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Nietzsche, among many others. Often during a single academic year he would survey new trends in sociology as well as in metaphysics. He was a very popular lecturer and his lectures soon became leading intellectual events, not only for students but for the cultural elite of Berlin. In spite of the fascination he called forth, however, his academic career turned out to be unfortunate, even tragic.

He was the author of six books and more than seventy articles, many of which had been translated into English, French, Italian, Polish, and Russian. Yet, whenever Simmel attempted to gain an academic promotion, he was rebuffed. Whenever a senior position became vacant at one of the German universities, Simmel competed for it. Although his applications were supported by the recommendations of leading scholars, Max Weber among others, they did not meet with success.

After his dissertation, his first publication, entitled On Social Differentiation (1890), was devoted to sociological problems, but for a number of years thereafter he published mainly in the field of ethics and the philosophy of history, returning to sociology only at a later date. His two major early works, The Problems of the Philosophy of History and the two volumes of the Introduction to the Science of Ethics, were published in 1892-93; these were followed in 1900 by his seminal work, The Philosophy of Money, a book on the borderline between philosophy and sociology. After several smaller volumes on religion, on Kant and Goethe, and on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, Simmel produced his major sociological work, Sociology: Investigations on the Forms of Sociation, in 1908. Much of its content had already been published previously in journal articles.

He then turned away from sociological questions for almost a decade, but he returned to them in the small volume published in 1917, Fundamental Questions of Sociology. His other books in the last period of his life dealt with cultural criticism (Philosophische Kultur, 1911), with literary and art criticism (Goethe, 1913, and Rembrandt, 1916), and with the history of philosophy (Hauptprobleme der Philosophie, 1910). His last publication, Lebensanschauung (1918), set forth the vitalistic philosophy he had elaborated toward the end of his life.

### 3. Formal Sociology, Sociation and Group formation

Simmel played an important role in developing a distinctive methodology for the social science which gave an independent status to sociology as a special discipline. Simmel rejected sociology as a comprehensive study of all social facts, since as such it would be only a label for numerous special disciplines treating different aspects of the same general object, human life and its products. But if sociology has no concrete object of its own, it nevertheless gains a special object of cognition by isolating analytically the aspect of interaction from the

whole of social reality. Interactions are to be analyzed not only where they have crystallized into relatively permanent structures or social institutions, but also on the level of the more transitory interpersonal relations. This emphasis on the subinstitutional, or microsociological, was novel for his time.

Simmel was also impatient with the confusion between sociology and the philosophy of history or social philosophy, and he wanted sociology to keep close to observable phenomena, leaving all metaphysical interpretations that transcend objective knowledge to what he later (1917) called "philosophical sociology." However, Simmel did not conceive of sociology in a positivistic fashion, as a science of laws. He had early rejected the use of natural science as a model for the disciplines dealing with man and his creations, and he did not side with the positivists in the hotly debated issue of the idiographic as against the nomothetic character of social science. Rather, he attempted to play down any such distinction by pointing out that both viewpoints are alternative modes of perception. But the search for social laws never appeared promising to him.

As early as 1890 he wrote that since a given event may have several and alternative causes, so that it can be produced by varying constellations of factors, it is usually impossible to formulate rules about a lawful association of isolated variables. When he himself described some specific regularity in his substantive analyses he repeatedly pointed out that this was not to be taken as a "law," but only as a descriptive generalization, leaving quite open which causes might produce it under varying conditions. Simmel expressly denied the existence of laws of social development or of history in general and once even suggested that what we now know as natural laws may at some later time be revealed to be superstitions.

Simmel did not reject the possibility of causal explanation in the realm of human life and its products. But such explanation was for him essentially psychological in nature.

Ultimately, the genesis of specific social forms and cultural objec-tifications must be derived psychologically. In his substantive analyses, Simmel again and again offered psychological explanations for the phenomena he described, both in terms of the conscious motives, interests, or goals of the individuals involved, and in terms of unconscious psychic mechanisms determining the reactions of these individuals. But he did not draw on any systematic psychological theory; rather, his often strikingly sensitive and perceptive explanations seem the result of introspection and conjecture.

In 1890 Simmel defined the subject matter of sociology as consisting of interactions and interrelations, but he did not remain content with this definition. Later, going back to the basic distinction made in his philosophy, he demanded that the forms of interaction be distinguished from their contents and held that only the former constitute sociology's special object of cognition. Still later (1917), this seems to have appeared too restrictive to him, and he conceived of a "general sociology" in addition to formal sociology; but he failed to make its approach clear.

The contents of interaction are its motive powers –individual drives, purposes, interests, and so forth. The forms of interaction, or social forms, are not structured real entities (analogous to the forms of culture) but abstract, analytical aspects of social reality. They might best be conceived of as basic structural configurations or structuring principles. Simmel found a justification for this distinction in the seeming independence of forms and contents: the same structural principle can be observed in groups or relations characterized by widely divergent contents, while the same content (interest, purpose) may be found expressed in different forms of social organization.

Simmel's attempt to explain the concept of social form with a misleading analogy between sociology and geometry and his admitted failure to make his methodological

principle quite explicit did much to provoke criticism of his "formal sociology." Such criticism was especially directed against the form-content distinction, on the grounds that in social reality the structural details of any concrete group and its particular syndrome of "contents" are inseparably linked. This is true and, incidentally, is quite obvious from Simmer's own analyses.

But Simmel expressly distinguished the forms of sociation from their embodiment in special social units. Conceived of as very general, abstract structural principles, or basic modes of interrelationship among social elements, the forms of sociation can indeed be isolated analytically. Structural principles that Simmel himself named are the relation of superordination-subordination; the relation of antagonism (conflict); the division of labor, or relation of functional interdependence; the in-group-outgroup relation and the related principle of party formation; the principle of representation; the principles of spatial and temporal structuring; and the quantitative dimension. Other structural principles are implied in Simmel's writings, such as the dependence-autonomy dimension, which plays such a crucial role in his analysis of group membership and individuality.

The specific task of sociology was for Simmel not the causal explanation of these social forms, but the analysis of their objective meaning. This distinction is analogous to one commonly made in the analysis of forms of culture, such as objects of art and systems of ideas: they possess an objective meaning, which is something distinct from their psychologically explained genesis. The objective meaning (the analogy does not fit completely) of social forms rested for Simmel in their essential characteristics and range of empirical variation, on the one hand, and in their consequences, on the other. His Soziologie (1908b) contains several chapters devoted to the analysis of selected structural principles in these terms. In other chapters he started by focusing on a specific type of group (e.g., secret

societies) or class of persons (e.g., the stranger, the poor man, the aristocrat) and proceeded to show how they are characterized and determined by a unique constellation of several of these structural principles.

Where Simmel dealt with the essential characteristics of some social form, his writing has a strongly phenomenological flavor. But the inclusion of the consequences or effects of social forms breaks this confinement and links his formal approach with his theory of social development, since he selected for analysis the consequences of given structural configurations either for individualization or for the preservation and functioning of groups. This procedure is obvious not only in the topical chapters on these subjects, but also where he treated specific structural principles (e.g., conflict), special types of relationship, such as marriage, or special types of groups, such as secret societies. Thus his *Soziologie,* often criticized for being an unsystematic collection of substantive analyses only vaguely connected with his formal approach, really does possess a surprising—if partly implicit—internal coherence.

Georg Simmel, as we have already mentioned, rejected the organicist theories of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer and German historical tradition. He did not believe that society can be viewed as a thing or organism as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer did. For him society is “an intricate web of multiple relations between individuals who are in constant interaction with one another: society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interactions” (Coser 1971: 178).

Simmel introduced the term sociation, which he believed to be the major field of study for the students of society. Sociation implies the particular patterns and forms in which human beings relate to each other and interact. According to him society is nothing more than all the individuals who constitute it. But here he has also drawn attention to the fact that

people in groups of different sizes – dyads, i.e., two persons, triads i.e., three people, or groups with more than three persons, interact differently from each other.

A qualitative change in terms of organisation takes place with the increase in number of persons in a group. According to Georg Simmel there cannot be a totalistic social science, which studies all aspects of social phenomenon, for even in natural sciences there is no one "total" science of all matter. Therefore, he states that science must study dimensions or aspects of phenomena instead of global wholes or totalities. In this context he believes that the task of sociology is to describe and analyse particular forms of human interaction and their crystallisation in group characteristics, such as, the state, the clan, the family, the city etc. He says that all human behaviour is behaviour of individuals but a large part of this human behaviour can be understood if we understand the social group to which the individuals belong and the kind of constraints they face in particular forms of interaction. He emphasised the study offorms of interaction and this approach gave impetus to rise of formalsociology. Let us discuss this point further.

### 3.1 Sociation

Simmel coins the idea of 'sociation' (*Vergesellschaftung*) to address these infinitesimal forms of interaction. Sociation refers to those stable and patterned forms of reciprocal interaction between individuals who are 'with-one-another, for-one-another, in-one-another, againstone- another, and through-one-another, in state and commune, in church and economic association, in family and in clubs' (Simmel, 1971: 127). At every moment people look at each other, are jealous, write text messages, advertise on social networking sites, take lunch with each other, attend sports, gossip, dress up and adorn themselves (or dress down and appear casual):

> all the thousands of relations from person to person, momentary or enduring, conscious or unconscious, fleeting or momentous, from which the above examples are taken quite at random, continually bind us together. (1997: 110)

Sociation is malleable, tenacious and reciprocal. Individuals form themselves and society through ‘innumerable, specific relations and in the feeling and knowledge of determining others and of being determined by them’ (1971: 7). Sociation emerges at ‘the intersection of various social circles’ and is subject to their distinctive weave and woof (Simmel, 1976). Society and individuality are merely different aspects of the same social reality: We perform the synthesis ‘social being’. We are capable of constructing the notion of society from the very idea of beings, each of whom may feel himself as the *terminus a quo* [starting point] and the *terminus ad quem* [end point] of his developments and destinies and qualities. And we do construct this concept of society, which is built up from that of the potentially autonomous individual, as the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of the individual’s very life and fate. (Simmel, 1971: 18)

Simmel develops a geometrical notion of social circles. In modernityindividuals belong to a wide range of social circles: family (parental,spouses and self), occupation (superiors, subordinates, colleagues), club,party, trade union, professional body, neighbourhood, voluntary group,through to the widest circles of social class or national identity (Simmel,1976: 97). Points of contact between social circles shift as individualsjoin or leave, ensuring that the elements of objective culture are continuallyre-combined in new ways.

Sociation is not the same thing as ‘society’. Society cannot be grasped inits entirety all at once. Simmel located his concept of sociation withinthe standard dispute of his time about ‘society’:One side mystically exaggerates its significance, contending that onlythrough

society is human life endowed with reality. The other regards itas a mere abstract concept by means of which the observer draws therealities, which are individual human beings, into a whole, as one callstrees and brooks, houses and meadows, a ‘landscape’. (1997: 120)Society is not a thing-like substance. For Simmel (1971: 27) there isno such thing as society ‘as such’ or interaction ‘as such’. Society isfundamentally a relational concept; it exists only in and throughforms of sociation.

Instead of treating society as an independentsubstance, as with Durkheim’s social facts, for Simmel ‘everythinginteracts in some way with everything else’.It is only through specific social forms that society also emerges.Sociation is neither the cause nor the consequence of society; it *is* society.Society as a complex whole is not the sum of individual people inthe same way that a collection of individual trees becomes a forest.Society is a ‘synthesis’ or a unity of individuals in countless interactions,connections and forms of association. While sociation extracts and distilsinto a definite *form* what is specifically ‘social’ the abstract idea of ‘society’is merely a ‘frame’ which contains the innumerable

**4. Relationships and Social types**

According to Georg Simmel there are no “pure” forms existing in anysocial reality. All social phenomena consist of a number of formal elements. These formal elements are like those of cooperation and conflict, subordination and superordination etc. Thus, there is no “pure” conflict or“pure” cooperation found in society. The “pure” forms are only abstractions which are not found in real society but have been created by Georg Simmel to study the real, existing social life. There is, therefore, a similarity between Georg Simmel’s “forms” and Max Weber’s concept of “ideal types” about which you will learn later in this course. Complementary to the concept of social form, Georg Simmel discussed the concept of social types**.**

In the study of society, Georg Simmel made an attempt to understand a whole range of social types such as “the stranger”, “the mediator”, “the poor”, and so on. His social types were complementary to his concept of social forms**.** A social type becomes a type because of his/ her relations with others who assign a certain position to this person and have certain expectations of him/ her. The characteristics of the social type are, therefore, seen as the features of social structure.

To explain his social type, Georg Simmel gives the example of “the stranger” in his book, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950). The stranger has been described by Simmel as a “person who comes today and stays tomorrow”. This stranger is someone who has a particular place in the society within the social group which he has entered. The social position of this stranger is determined by the fact that he or she does not belong to this group from the beginning. It is this status of the stranger which determines his or her role in the new social group and also the interaction that takes place.

As a stranger, a person is simultaneously both near to one as well as distant. Not being part of the social group the stranger can look at it objectively without being biased. Thus, the stranger can be an ideal intermediary in any kind of exchange of ideas or goods. In this way, the position of the stranger is fixed in a society and defined. This is only example of Georg Simmel’s social types. He has discussed several others too, such as, “the poor”, “the adventurer”, etc. (Coser, 1971: 183).

5. **Philosophy of Money**

We should not leave Simmel without saying something about *Philosophy ofMoney* (1907/1978), because its English translation made Simmel’s work attractive toa whole new set of theorists interested in culture and society. Although a macro orientation is clearer in *Philosophy of Money*, it always existed in Simmel’s work. For example, it is clear in his famous work on the dyad and the triad. Simmel thought that some crucial sociological

developments take place when a two-person group (or *dyad*) is transformed into a *triad* by the addition of a third party. Social possibilities emerge that simply could not exist in a dyad.

For example, in a triad, one of the members can become an arbitrator or mediator of the differences between the other two. More important, two of the members can band together and dominate the other member. This represents on a small scale what can happen with the emergence of large-scale structures that become separate from individuals and begin to dominate them. This theme lies at the base of *Philosophy of Money*. Simmel was concerned primarily with the emergence in the modern world of a money economy that becomes separate from the individual and predominant. This theme, in turn, is part of an even broader and more pervasive one in Simmel's work: the domination of the culture as a whole over the individual.

As Simmel saw it, in the modern world, the larger culture and all its various components (including the money economy) expand, and as they expand, the importance of the individual decreases. Thus, for example, as the industrial technology associated with a modern economy expands and grows more sophisticated, the skills and abilities of the individual worker grow progressively less important. In the end, the worker is confronted with an industrial machine over which he or she can exert little, if any, control. More generally, Simmel thought that in the modern world, the expansion of the larger culture leads to the growing insignificance of the individual. Although sociologists have become increasingly attuned to the broader implications of Simmel's work, his early influence was primarily through his studies of small scale social phenomena, such as the forms of interaction and types of interactants.

Simmel's major work concerns money and the social meaning of money. In this book Simmel is concerned with large social issues, and this book can be thought of as on a par with *The Division of Labour* of Durkheim, although not as extensive and thorough as

Marx's *Capital* or Weber's *Economy and Society*. In his book *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel is concerned with money as a symbol, and what some of the effects of this are for people and society. In modern society, money becomes an impersonal or objectified measure of value. This implies impersonal, rational ties among people that are institutionalized in the money form. For example, relations of domination and subordination become quantitative relationships of more and less money -- impersonal and measurable in a rational manner. The use of money distances individuals from objects and also provides the means of overcoming this distance. The use of money allows much greater flexibility for individuals in society -- to travel greater distances and to overcome person-to-person limitations.

Simmel thus suggests that the spread of the money form gives individuals a freedom of sorts by permitting them to exercise the kind of *individualized* control over "impression management" that was not possible in traditional societies. ... ascribed identities have been discarded. Even strangers become familiar and knowable identities insofar as they are willing to use a common but impersonal means of exchange. At the same time, personal identity becomes problematic, so that development of the money form has both positive and negative consequences. That is, individual freedom is potentially increased greatly, but there are problems of alienation, fragmentation, and identity construction.

*The Philosophy of Money* (1907/1978) illustrates well the breadth and sophistication of Simmel's thinking (Deflem, 2003). It demonstrates conclusively that Simmel deserves at least as much recognition for his general theory as for his essays on microsociology, 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, as we have already seen,

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." (Siegfried Kracauer, cited in Bottomore and Frisby, 1978:7). Finally, and most generally, Simmel saw money as a specific component of life capable of helping us understand the totality of life. As Tom Bottomore and David Frisby put it, Simmel sought no less than to extract "the totality of the spirit of the age from his analysis of money" (1978:7).

*The Philosophy of Money* has much in common with the work of Karl Marx. Like Marx, Simmel focused on capitalism and the problems created by a money economy. Despite this common ground, however, the differences are overwhelming. For example, Simmel saw the economic problems of his time as simply a specific manifestation of a more general cultural problem, the alienation of objective from subjective culture (Poggi, 1993). To Marx these problems are specific to capitalism, but to Simmel they are part of a universal tragedy—the increasing powerlessness of the individual in the face of the growth of objective culture.

Whereas Marx's analysis is historically specific, Simmel's analysis seeks to extract timeless truths from the flux of human history. As Frisby says, "In his *The Philosophy of Money* . . . [w]hat is missing . . . is a historical sociology of money relationships" (1984:58). This difference in their analyses is related to a crucial political difference between Simmel and Marx. Because Marx saw economic problems as time-bound, the product of capitalist

society, he believed that eventually they could be solved. Simmel, however, saw the basic problems as inherent in human life and held out no hope for future improvement.

In fact, Simmel believed that socialism, instead of improving the situation, would heighten the kinds of problems discussed in *The Philosophy of Money*. Despite some substantive similarities to Marxian theory, Simmel's thought is far closer to that of Weber and his "iron cage" in terms of his image of both the modern world and its future. *The Philosophy of Money* begins with a discussion of the general forms of money and value. Later the discussion moves to the impact of money on the "inner world" of actors and on culture in general. Because the argument is so complex, it is only highlighted here.

One of Simmel's initial concerns in the work, as we discussed briefly earlier, is the relationship between money and value (Kamolnick, 2001). In general, he argued that people create value by making objects, separating themselves from those objects, and then seeking to overcome the "distance, obstacles, difficulties" (Simmel, 1907/1978:66).The greater the difficulty of obtaining an object, the greater its value. However, difficulty of attainment has a "lower and an upper limit" (Simmel, 1907/1978:72). 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 time 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 tous. 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.

**6. Modernity - Metropolis**

One of Simmel's most notable essays is *The Metropolis and Mental Life* from 1903, which was originally given as one of a series of lectures on all aspects of city life by experts in various fields, ranging from science and religion to art. The series was conducted alongside the Dresden cities exhibition of 1903. Simmel was originally asked to lecture on the role of intellectual (or scholarly) life in the big city, but he effectively reversed the topic in order to analyze the effects of the big city on the mind of the individual. As a result, when the lectures were published as essays in a book, to fill the gap, the series editor had to supply an essay on the original topic himself.

The *Metropolis and Mental Life* was not particularly well received during Simmel's lifetime. The organizers of the exhibition over-emphasized its negative comments about city life, because Simmel also pointed out positive transformations. During the twenties the essay was influential on the thinking of Robert E. Park and other American sociologists at the University of Chicago who collectively became known as the "Chicago School". It gained wider circulation in the 1950s when it was translated into English and published as part of Kurt Wolff's edited collection, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. It now appears regularly on the reading lists of courses in urban studies and architecture history. However, it is important to note that the notion of the blasé is actually not the central or final point of the essay, but is

part of a description of a sequence of states in an irreversible transformation of the mind. In other words, Simmel does not quite say that the big city has an overall negative effect on the mind or the self, even as he suggests that it undergoes permanent changes. It is perhaps this ambiguity that gave the essay a lasting place in the discourse on the metropolis.

The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life. The antagonism represents the most modern form of the conflict which primitive man must carry on with nature for his own bodily existence. The eighteenth century may have called for liberation from all the ties which grew up historically in politics, in religion, in morality and in economics in order to permit the original natural virtue of man, which is equal in everyone, to develop without inhibition.

The nineteenth century may have sought to promote, in addition to man's freedom, his individuality (which is connected with the division of labor) and his achievements which make him unique and indispensable but which at the same time make him so much the more dependent on the complementary activity of others; Nietzsche may have seen the relentless struggle of the individual as the prerequisite for his full development, while socialism found the same thing in the suppression of all competition, but in each of these the same fundamental motive was at work, namely the resistance of the individual to being leveled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism.

## 7. Conclusions

In this final module we discussed the contributions of Georg Simmel to the development of classical sociological theory. In the first part we gave a short description of his biography and details of the socio-historical background in which he developed his perspective on sociology and social theory. Then we have presented to you some of the central ideas of

Simmel, such as his formal sociology, his description of the social types, his ideas on the roleof money in society and finally his ideas about modern culture.

Simmel is unique among the four leading classical theorists in emphasizing themicro level. However, he moved back and forth between micro and macro levels, showing how similar types of social processes can be manifested at different levels. Although his intellectual environment was permeated by German historicism, his work dealt mainly with forms or patterns of interaction. Both social conflict and social cohesion can be regarded as basic forms of interaction in his perspective. This focus on both conflict and cohesion allows for incorporation of Durkheim's emphasis on interdependence and solidarity plus Marx's analysis of class conflict. Simmel also contrasted forms of interaction and patterns of individual involvement in small-scale social settings and those in larger social systems, and he emphasized how the latter are becoming more and more important in modern society.

## KEY CONCEPTS

**Blasé Attitude:** An intellectualized approach to life, void of an emotional investment in "differences," that protects the individual from becoming overwhelmed by the intensity of city life.

**Content:** The drives, purposes, interests, or inclinations that lead individuals to interact with each other.

**Forms:** This is a concept given by Georg Simmel. The various "shapes" of interaction through which individuals pursue their interests and satisfy their desires. It refers to the underlying uniformities of patterns of interaction of individuals, social actors in social, political economic fields.

**Types:** This concept too has been given by Georg Simmel and is related to his concept of social forms. An individual's identity derived from her relationship to others. He has described a wholerange of types from "the stranger", "the adventuror" to the "the renegade". According to such concept as "the stranger", a person is a stranger not because he/ she wanders from one place to another but because of the special status enjoyed by that person as one joins a social group in which he/ she is not originally a member. Thus, a stranger has a fixed social position in society and due to this position is not biased and can perform certain roles special to a stranger alone, like acting as an intermediary.

**Reference and Further Readings**


- Coser, L.A. 1971 *Maters of Sociological Thought, Ideas in Historical and Social Context,* Harcourt Brace Javonovich Inc: New York
- Frisby, David, *Georg Simmel* (Ellis Horwood, Chichester and Tavistock, London, 1984), Key Sociologists Series.
- Morrison, Ken 2012. Marx Durkheim Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought. Sage Publications
- Ritzer, George, *Sociological Theory* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1992)
- Simmel, Georg, *The Philosophy of Money* (Routledge, London, 1990
- Wolff, Kurt, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1950)

**Bibliography**


1) Nielsen, Francois (2007) The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology
2) Adams, B. N. and Sydie, R. A. (2002) Classical Sociological Theory, Sage Publications
3) Allan, K. (2012 3rd edition) Explorations in Classical Social Theory: Seeing the World, Sage Publications
4) Ashley, D. and Orenstein, D. M. (2005 6th edition) Sociological Theory: Classical Statements,
5) Allyn & BaconCallinicos, A. (2007 2nd edition) Social Theory: A Historical Introduction, Polity.
6) Craib, I. (1997) Classical Social Theory: An Introduction to the thought of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Oxford University Press.
7) Crow, G. (2005) The Art of Sociological Argument, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
8) Dillon, M. (2010) Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell
9) Hughes, J. A. et al (1995) Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx Weber Durkheim, Sage Publications.
10) Jones, P. Bradbury, L and Le Boutiller, S. (2011) Introducing Social Theory, Cambridge: Polity.
11) Morrison, K. (1995) Marx Durkheim and Weber: Foundations of Modern Social Theory, Sage Publications.
12) Pampel, F. C. (2000) Sociological Lives and Ideas: An Introduction to the Classical Theorists, Word Publishers
13) Haralambos and Holborn. 2014. Sociology Themes and Perspectives. Harpin Collins
14) Ritzer George. 2016. Classical Sociological Theory. Rawat Publications

15) Royce Edward. 2015. Classical Social Theory and Modern Society. Rawat Publication

16) Aron, Raymond. Main Currents in Sociological Thought (Vol. 1 &II).Routledge Publications.

17) Morrison, Ken 2012. Marx Durkheim Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought. Sage Publications