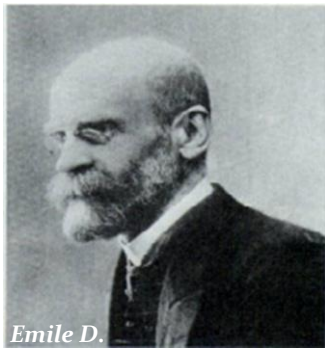




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**COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**



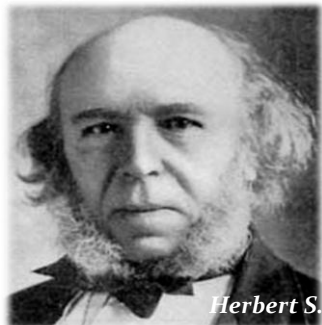
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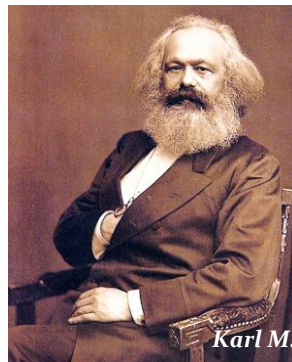
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**SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES I: CLASSICAL**  
**PERSPECTIVES – SOCI1041**

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<b>Module Name</b>	<b>Sociological Theories</b>
<b>Module Code</b>	<b>SocM1041</b>
<b>Clustered Courses</b>	<b>SOCl1041: Sociological Theories I: Classical Perspectives – 5 ECTS</b>  <b>SOCl1042: Sociological Theories II: Contemporary Perspectives – 5ECTS</b>
<b>ECTS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total Module Study Hour</b>	<b>270 hours (135 hours for each course)</b>

### **Module Description**

This module encompasses two courses: Sociological Theories I: Classical Perspectives and Sociological Theories II: Contemporary Perspectives. The module covers an overview of the history of sociological theory in the classical period by introducing students to the founding fathers of sociology and the main approaches to early sociological theory. It further provides a broad coverage of contemporary sociological theories which includes the likes of structural functionalism, neo-functionalism, conflict theory, various types of neo-Marxist theories and more.

### **Module Objectives**

The primary objective of this module is to convey to the students the basic knowledge about the development of sociological theories in the modern period based on the classical theoretical foundations. It is hoped that after completing the module, students will be familiar with the subject matter and will be able to develop the skills to articulate, compare, contrast and apply selected theoretical perspectives to their own research and/or interests.

### **Module Competency**

- ✓ Substantiate the structure of classical and contemporary sociological theory;
- ✓ Critically review sociological thought; and
- ✓ Apply sociological theories to explain every day social life.

## **Course Description**

The course introduces classical sociological thought and the main approaches to early sociological theorizing. The course starts with a brief overview of the fundamental social and intellectual forces, which served as the background conditions for the rise of classical sociological thought in the Western World in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. A large number of thinkers and scholars have contributed to the development of classical sociological theory but time limitations necessitate a selective approach. The founders of classical sociological thought to be covered in the course include: Adam Smith, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel. This approach is followed partly due to the fact that in the formative stages of classical sociological theory clearly defined and separate schools of sociological thought were just in the process of formation and had not fully crystallized. An attempt will be made to introduce these different thinkers in terms of the schools of thought that inherited their legacies and that got crystallized during the later phases of the history of social thought. This includes Positivism, Marxism and Neo –Marxism, Functionalism, and so on.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1. Factors Responsible for the Emergence of Classical Theories**

##### **1.1.1. Social Forces**

- All intellectual fields are profoundly shaped by their social settings.
- This chapter will focus briefly on a few of the most important social conditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conditions that were of the utmost significance in the development of sociology.

##### **A. Political Revolutions**

- 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.

**B. The Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Capitalism**

- At least as important as political revolution in shaping sociological theory was the Industrial Revolution, which swept through many Western societies, mainly in the nineteenth and early twentieth.
- Within the industrial system, a few profited greatly while the majority worked long hours for low wages.
- A reaction against the industrial system and against capitalism in general followed and led to the labor movement as well as to various radical movements aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system.
- The Industrial Revolution, capitalism, and the reaction against them all involved an enormous upheaval in Western society, an upheaval that affected sociologists greatly.
- Four major figures in the early history of sociological theory Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel—were preoccupied, as were many lesser thinkers, with these changes and the problems they created for society as a whole.
- They spent their lives studying these problems, and in many cases they endeavored to develop programs that would help solve them.

**C. The Rise of Socialism**

- One set of changes aimed at coping with the excesses of the industrial system and capitalism can be combined under the heading “socialism” (Beilharz, 2005)
- Although some sociologists favored socialism as a solution to industrial problems, most were personally and intellectually opposed to it.
- On one side, Karl Marx was an active supporter of the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by a socialist system.
- Most of the early theorists, such as Weber and Durkheim, were opposed to socialism (at least as it was envisioned by Marx).
- Although they recognized the problems within capitalist society, they sought social reform within capitalism rather than the social revolution argued for by Marx.



- They feared socialism more than they did capitalism. This fear played a far greater role in shaping sociological theory than did Marx's support of the socialist alternative to capitalism.

#### **D. Feminism**

- In one sense there has always been a feminist perspective.
- Wherever women are subordinated—and they have been subordinated almost always and everywhere—they seem to have recognized and protested that situation in some form (Lerner, 1993).
- All of this had an impact on the development of sociology, in particular on the work of a number of women in or associated with the field—Harriet Martineau, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells-Barnett, Marianne Weber, and Beatrice Potter Webb, to name a few.
- But their creations were, over time, pushed to the periphery of the profession, annexed, discounted, or written out of sociology's public record by the men who were organizing sociology as a professional power base.
- Feminist concerns filtered into sociology only on the margins, in the work of marginal male theorists or of the increasingly marginalized female theorists.
- The men who assumed centrality in the profession—from Spencer, through Weber and Durkheim—made basically conservative responses to the feminist arguments going on around them, making issues of gender an inconsequential topic to which they responded conventionally rather than critically in what they identified and publicly promoted as sociology.
- They responded in this way even as women were writing a significant body of sociological theory.

#### **E. Urbanization**

- Partly as a result of the Industrial Revolution, large numbers of people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were uprooted from their rural homes and moved to urban settings.
- This massive migration was caused, in large part, by the jobs created by the industrial system in the urban areas.

- But it presented many difficulties for those people who had to adjust to urban life. In addition, the expansion of the cities produced a seemingly endless list of urban problems—overcrowding, pollution, noise, traffic, and so forth.
- The nature of urban life and its problems attracted the attention of many early sociologists, especially Max Weber and Georg Simmel.
- In fact, the first major school of American sociology, the Chicago School, was in large part defined by its concern for the city and its interest in using Chicago as a laboratory in which to study urbanization and its problems.

#### **F. Religious Change**

- Social changes brought on by political revolutions, the Industrial Revolution, and urbanization had a profound effect on religiosity.
- Many early sociologists came from religious backgrounds and were actively, and in some cases professionally, involved in religion (Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954).
- For some (such as Comte), sociology was transformed into a religion.
- For others, their sociological theories bore an unmistakable religious imprint.
- Durkheim wrote one of his major works on religion. Morality played a key role not only in Durkheim's sociology but also in the work of Talcott Parsons.
- A large portion of Weber's work also was devoted to the religions of the world.
- Marx, too, had an interest in religiosity, but his orientation was far more critical.

#### **G. The Growth of Science**

- As sociological theory was being developed, there was an increasing emphasis on science, not only in colleges and universities but in society as a whole.
- The technological products of science were permeating every sector of life, and science was acquiring enormous prestige.
- Sociologists (especially Comte, Durkheim, Spencer, Mead, and Schutz) from the beginning were preoccupied with science, and many wanted to model sociology after the successful physical and biological sciences.

- However, a debate soon developed between those who wholeheartedly accepted the scientific model and those (such as Weber) who thought that distinctive characteristics of social life made a wholesale adoption of a scientific model difficult and unwise (Lepenies, 1988).
- The issue of the relationship between sociology and science is debated to this day, although even a glance at the major journals in the field, at least in the United States, indicates the predominance of those who favor sociology as a science.

### 1.1.2. Intellectual Forces and the Rise of Sociological Theory

- In the real world intellectual factors cannot be separated from social forces.
- For example, in the discussion of the Enlightenment that follows, we will find that that movement was intimately related to, and in many cases provided the intellectual basis for, the social changes discussed above.

#### A. The Enlightenment

- The Enlightenment was a period of remarkable intellectual development and change in philosophical thought.
- A number of long-standing ideas and beliefs—many of which related to social life—were overthrown and replaced during the Enlightenment.
- The most prominent thinkers associated with the Enlightenment were the French philosophers Charles Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) (B. Singer, 2005a, 2005b).
- The influence of the Enlightenment on sociological theory, however, was more indirect and negative than it was direct and positive.
- As Irving Zeitlin puts it, “Early sociology developed as a reaction to the Enlightenment” (1996:10).
- The thinkers associated with the Enlightenment were influenced, above all, by two intellectual currents—seventeenth-century philosophy and science.
- Seventeenth-century philosophy was associated with the work of thinkers such as René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke.

- The emphasis was on producing grand, general, and very abstract systems of ideas that made rational sense.
- The later thinkers associated with the Enlightenment did not reject the idea that systems of ideas should be general and should make rational sense, but they did make greater efforts to derive their ideas from the real world and to test them there.
- In other words, they wanted to combine empirical research with reason (Seidman, 1983:36–37).
- Overall, 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.

### **B. The Conservative Reaction to the Enlightenment**

- On the surface, we might think that French classical sociological theory, like Marx’s theory, was directly and positively influenced by the Enlightenment.
- French sociology became rational, empirical, scientific, and change-oriented, but not before it was also shaped by a set of ideas that developed in reaction to the Enlightenment.
- As we will see, sociology in general, and French sociology in particular, have from the beginning been an uncomfortable mix of Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment ideas.
- The most extreme form of opposition to Enlightenment ideas was French Catholic counterrevolutionary philosophy.
- In this view, God was the source of society; therefore, reason, which was so important to the Enlightenment philosophers, was seen as inferior to traditional religious beliefs.
- Furthermore, it was believed that because God had created society, people should not tamper with it and should not try to change a holy creation.

- By extension, they opposed anything that undermined such traditional institutions as patriarchy, the monogamous family, the monarchy, and the Catholic Church.
- Thus they regarded such phenomena as tradition, imagination, emotionalism, and religion as useful and necessary components of social life.
- In that they disliked upheaval and wanted to retain the existing order, they criticized developments such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, which they saw as disturbing forces.
- The conservatives tended to emphasize social order, an emphasis that became one of the central themes of the work of several sociological theorists.
- Whereas Enlightenment thinkers tended to emphasize the individual, the conservative reaction led to a major sociological interest in, and emphasis on, society.
- Society was viewed as something more than simply an aggregate of individuals.
- Society was the most important unit of analysis; it was seen as more important than the individual for it was society that produced the individual, primarily through the process of socialization.

## Chapter Two

### Adam Smith (1723-1790)

#### 2.1. Background

- Adam Smith (1723-1790) was Scottish philosopher and economist, whose celebrated treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* was the first serious attempt to study the nature of capital and the historical development of industry and commerce among European nations.
- Smith was born in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, and educated at the universities of Glasgow and Oxford.
- From 1748 to 1751, he gave lectures on rhetoric and belles-lettres in Edinburgh.
- During this period, a close association developed between Smith and fellow Scottish philosopher David Hume that lasted until the latter's death in 1776 and contributed much to the development of Smith's ethical and economic theories.
- Smith was appointed professor of logic in 1751 and then professor of moral philosophy in 1752 at the University of Glasgow. He later systematized the ethical teachings he had propounded in his lectures and published them in his first major work, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).
- From 1766 to 1776, he lived in Kirkcaldy preparing *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).
- In 1787 he was named lord rector of the University of Glasgow.
- Smith was appointed commissioner of customs in Edinburgh in 1778, serving in this capacity until his death.

#### 2.2. Political Economy

- The term *political economy* encompasses the area of social thought subsequently known as economics, and a great deal besides.
- Classical political economy emerged toward the end of the seventeenth century and flourished in the eighteenth century with the work of the Physiocrats in France and their Scottish contemporaries, above all Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* (1776) was a major landmark.

- Classical political economists concentrated their attention on the production and distribution of the means of subsistence.
- They explained the evolution of modern economies in terms of the fundamental conflict between the different social classes in a predominantly agricultural society where the producers enjoyed a bare minimum standard of living and the surplus product was shared between landlords and capitalist farmers.
- The size of the surplus, relative to total output, set a maximum limit on the rate of growth; actual growth depended on the relative shares of thrifty capitalists and prodigal landlords.
- In most versions of classical political economy, the rate of profit on capital was expected to fall, and with it the rate of economic growth.
- Many sections in Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, notably those relating to the sources of income and the nature of capital, continue to form the basis for theoretical studies in the field of political economy.
- Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* represents the first serious attempt in the history of economic thought to divorce the study of political economy from the related fields of political science, ethics, and jurisprudence.
- It embodies a penetrating analysis of the processes whereby economic wealth is produced and distributed and demonstrates that the fundamental sources of all income, that is, the basic forms in which wealth is distributed, are rent, wages, and profits.

### 2.3. Division of Labor

- Adam Smith considered the emergence of the division of labor as a significant phenomenon in human history.
- According to him, it was the start of the division of labor which enabled society to reach at increasingly advanced stages of development.
- In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith writes;

*“The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labor, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labor.”* (Smith, 1776)

- According to Smith the great increase in the quantity of work that results from the division of labor could be associated with three different circumstances;
  1. to the increase of dexterity in every particular workman;
  2. to the saving of the time which is commonly lost in passing from one species of work to another; and
  3. to the invention of a great number of machines which facilitate and abridge labor, and enable one man to do the work of many.

#### 2.4. The Invisible Hand and the Wealth of Nations

- The central thesis of *The Wealth of Nations* is that capital is best employed for the production and distribution of wealth under conditions of governmental noninterference, or laissez-faire, and free trade.
- In Smith's view, the production and exchange of goods can be stimulated, and a consequent rise in the general standard of living attained, only through the efficient operations of private industrial and commercial entrepreneurs acting with a minimum of regulation and control by governments.
- To explain this concept of government maintaining a laissez-faire attitude toward commercial endeavors, Smith proclaimed the principle of the “invisible hand”.
- The “invisible hand” refers to the principle that every individual in pursuing his or her own good is led, as if by an invisible hand, to achieve the best good for all.
- Therefore, any interference with free competition by government is almost certain to be injurious.



## Chapter Three

### Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

#### 3.1. Biographical Sketch

- Auguste Comte was born in Montpellier, France, on January 19, 1798.
- Although a bright 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.
- In 1817 he became secretary (and “adopted son”) to Claude Henri Saint- Simon, a philosopher forty years Comte’s senior.
- Heilbron (1995) describes Comte as short (perhaps 5 feet, 2 inches), a bit cross-eyed, and very insecure in social situations, especially ones involving women.
- He was also alienated from society as a whole.
- Comte’s personal insecurities stood in contrast to his great security about his own intellectual capacities, and it appears that his self-esteem was well founded:

*“Comte’s prodigious memory is famous. Endowed with a photographic memory he could recite backwards the words of any page he had read but once. His powers of concentration were such that he could sketch out an entire book without putting pen to paper. His lectures were all delivered without notes. When he sat down to write out his books he wrote everything from memory.”* (Schweber, 1991:134)

- He suffered from mental problems, and once in 1827 he tried (unsuccessfully) to commit suicide by throwing himself into the Seine River.
- Comte wrote the six-volume *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, which was published in its entirety in 1842 (the first volume had been published in 1830).

- In that work Comte outlined his view that sociology was the ultimate science.
- By 1851 he had completed the four-volume *Systeme de Politique Positive*, which had a more practical intent, offering a grand plan for the reorganization of society.
- Heilbron argues that a major break took place in Comte's life in 1838 and it was then that he lost hope that anyone would take his work on science in general, and sociology in particular, seriously.
- It was also at that point that he embarked on his life of "cerebral hygiene"; that is, Comte began to avoid reading the work of other people, with the result that he became hopelessly out of touch with recent intellectual developments.
- Comte came to fancy himself as the high priest of a new religion of humanity; he believed in a world that eventually would be led by sociologist-priests. (Comte had been strongly influenced by his Catholic background.)
- Interestingly, in spite of such outrageous ideas, Comte eventually developed a considerable following in France, as well as in a number of other countries.
- Auguste Comte died on September 5, 1857.

### 3.2. **Positivism: Search for Invariant Laws and Search for Order and Progress**

- Comte 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.
- 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.

- However, his work can be set apart from theirs on at least two grounds:
  1. He did not think it possible to return to the Middle Ages; advances in science and industry made that impossible.
  2. He developed a *much more sophisticated theoretical system* than his predecessors, one that was *adequate to shape a good portion of early sociology*.
- Comte's positivism emphasized that "the social universe is amenable to the development of abstract laws that can be tested through the careful collection of data," and "these abstract laws will denote the basic and generic properties of the social universe and they will specify their 'natural relations'" (Turner, 1985:24)

### 3.3. Law of the Three Stages

- The Law of the Three Stages proposes that there are three intellectual stages through which the world has gone throughout its history.
- According to Comte, not only does the world go through this process, but groups, societies, sciences, individuals, and even minds go through the same three stages. These stages were:
  1. The Theological Stage,
  2. The Metaphysical Stage, and
  3. The Positivistic Stage

#### 3.3.1. The Theological Stage (Before 1300)

- The *theological stage* is the first, and it characterized the world prior to 1300.
- During this period, the major idea system emphasized the belief that supernatural powers and religious figures, modeled after humankind, are at the root of everything.
- In particular, the social and physical world is seen as produced by God.

### 3.3.2. The Metaphysical Stage (1300-1800)

- The second stage is the *metaphysical* stage, which occurred roughly between 1300 and 1800.
- This era was characterized by the belief that abstract forces like “nature,” rather than personalized gods, explain virtually everything.

### 3.3.3. The Positivistic Stage (Since 1800)

- According to Comte, in 1800 the world entered the positivistic stage, characterized by belief in science.
- People now tended to give up the search for absolute causes (God or nature) and concentrated instead on observation of the social and physical world in the search for the laws governing them.
- It is clear that in his theory of the world Comte focused on intellectual factors. Indeed, he argued that intellectual disorder is the cause of social disorder.
- The disorder stemmed from earlier idea systems (theological and metaphysical) that continued to exist in the positivistic (scientific) age.
- Only when positivism gained total control would social upheavals cease.
- Because this was an evolutionary process, there was no need to foment social upheaval and revolution. Positivism would come, although perhaps not as quickly as some would like. Here Comte’s social reformism and his sociology coincide.
- Sociology could accelerate the arrival of positivism and hence bring order to the social world.
- Above all, Comte did not want to seem to be supporting revolution. There was, in his view, enough disorder in the world.
- In any case, from Comte’s point of view, it was intellectual change that was needed, and so there was little reason for social and political revolution.

### 3.4. Sociology: Social Static and Social Dynamic

- 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.

### 3.5. Comte’s Contribution to Sociology

- We have already encountered several of Comte’s positions that were to be of great significance to the development of classical sociology—his basic conservatism, reformism, and scientism and his evolutionary view of the world.
- Several other aspects of his work that played a major role in the development of sociological theory include:
  1. His sociology does not focus on the individual but rather takes as its basic unit of analysis larger entities such as the family. He also urged that we look at both social structure and social change.
    - Of great importance to later sociological theory, especially the work of Spencer and Parsons, is Comte’s stress on the systematic character

of society—the links among and between the various components of society.

2. He also accorded great importance to the role of consensus in society.
  3. He urged that sociologists use observation, experimentation, and comparative historical analysis.
  4. Comte believed that sociology ultimately would become the dominant scientific force in the world because of its distinctive ability to interpret social laws and to develop reforms aimed at patching up problems within the system.
- Generally, Comte was in the forefront of the development of positivistic sociology. Even though he lacked a solid academic base on which to build a school of Comtian sociological theory, he nevertheless laid a basis for the development of a significant stream of sociological theory.

## Chapter Four

### Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

#### 4.1. Biographical Sketch

- Herbert Spencer was born in Derby, England, on April 27, 1820.
- He was not schooled in the arts and humanities, but rather in technical matters.
- In 1837 he began work as a civil engineer for a railway, an occupation he held until 1846.
- 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.
- Eventually, Spencer began to achieve not only fame within England but also an international reputation.
- One of Spencer's most interesting characteristics, one that was ultimately to be the cause of his intellectual undoing, was his unwillingness to read the work of other people.
- In this, he resembled another early giant of sociology, Auguste Comte, who practiced "cerebral hygiene."
- Spencer died on December 8, 1903.

- Some of Spencer's Well Known Works are:
  1. Social Statics (1850)
  2. Man Verses the State (1884)
  3. The Study of Sociology (1891)
  4. Essays, Scientific, Political and Speculative (1892)
  5. The Principles of Sociology (1896)
- Spencer is said to be the first classical theorist to have used the word "Sociology" in the title of his work.

#### 4.2. Comte and Spencer

- When comparing himself with Comte Spencer writes:

*"What is Comte's professed aim? To give a coherent account of the progress of human conceptions. What is my aim? To give a coherent account of the progress of the external world. Comte proposes to describe the necessary and the actual, filiations of ideas. I propose to describe the necessary, and the actual, filiations of things... Comte professes to interpret the genesis of our knowledge of nature. My aim is to interpret . . . the genesis of the phenomena which constitute nature. The one is subjective. The other is objective" (Spencer, 1904) (In an Autobiography Published After His Death In 1903)*

- In contrast to Comte, who wanted to rule society through the power of his sociologist-priests, Spencer argued that sociologists should convince the public that society must be free from the meddling of governments and reformers.
- Spencer, just like Comte, believed that society operates according to fixed laws. However, his first and foremost concern was with evolutionary changes in social structure and social institutions.



- Spencer defines evolution as “*a change from a state of relatively indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a state of relatively definite, coherent heterogeneity.*”
- The evolution of societies is but a special case of a universally applicable natural law.
- Note that Spencer does not claim that social evolution “parallels” or has “much in common with” organic evolution.
- Rather, he claims that social evolution is an extension of organic evolutionary principles.
- Increases in size, Spencer maintains, bring in the wake differentiation in structure (a greater division of labor).
- If hunting and gathering societies were suddenly to grow in population into the thousands, only major modifications in their structure would allow them to continue being viable societies.

#### 4.3. Evolutionary Theory

- According to Spencer, societies like living bodies begin as germs—originate from masses which are extremely small in comparison with the masses some of them eventually reach.
- He maintains that the change from the homogenous to the heterogeneous is displayed in the progress of civilization as a whole, as well as in the progress of every nation.
- While rudimentary, a society is all warrior, all hunter, all hut-builder, all tool-maker: every part fulfills for itself all needs. However, as society grows, its parts become unlike: it exhibits increase of structure.
- The unlike parts simultaneously assume activities of unlike kinds. These activities are not simply different, but the differences are so related as to make one another possible.
- The reciprocal aid thus given causes mutual dependence of the parts. And the mutually dependent parts, living by and for another, form an aggregate constituted on the same general principle as is an individual organism.

- This division of labor, first dwelt on by political economists as a social phenomenon, and thereupon recognized by biologists as a phenomenon of living bodies, which they called the 'physiological division of labor,' is that which in the society, as in the animal, makes it a living whole.
- It inevitably happens that in the body politic, as in the living body, there arises a regulating system. As compound aggregates are formed there arise supreme regulating centers and subordinate ones and the supreme centers begin to enlarge and complicate.
- Spencer pictures the process of social evolution as almost unrelenting and ever present — but not absolute.
- For Spencer, a social organism, like an individual organism, undergoes modifications until it comes into equilibrium with environing conditions; and thereupon continues without further change of structure.
- Once equilibrium has been reached, evolution continues to show itself only in the progressing integration that ends in rigidity and practically ceases.
- He also considered that retrogression might have probably been as frequent as progression.

#### 4.4. Militant and Industrial Societies

- To distinguish between what he called “militant” and “industrial” societies, Spencer used as the basis a difference in social regulation.
- Rather than being based on the physical and biological environment, this classification is rooted in a hypothesis that social structure is also affected by the relations a society has to other societies.
- With peaceful relations with neighbors come relatively weak and diffuse systems of government. With hostile relations come coercive and centralized authoritarian regimes.
- The characteristic trait of militant societies is compulsion.

- The industrial type of society, in contrast, is based on voluntary cooperation.
- This militant/industrial classification scheme gave him a pessimistic view of the future of mankind.

#### 4.5. Social Darwinism

- Similar to Malthus, Spencer argued that our fertility stimulates greater activity because of the competition for resources. But this is where the resemblance ends.
- Spencer goes on to posit that this competition would, in the long run, produce smarter people as the more ingenious would survive and the lesser intelligent people would die off. Over time this would lead to a gradual rise in intelligence over time.
- Those whom this increasing difficulty of getting a living, which excess of fertility entails, does not stimulate to improvements in production—that is, to greater mental activity—are on the high road to extinction; and must ultimately be supplanted by those whom the pressure does so stimulate.
- Welfare would, of course, distort this invisible hand of natural selection, allowing the “unfit” to survive. Government’s intervention would seem beneficial—but it would only be so in the short run. It would interfere with society’s adaptation to the environment, more unfit people would survive and reproduce, and greater numbers would suffer in the future.
- One flaw in this thinking, of course, is the hypothesis that the more intelligent survive. Social class, luck, grace, physical attractiveness, athleticism and a host of other factors play into survival.
- Also, unlike wealth, passing on intelligence to your children is problematic.
- Finally, the time scales needed for such biological evolution are measured in terms of millennia.

#### 4.6. Spencer's Ambiguities

##### 1

Although Spencer is an evolutionary scientist known for his 'Social Darwinism' his discussion of social evolution constitutes a 'beneficent discipline' which appears to be supernatural in its existence.

Spencer Writes:

*"The well-being of existing humanity and the unfolding of it into this ultimate perfection are both secured by that same beneficent, though severe, discipline to which animate creation at large is subject: a discipline which is pitiless in the working out of good: a felicity-pursuing law which never swerves for the avoidance of partial and temporary suffering. the poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shouldering aside of the weak by the strong, which leaves so many 'in shallows and in miseries,' are the decrees of a large, far-seeing benevolence"*  
(Spencer, 1850:288-289)

##### 2

Whenever the state intervenes, according to Spencer, whether for social welfare, the economic health of an enterprise, or for any other reason, it necessarily restricts freedom and must ultimately lead to tyranny.

But Spencer also writes:

*"For a government to take from a citizen more property than is needful for the efficient defense of that citizen's rights is to infringe his rights"* (Spencer, 1850:333).

Spencer then argues that the state has the duty not only of shielding each citizen from the trespasses of his neighbors, but of defending him, in common with the community at large, against foreign aggression.

## Chapter Five

### Emile Durkheim (1858–1917)

#### 5.1. Biographical Sketch

- Emile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1858, in Epinal, France.
- He was descended from a long line of rabbis and studied to be a rabbi, but by the time he was in his teens, he had largely given up his heritage (Strenski, 1997:4).
- From that time on, his lifelong interest in religion was more academic than theological (Mestrovic, 1988).
- He longed for schooling in scientific methods and in the moral principles needed to guide social life.
- He rejected a traditional academic career in philosophy and sought instead to acquire the scientific training needed to contribute to the moral guidance of society.
- Although he was interested in scientific sociology, there was no field of sociology at that time, so between 1882 and 1887 he taught philosophy in a number of provincial schools in the Paris area.
- In the years immediately after his visit to Germany, Durkheim published a good deal, basing his work, in part, on his experiences there.
- These publications helped him gain a position in the department of philosophy at the University of Bordeaux in 1887.
- There Durkheim offered the first course in social science in a French university. This was a particularly impressive accomplishment, because only a decade earlier, anger had erupted in a French university after the mention of Auguste Comte in a student dissertation.
- Durkheim's main responsibility, however, was teaching courses in education to schoolteachers, and his most important course was in the area of moral education.
- His goal was to communicate a moral system to the educators, who he hoped would then pass the system on to young people in an effort to help reverse the moral degeneration he saw around him in French society.

- In 1893 he published his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labor in Society*, as well as his *Latin thesis on Montesquieu*.
- His major methodological statement, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, appeared in 1895, followed (in 1897) by his empirical application of those methods in the study *Suicide*.
- By 1896 he had become a full professor at Bordeaux.
- In 1902 he was summoned to the famous French university the Sorbonne, and in 1906 he was named professor of the science of education, a title that was changed in 1913 to professor of the science of education and sociology.
- The other of his most famous works, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published in 1912.
- Durkheim died on November 15, 1917.

#### 5.2. Social Facts

- In order to help sociology move away from philosophy and to give it a clear and separate identity, Durkheim proposed that the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be the study of social facts.
- *Social Facts*: are the social structures and cultural norms and values that are external to, and coercive of, actors.

*“A social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations.”*

(Durkheim, 1895/1982:13)

- Durkheim used the study of social facts as a crucial way of separating sociology from philosophy and psychology.
- Crucial in separating sociology from philosophy is the idea that social facts are to be treated as “things” and studied empirically.
- This means that we must study social facts by acquiring data from outside of our own minds through observation and experimentation.

- To allow that social facts could be explained by reference to individuals would be to reduce sociology to psychology. Instead, social facts can be explained only by other social facts.
- Durkheim himself gave several examples of social facts, including legal rules, moral obligations, and social conventions.
- He also refers to language as a social fact, and it provides an easily understood example.
  1. First, language is a “thing” that must be studied empirically. One cannot simply philosophize about the logical rules of language. Certainly, all languages have some logical rules regarding grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and so forth;
  2. Second, language is external to the individual. Although individuals use a language, language is not defined or created by the individual.
  3. Third, language is coercive of the individual. The language that we use makes some things extremely difficult to say.
  4. Finally, changes in language can be explained only by other social facts and never by one individual’s intentions. Even in those rare instances where a change in language can be traced to an individual, the actual explanation for the change is the social facts that have made society open to this change.
- Generally, Durkheim’s idea of social facts both established sociology as an independent field of study and provided one of the most convincing arguments for studying society as it is before we decide what it should be.

#### 5.2.1. Material and Nonmaterial Social Facts

- Durkheim differentiated between two broad types of social facts:
  1. Material Social Facts
  2. Nonmaterial Social Facts

##### 5.2.1.1. Material Social Facts

- *Material social facts*, such as styles of architecture, forms of technology, and legal codes, are the easier to understand because they are directly observable.
- Clearly, such things as laws are external to individuals and coercive over them.

### 5.2.1.2. Nonmaterial Social Facts

- The bulk of Durkheim's studies, and the heart of his sociology, lies in the study of nonmaterial social facts.
- What sociologists now call norms and values, or more generally culture are good examples of what Durkheim meant by nonmaterial social facts.
- Durkheim recognized that nonmaterial social facts are, to a certain extent, found in the minds of individuals.
- However, it was his belief that when people begin to interact in complex ways, their interactions will "*obey laws all their own.*"
- Durkheim saw social facts along a continuum of materiality.
- The most material are such things as population size and density, channels of communication, and housing arrangements. Durkheim called these facts *morphological*.
- At another level are structural components (a bureaucracy, for example), which are a mixture of morphological components (the density of people in a building and their lines of communication) and nonmaterial social facts (such as the bureaucratic norms).

#### 5.2.1.2.1. Types of Nonmaterial Social Facts

- Since nonmaterial social facts are so important to Durkheim, we will examine four different types—morality, collective conscience, collective representations, and social currents—before considering how Durkheim used these types in his studies.

#### Morality

- Durkheim was a sociologist of morality in the broadest sense of the word.
- Studying him reminds us that a concern with morality was at the foundation of sociology as a discipline.
- Durkheim's view of morality had two aspects.
  1. First, Durkheim was convinced that morality is a social fact, in other words, that morality can be empirically studied, is external to the individual, is coercive of the individual, and is explained by other social facts.



For example, to understand the morality of any particular institution, you have to first study how the institution is constituted, how it came to assume its present form, what its place is in the overall structure of society, how the various institutional obligations are related to the social good, and so forth.

2. Second, Durkheim was a sociologist of morality because his studies were driven by his concern about the moral “health” of modern society. Much of Durkheim’s sociology can be seen as a by-product of his concern with moral issues.
- In Durkheim’s view, people were in danger of a “pathological” loosening of moral bonds. These moral bonds were important to Durkheim, for without them the individual would be enslaved by ever-expanding and insatiable passions.
  - People would be impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification, but each new gratification would lead only to more and more needs.
  - According to Durkheim, the one thing that every human will always want is “more.” And, of course, that is the one thing we ultimately cannot have.
  - If society does not limit us, we will become slaves to the pursuit of more. Consequently, Durkheim held that the individual needs morality and external control in order to be free. This view of the insatiable desire at the core of every human is central to his sociology.

### Collective Conscience

- In French, the word *conscience* means both “consciousness” and “moral conscience.”
- Durkheim characterized the collective conscience in the following way:

*“The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience. . . . It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them.”*

(Durkheim, 1893/1964:79–80)

- In simple terms, *collective conscience* refers to the general structure of shared understandings, norms, and beliefs.

- Durkheim employed this concept to argue that “primitive” societies had a stronger collective conscience—that is, more shared understandings, norms, and beliefs—than modern societies.

### **Collective Representations**

- Because collective conscience is such a broad and amorphous idea, it is impossible to study directly and must be approached through related material social facts. (For example, we will look at Durkheim’s use of the legal system to say something about the collective conscience.)
- Durkheim’s dissatisfaction with this limitation led him to use the collective conscience less in his later work in favor of the much more specific concept of *collective representations*.
- The French word *représentation* literally means “idea.” Durkheim used the term to refer to both a collective concept and a social “force.”
- Examples of collective representations are religious symbols, myths, and popular legends.
- All of these are ways in which society reflects on itself. They represent collective beliefs, norms, and values, and they motivate us to conform to these collective claims.
- Collective representations can be studied more directly than collective conscience because they are more likely to be connected to material symbols such as flags, icons, and pictures or connected to practices such as rituals.

### **Social Currents**

- Most of the examples of social facts that Durkheim refers to are associated with social organizations.
- However, he made it clear that there are social facts “which do not present themselves in this already crystallized form.” Durkheim called these social currents.
- He gave as examples “the great waves of enthusiasm, indignation, and pity” that are produced in public gatherings.
- Although social currents are less concrete than other social facts, they are nevertheless social facts because they cannot be reduced to the individual. We are swept along by such social

currents, and this has a coercive power over us even if we become aware of it only when we struggle against the common feelings.

- It is possible for these nonmaterial and ephemeral social facts to affect even the strongest institutions.
- Ramet (1991), for example, reports that the social currents that are potentially created among a crowd at a rock concert were looked at as a threat by eastern European communist governments and, indeed, contributed to their downfall.
- Rock concerts were places for the emergence and dissemination of “cultural standards, fashions, and behavioral syndromes independent of party control” (Ramet, 1991:216).
- Given the emphasis on norms, values, and culture in contemporary sociology, we have little difficulty accepting Durkheim’s interest in nonmaterial social facts.
- However, the concept of social currents does cause us a few problems. Particularly troublesome is the idea of a set of independent social currents “coursing” through the social world as if they were somehow suspended in a social void.
- But cultural phenomena cannot float by themselves in a social void, and Durkheim was well aware of this.

*“. . . they(individual minds) are in perpetual interaction through the exchange of symbols; they interpenetrate one another. They group themselves according to their natural affinities; they coordinate and systematize themselves. In this way is formed an entirely new psychological being, one without equal in the world. The consciousness with which it is endowed is infinitely more intense and more vast than those which resonate within it. For it is “a consciousness of consciousnesses” [une conscience de consciences ].”*

(Durkheim, 1885/1978:103)

- Social currents can be viewed as sets of meanings that are shared by the members of a collectivity.
- As such, they cannot be explained in terms of the mind of any given individual. Individuals certainly contribute to social currents, but by becoming social something new develops through their interactions.

- Durkheim's argument: that the complexity and intensity of interactions between individuals cause a new level of reality to emerge that cannot be explained in terms of the individuals.

### 5.3. The Division of Labor in Society

- *The Division of Labor in Society* has been called sociology's first classic.
- In this work, Durkheim traced the development of the modern relation between individuals and society.
- In particular, Durkheim wanted to use his new science of sociology to examine what many at the time had come to see as the modern crisis of morality.
- The preface to the first edition begins,

*"This book is above all an attempt to treat the facts of moral life according to the methods of the positive sciences."*

(Durkheim 1893/1964)

- The thesis of *The Division of Labor in Society* is that modern society is not held together by the similarities between people who do basically similar things.
- Instead, it is the division of labor itself that pulls people together by forcing them to be dependent on each other.
- It may seem that the division of labor is an economic necessity that eats away the feeling of solidarity, but Durkheim argued that:

*"the economic services that it can render are insignificant compared with the moral effect that it produces and its true function is to create between two or more people a feeling of solidarity."*

(Durkheim 1893/1964:17)

### 5.4. Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

- Durkheim was most interested in the changed way in which social solidarity is produced, in other words, the changed way in which society is held together and how its members see themselves as part of a whole.
- To capture this difference, Durkheim referred to two types of solidarity—mechanical and organic.
- A society characterized by *mechanical solidarity is unified because all people are generalists.*

- The bond among people is that they are all engaged in similar activities and have similar responsibilities.
- In contrast, a society characterized by *organic solidarity* is held together by the differences among people, by the fact that all have different tasks and responsibilities.
- Because people in modern society perform a relatively narrow range of tasks, they need many other people in order to survive.
- The “primitive” family headed by father-hunter and mother-food gatherer is practically self-sufficient, but the modern family needs the grocer, baker, butcher, auto mechanic, teacher, police officer, and so forth.
- These people, in turn, need the kinds of services that others provide in order to live in the modern world.
- Modern society, in Durkheim’s view, is thus held together by the specialization of people and their need for the services of many others.
- This specialization includes not only that of individuals but also of groups, structures, and institutions.

#### 5.5. Dynamic Density

- Durkheim believed that the cause of the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity was dynamic density.
- This concept refers to the number of people in a society and the amount of interaction that occurs among them.
- More people means an increase in the competition for scarce resources, and more interaction mean a more intense struggle for survival among the basically similar components of society.
- In societies with organic solidarity, less competition and more differentiation allow people to cooperate more and to all be supported by the same resource base.
- Therefore, difference allows for even closer bonds between people than does similarity.
- Thus, in a society characterized by organic solidarity, there are both more solidarity and more individuality than there are in a society characterized by mechanical solidarity.
- Individuality, then, is not the opposite of close social bonds but a requirement for them.

## 5.6. Repressive and Restitutive Law

### 5.6.1. Repressive Law

- In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim chose to study the differences between law in societies with mechanical solidarity and law in societies with organic solidarity.
- Durkheim argued that a society with mechanical solidarity is characterized by *repressive law*.
- *Because people are very similar in this type of society, and because they tend to believe very strongly in a common morality, any offense against their shared value system is likely to be of significance to most individuals.*
- Since everyone feels the offense and believes deeply in the common morality, a wrongdoer is likely to be punished severely for any action that offends the collective moral system.
- Theft might lead to the cutting off of the offender's hands; blaspheming might result in the removal of one's tongue.

### 5.6.2. Restitutive Law

- In contrast, a society with organic solidarity is characterized by *restitutive law*, which requires offenders to make restitution for their crimes.
- In such societies, offenses are more likely to be seen as committed against a particular individual or segment of society than against the moral system itself.
- Because there is a weak common morality, most people do not react emotionally to a breach of the law.
- Instead of being severely punished for every offense against the collective morality, offenders in an organic society are likely to be asked to make restitution to those who have been harmed by their actions.
- Although some repressive law continues to exist in a society with organic solidarity (for example, the death penalty), restitutive law predominates, especially for minor offenses.

### 5.7. Suicide

- Durkheim chose to study suicide because it is a relatively concrete and specific phenomenon for which there were comparatively good data available.
- However, Durkheim's most important reason for studying suicide was to prove the power of the new science of sociology. Suicide is generally considered to be one of the most private and personal acts.
- Durkheim believed that if he could show that sociology had a role to play in explaining such a seemingly individualistic act as suicide, it would be relatively easy to extend sociology's domain to phenomena that are much more readily seen as open to sociological analysis.
- As a sociologist, Durkheim was not concerned with studying why any specific individual committed suicide. That was to be left to the psychologists. Instead, Durkheim was interested in explaining differences in *suicide rates*; that is, he was interested in why one group had a higher rate of suicide than did another.
- Durkheim proposed two related ways of evaluating suicide rates. One way is to compare different societies or other types of collectivities. Another way is to look at the changes in the suicide rate in the same collectivity over time. In either case, cross culturally or historically, the logic of the argument is essentially the same. If there is variation in suicide rates from one group to another or from one time period to another, Durkheim believed that the difference would be the consequence of variations in sociological factors, in particular, social currents.
- Durkheim acknowledged that individuals may have reasons for committing suicide, but these reasons are not the real cause: "They may be said to indicate the individual's weak points, where the outside current bearing the impulse to self-destruction most easily finds introduction. But they are no part of this current itself, and consequently cannot help us to understand it" (1897/1951:151).
- 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 and regulation (Pope, 1976). Integration refers to the strength of the attachment that we have to society. Regulation refers to the degree of external constraint on people.

- If integration is high, Durkheim calls that type of suicide altruistic. Low integration results in an increase in egoistic suicides. Fatalistic suicide is associated with high regulation, and anomic suicide with low regulation.

**TABLE 3.2****The Four Types of Suicide**

Integration	Low	Egoistic suicide
	High	Altruistic suicide
Regulation	Low	Anomic suicide
	High	Fatalistic suicide

### A. Egoistic Suicide

- High rates of *egoistic suicide* (Berk, 2006) are likely to be found in societies or groups in which the individual is not well integrated into the larger social unit. This lack of integration leads to a feeling that the individual is not part of society, but this also means that society is not part of the individual.
- Durkheim believed that the best parts of 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 of moral support to get us through the daily small indignities and trivial disappointments. Without this, we are liable to commit suicide at the smallest frustration.

### B. 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” (Durkheim, 1897/1951:217). The individual is literally forced into committing suicide.
- One notorious example of altruistic suicide was the mass suicide of the followers of the Reverend Jim Jones in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978. They knowingly took a poisoned drink and in some cases had their children drink it as well. They clearly were committing suicide because they were so tightly integrated into the society of Jones’s fanatical followers.



Durkheim notes that this is also the explanation for those who seek to be martyrs (Durkheim, 1897/1951:225), as in the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001.

- More generally, those who commit altruistic suicide do so because they feel that it is their duty to do so. Durkheim argued that this is particularly likely in the military, where the degree of integration is so strong that an individual will feel that he or she has disgraced the entire group by the most trivial of failures.

### C. 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. Periods of disruption unleash currents of anomie—moods of rootlessness and normlessness—and these currents lead to an increase in rates of anomic suicide.

### D. Fatalistic Suicide

- There is a little-mentioned fourth type of suicide—fatalistic—that Durkheim discussed only in a footnote in *Suicide* (Acevedo, 2005; Besnard, 1993). 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 (1897/1951:276) described those who are more likely to commit fatalistic suicide as “persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline.” The classic example is the slave who takes his own life because of the hopelessness associated with the oppressive regulation of his every action. Too much regulation—oppression—unleashes currents of melancholy that, in turn, cause a rise in the rate of fatalistic suicide.

## 5.8. Theory of Religion—The Sacred and the Profane

- According to Durkheim society (through individuals) creates religion by defining certain phenomena as sacred and others as profane. Those aspects of social reality that are defined as *sacred*—that is, that are set apart from the everyday—form the essence of religion. The rest are defined as *profane*—the commonplace, the utilitarian, the mundane aspects of life.
- On the one hand, the sacred brings out an attitude of reverence, awe, and obligation. On the other hand, it is the attitude accorded to these phenomena that transforms them from profane to sacred. The question for Durkheim was what is the source of this reverence, awe, and obligation?
- Durkheim refused to believe that all religion is nothing but an illusion. Such a pervasive social phenomenon must have some truth. However, that truth need not be precisely that which is believed by the participants.
- Indeed, as a strict atheist, Durkheim could not believe that anything supernatural was the source of these religious feelings. There really is a superior moral power that inspires believers, but it is society and not God.
- Durkheim argued that religion symbolically embodies society itself. Religion is the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself. This was the only way that he could explain why every society has had religious beliefs but each has had different beliefs.
- Society is a power that is greater than we are. It transcends us, demands our sacrifices, suppresses our selfish tendencies, and fills us with energy. Society, according to Durkheim, exercises these powers through representations. In God, he sees “only society transfigured and symbolically expressed” (Durkheim, 1906/1974:52). Thus society is the source of the sacred.

### 5.8.1. Totemism

- Because Durkheim believed that society is the source of religion, he was particularly interested in totemism among the Australian Arunta.
- *Totemism* is a religious system in which certain things, particularly animals and plants, come to be regarded as sacred and as emblems of the clan. Durkheim viewed totemism as the

simplest, most primitive form of religion, and he believed it to be associated with a similarly simple form of social organization, the clan.

- Durkheim argued that the totem is nothing but the representation of the clan itself. Individuals who experience the heightened energy of social force in a gathering of the clan seek some explanation for this state.
- Durkheim believed that the gathering itself was the real cause, but even today, people are reluctant to attribute this power to social forces. Instead, the clan member mistakenly attributes the energy he or she feels to the symbols of the clan.
- The totems are the material representations of the nonmaterial force that is at their base, and that nonmaterial force is none other than society.
- Totemism, and more generally religion, are derived from the collective morality and become impersonal forces. They are not simply a series of mythical animals, plants, personalities, spirits, or gods.

## Chapter Six

### Max Weber (1864 – 1920)

#### 6.1. A Biographical Sketch

- Max Weber was born in Erfurt, Germany, on April 21, 1864, into a decidedly middle-class family.
- His father studied law and was a bureaucrat who rose to a relatively important political position.
- Max Weber's mother was a committed Calvinist, a woman who sought to lead an ascetic life largely devoid of the pleasures craved by her husband.
- At age 18, Max Weber left home for a short time to attend the University of Heidelberg.
- Weber had already demonstrated intellectual precocity, but on a social level he entered Heidelberg shy and underdeveloped.
- However, that quickly changed after he gravitated toward his father's way of life and joined his father's old dueling fraternity.
- After three terms, Weber left Heidelberg for military service, and in 1884 he returned to Berlin and to his parents' home to take courses at the University of Berlin.
- He remained there for most of the next eight years as he completed his studies, earned his Ph.D., became a lawyer and started teaching at the University of Berlin.
- In the process, his interests shifted more toward his lifelong concerns economics, history, and sociology.
- At the same time, he moved closer to his mother's values, and his hatred to his father increased.
- Following his mother, he became ascetic and diligent, a compulsive worker—in contemporary terms a "workaholic." This compulsion for work led in 1896 to a position as professor of economics at Heidelberg.
- But in 1897, when Weber's academic career was blossoming, his father died following a violent argument between them.

- Shortly thereafter Weber began to manifest symptoms that were to culminate in a nervous breakdown.
- Often unable to sleep or to work, Weber spent the next six or seven years in near-total collapse.
- After a long interruption, some of his powers began to return in 1903, but it was not until 1904, when he delivered (in the United States) his first lecture in six and a half years, that Weber was able to begin to return to active academic life.
- In 1904 and 1905, he published one of his best-known works, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
- In this work, Weber announced the ascendance of his mother's religion on an academic level.
- Weber devoted much of his time to the study of religion, though he was not personally religious.
- Although he continued to be plagued by psychological problems, after 1904 Weber was able to function, indeed to produce some of his most important work.
- In these years, Weber published his studies of the world's religions in world-historical perspective (for example, China, India, and ancient Judaism).
- At the time of his death (June 14, 1920), he was working on his most important work, *Economy and Society* (1921/1968). Although this book was published, and subsequently translated into many languages, it was unfinished.
- In addition to producing a number of writings in this period, Weber undertook a number of other activities.
- He helped found the German Sociological Society in 1910.
- His home became a center for a wide range of intellectuals, including sociologists such as Georg Simmel, Robert Michels, and his brother Alfred Weber, as well as the philosopher and literary critic Georg Lukács.
- In addition, Max Weber was active politically and wrote essays on the issues of the day.

## 6.2. Verstehen

- Weber felt that sociologists had an advantage over natural scientists. That advantage resided in the sociologist's ability to *understand* social phenomena, whereas the natural scientist could not gain a similar understanding of the behavior of an atom or a chemical compound.
- The German word for understanding is *verstehen*. Weber's thoughts on *verstehen* were relatively common among German historians of his day and were derived from a field known as *hermeneutics*.
- Hermeneutics was a special approach to the understanding and interpretation of published writings. Its goal was to understand the thinking of the author as well as the basic structure of the text.
- Weber and others sought to extend this idea from the understanding of texts to the understanding of social life:

*"Once we have realized that the historical method is nothing more or less than the classical method of interpretation applied to overt action instead of to texts, a method aiming at identifying a human design, a "meaning" behind observable events, we shall have no difficulty in accepting that it can be just as well applied to human interaction as to individual actors. From this point of view all history is interaction, which has to be interpreted in terms of the rival plans of various actors."*(Lachman, 1971:20)

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

### 6.3. Class, Status, and Party

- The concept of “class” refers to any group of people found in the same class situation. Thus a class is *not* a community but merely a group of people in the same economic, or market, situation.
- In contrast to class, status does normally refer to communities; status groups are ordinarily communities, although rather unstructured 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*”
- 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.

### 6.4. Social Action

- According to the standard interpretation, Weber conceived of sociology as a comprehensive science of social action.
- His initial theoretical focus is on the subjective meaning that humans attach to their actions and interactions within specific social contexts.
- In this connection, Weber distinguishes between four major types of social action:
  1. Means-Ends Rationality
  2. Value Rationality
  3. Affective action
  4. Traditional action

**Means-Ends Rationality** can be defined as action in which the means to attain a particular goal are rationally chosen.

**Value Rationality** is characterized by striving for a goal which in itself may not be rational, but which is pursued through rational means. The values come from within an ethical, religious, philosophical or even holistic context--they are not rationally "chosen."

**Affective Action** is based on the emotional state of the person rather than in the rational weighing of means and ends. Sentiments are powerful forces in motivating human behavior.

**Traditional Action** is action guided by custom or habit. People engage in this type of action often unthinkingly, because it is simply "always done."

- Weber's typology is intended to be a comprehensive list of the types of meaning men and women give to their conduct across socio-cultural systems.
- As an advocate of multiple causation of human behavior, Weber was well aware that most behavior is caused by a mix of these motivations.
- He developed the typology because he was primarily concerned with modern society and how it differs from societies of the past.
- He proposed that the basic distinguishing feature of modern society was a characteristic shift in the motivation of individual behaviors.
- In modern society the efficient application of means to ends has come to dominate and replace other springs of social behavior.
- While he proposed that the basic distinguishing feature of modern society was best viewed in terms of characteristic shift in motivation, he rooted that shift in the growth of bureaucracy and industrialism.

### 6.5. Ideal Type

- Weber's discussion of social action is an example of the use of an ideal type. An ideal type provides the basic method for historical- comparative study.
- It is not meant to refer to the "best" or to some moral ideal, but rather to typical or "logically consistent" features of social institutions or behaviors.



- An ideal type is an analytical construct that serves as a measuring rod for social observers to determine the extent to which concrete social institutions are similar and how they differ from some defined measure.
- The ideal type involves determining the features of a social institution that would be present if the institution were a logically consistent whole, not affected by other institutions, concerns and interests.
- The ideal type never corresponds to concrete reality but is a description to which we can compare reality.

### 6.6. Bureaucracy

- Weber's focus on the trend of rationalization led him to concern himself with the operation and expansion of large-scale enterprises in both the public and private sectors of modern societies.
- Bureaucracy can be considered to be a particular case of rationalization, or rationalization applied to human organization.
- Bureaucratic coordination of human action, Weber believed, is the distinctive mark of modern social structures.
- In order to study these organizations, both historically and in contemporary society, Weber developed the characteristics of an ideal-type bureaucracy:
  1. Hierarchy of authority
  2. Impersonality
  3. Written rules of conduct
  4. Promotion based on achievement
  5. Specialized division of labor
  6. Efficiency
- According to Weber, bureaucracies are goal-oriented organizations designed according to rational principles in order to efficiently attain their goals.

- Offices are ranked in a hierarchical order, with information flowing up the chain of command, directives flowing down.
- Operations of the organizations are characterized by impersonal rules that explicitly state duties, responsibilities, standardized procedures and conduct of office holders.
- Offices are highly specialized . Appointments to these offices are made according to specialized qualifications rather than ascribed criteria.
- All of these ideal characteristics have one goal, to promote the efficient attainment of the organization's goals.
- The bureaucratic coordination of the action of large numbers of people has become the dominant structural feature of modern societies.
- It is only through this organizational device that large-scale planning and coordination, both for the modern state and the modern economy, become possible.
- The consequences of the growth in the power and scope of these organizations is key in understanding our world.

### 6.7. Authority

- Weber's discussion of authority relations also provides insight into what is happening in the modern world.
  - On what basis do men and women claim authority over others?
  - Why do men and women give obedience to authority figures?

- Again, he uses the ideal type to begin to address these questions. Weber distinguished three main types of authority:
  1. Traditional Authority
  2. Rational-legal Authority
  3. Charismatic
- **Rational legal authority** is anchored in impersonal rules that have been legally established. This type of authority (which parallels the growth of zweckrational) has come to characterize social relations in modern societies.
- **Traditional authority** often dominates pre-modern societies. It is based on the belief in the sanctity of tradition, of "the eternal yesterday."
- Finally, **charismatic authority** rests on the appeal of leaders who claim allegiance because of the force of their extraordinary personalities.
- Again, it should be kept in mind that Weber is describing an ideal type; he was aware that in empirical reality mixtures will be found in the legitimization of authority.

#### 6.8. Causality

- Weber firmly believed in the multi-causality of social phenomenon. He expressed this causality in terms of probabilities.
- Prediction becomes possible, Weber believed, only within a system of theory that focus our concern on a few social forces out of the wealth of forces and their interactions that make up empirical reality
- Within such constraints, causal certainty in social research is not attainable (nor is it attainable outside the laboratory in natural sciences).
- The best that can be done is to focus our theories on the most important relationships between social forces, and to forecast from that theory in terms of probabilities.
- Weber's system invokes both ideas and material factors as interactive components in the socio-cultural evolutionary process.

- Weber attempted to show that the relations between ideas and social structures were multiple and varied, and that causal connections went in both directions.
- While Weber basically agreed with Marx that economic factors were key in understanding the social system, he gave much greater emphasis to the influence and interaction of ideas and values on sociocultural evolution.

### 6.9. The Protestant Ethic

- Weber's concern with the meaning that people give to their actions allowed him to understand the drift of historical change.
- He believed that rational action within a system of rational-legal authority is at the heart of modern society.
- His sociology was first and foremost an attempt to explore and explain this shift from traditional to rational action.
  - What was it about the West, he asks, that is causing this shift?
  - In an effort to understand these causes, Weber examined the religious and economic systems of many civilizations.
- Weber came to believe that the rationalization of action can only be realized when traditional ways of life are abandoned.
- Weber's task was to uncover the forces in the West that caused people to abandon their traditional religious value orientation and encouraged them to develop a desire for acquiring goods and wealth.
- After careful study, Weber came to the hypothesis that the Protestant ethic broke the hold of tradition while it encouraged men to apply themselves rationally to their work.
- Calvinism, he found, had developed a set of beliefs around the concept of predestination.

- It was believed by followers of Calvin that one could not do good works or perform acts of faith to assure your place in heaven.
- You were either among the "elect" (in which case you were in) or you were not. However, wealth was taken as a sign (by you and your neighbors) that you were one of the God's elect, thereby providing encouragement for people to acquire wealth.
- The Protestant ethic therefore provided religious sanctions that fostered a spirit of rigorous discipline, encouraging men to apply themselves rationally to acquire wealth.
- Weber studied non-Western cultures as well. He found that several of these pre-industrial societies had the technological infrastructure and other necessary preconditions to begin capitalism and economic expansion, however, capitalism failed to emerge.
- The only force missing were the positive sanctions to abandon traditional ways.
- While Weber does not believe that the Protestant ethic was the only cause of the rise of capitalism, he believed it to be a powerful force in fostering its emergence.

#### **6.10. Rationalization**

- The rationalization process is the practical application of knowledge to achieve a desired end. It leads to efficiency, coordination, and control over both the physical and the social environment.
- It is the guiding principle behind bureaucracy and the increasing division of labor.
- It has led to the unprecedented increase in both the production and distribution of goods and services.
- It is also associated with secularization, depersonalization, and oppressive routine.
- Increasingly, human behavior is guided by observation, experiment and reason to master the natural and social environment to achieve a desired end.
- Weber's general theory of rationalization (of which bureaucratization is but a particular case) refers to increasing human mastery over the natural and social environment.

- In turn, these changes in social structure have changed human character through changing values, philosophies, and beliefs.
- Such super structural norms and values as individualism, efficiency, self-discipline, materialism, and calculability (all of which are subsumed under Weber's concept of zweckrational) have been encouraged by the bureaucratization process.
- Weber came to believe that bureaucracy and rationalization were rapidly replacing all other forms of organization and thought. They formed a stranglehold on all sectors of Western society.
- Rationalization is the most general element of Weber's theory. He identifies rationalization with an increasing division of labor, bureaucracy and mechanization.

## Chapter Seven

### Karl Marx (1818 -1883)

#### 7.1. A Biographical Sketch

- Karl Marx was born in Trier, Prussia, on May 5, 1818.
- In 1841 Marx received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin.
- Marx's doctorate was a dry philosophical treatise, but it did anticipate many of his later ideas.
- After graduation he became a writer for a liberal-radical newspaper and within ten months had become its editor in chief.
- However, because of its political positions, the paper was closed shortly thereafter by the government.
- The early essays published in this period began to reflect a number of the positions that would guide Marx throughout his life. They were liberally sprinkled with democratic principles, humanism, and youthful idealism.
- Marx married in 1843 and soon thereafter was forced to leave Germany for the more liberal atmosphere of Paris.
- There he continued to grapple with the ideas of Hegel and his supporters, but he also encountered two new sets of ideas—French socialism and English political economy.
- Also of great importance at this point was his meeting the man who was to become his lifelong friend, benefactor, and collaborator—Friedrich Engels. The son of a textile manufacturer, Engels had become a socialist critical of the conditions facing the working class.
- Much of Marx's compassion for the misery of the working class came from his exposure to Engels and his ideas.
- In 1844 Engels and Marx had a lengthy conversation in a famous café in Paris and laid the groundwork for a lifelong association.
- During this period Marx wrote a number of abstruse works (many unpublished in his lifetime), including *The Holy Family* (1845/1956) and *The German Ideology* (1845–1846/1970) (both coauthored with Engels), but he also produced *The Economic and Philosophic*

*Manuscripts of 1844* (1932/1964), which better foreshadowed his increasing preoccupation with the economic domain.

- While Marx and Engels shared a theoretical orientation, there were many differences between the two men. Marx tended to be theoretical, a disorderly intellectual, and very oriented to his family. Engels was a practical thinker, a neat and tidy businessman, and a person who did not believe in the institution of the family.
- Because some of his writings had upset the Prussian government, the French government (at the request of the Prussians) expelled Marx in 1845, and he moved to Brussels.
- His radicalism was growing, and he had become an active member of the international revolutionary movement. He also associated with the Communist League and was asked to write a document (with Engels) expounding its aims and beliefs. The result was the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 (1848/1948), a work that was characterized by ringing political slogans (for example, “Working men of all countries, unite!”).
- In 1849 Marx moved to London, and, in light of the failure of the political revolutions of 1848, he began to withdraw from active revolutionary activity and to move into more serious and detailed research on the workings of the capitalist system.
- In 1852, he began his famous studies in the British Museum of the working conditions in capitalism.
- These studies ultimately resulted in the three volumes of *Capital*, the first of which was published in 1867.
- Marx lived in poverty during these years, barely managing to survive on a small income from his writings and the support of Engels.
- In 1864 Marx became reinvented in political activity by joining the International, an international movement of workers.
- He soon gained dominance within the movement and devoted a number of years to it. He began to gain fame both as a leader of the International and as the author of *Capital*.
- But the disintegration of the International by 1876, the failure of various revolutionary movements, and personal illness took their toll on Marx.
- His wife died in 1881, a daughter in 1882, and Marx himself on March 14, 1883.



## 7.2. The Dialectic

- Marx's focus on real, existing contradictions led to a particular method for studying social phenomena that has also come to be called "dialectical."
- The idea of a dialectical philosophy had been around for centuries. Its basic idea is the centrality of contradiction. While most philosophies, and indeed common sense, treat contradictions as mistakes, a dialectical philosophy believes that contradictions exist in reality and that the most appropriate way to understand reality is to study the development of those contradictions. Hegel used the idea of contradiction to understand historical change.
- According to Hegel, historical change has been driven by the contradictory understandings that are the essence of reality, by our attempts to resolve the contradictions, and by the new contradictions that develop.
- However, unlike Hegel, Marx did not believe that these contradictions could be worked out in our understanding, that is, in our minds. Instead, for Marx these are real, existing contradictions.
- For Marx, such contradictions are resolved not by the philosopher sitting in an armchair but by a life-and-death struggle that changes the social world.
- This was a crucial transformation because it allowed Marx to move the dialectic out of the realm of philosophy and into the realm of a study of social relations grounded in the material world.
- It is this focus that makes Marx's work so relevant to sociology, even though the dialectical approach is very different from the mode of thinking used by most sociologists.
- The dialectic leads to an interest in the conflicts and contradictions among various levels of social reality, rather than to the more traditional sociological interest in the ways these various levels mesh neatly into a cohesive whole.
- **Example:** One of the contradictions within capitalism is the relationship between the workers and the capitalists who own the factories and other means of production with which the work is done. The capitalist must exploit the workers in order to make a profit from the workers' labor. The workers, in contradiction to the capitalists, want to keep at least some of

the profit for themselves. Marx believed that this contradiction was at the heart of capitalism, and that it would grow worse as capitalists drove more and more people to become workers by forcing small firms out of business and as competition between the capitalists forced them to further exploit the workers to make a profit. As capitalism expands, the number of workers exploited, as well as the degree of exploitation, increases. This contradiction can be resolved not through philosophy but only through social change. The tendency for the level of exploitation to escalate leads to more and more resistance by the workers. Resistance begets more exploitation and oppression, and the likely result is a confrontation between the two classes.

### 7.3. Human Potential

- Marx built his critical analysis of the contradictions of capitalist society on his premises about human potential, its relation to labor, and its potential for alienation under capitalism.
- He believed that there was a real contradiction between our human potential and the way that we must work in capitalist society.
- Marx (1850/1964:64) wrote in an early work that human beings are an “ensemble of social relations.” He indicates by this that our human potential is intertwined with our specific social relations and our institutional context.
- Therefore, human nature is not a static thing but varies historically and socially.
- For Marx, there is a human potential in general, but what is more important is the way it is “modified in each historical epoch”
- When speaking of our general human potential, Marx often used the term *species being*. By this he meant the potentials and powers that are uniquely human and that distinguish humans from other species.
- Important parts of Marx’s view of the relation between labor and human nature are:

#### 7.3.1. The Objectification of Our Purpose

- What distinguishes us from other animals—our species being—is that our labor creates something in reality that previously existed only in our imagination.

- Our production reflects our purpose. Marx calls this process in which we create external objects out of our internal thoughts *objectification*.

### 7.3.2. The Establishment of an Essential Relation between Human Need and the Material Objects of Our Need

- Labor is material. It works with the more material aspects of nature (e.g., raising fruits and vegetables, cutting down trees for wood) in order to satisfy our material needs.

### 7.3.3. The Transformation of Our Human Nature

- Finally, Marx believed that this labor does not just transform the material aspects of nature but also transforms us, including our needs, our consciousness, and our human nature.
- Labor is thus at the same time (1) the objectification of our purpose, (2) the establishment of an essential relation between human need and the material objects of our need, and (3) the transformation of our human nature.
- Marx's use of the term *labor* is not restricted to economic activities; it encompasses all productive actions that transform the material aspects of nature in accordance with our purpose. Whatever is created through this free purposive activity is both an expression of our human nature and a transformation of it.
- In addition, Marx tells us that this transformation includes even our consciousness:

*“Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all”*

(Marx and Engels, 1845–1846/1970:51).

- Consequently, the transformation of the individual through labor and the transformation of society are not separable.

## 7.4. Alienation

- Although Marx believed that there is an inherent relation between labor and human nature, he thought that this relation is perverted by capitalism.
- He calls this perverted relation *alienation*.

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

**7.4.1. Workers in Capitalist Society are Alienated From their *Productive Activity*.**

- They do not produce objects according to their own ideas or to directly satisfy their own needs.
- Instead, workers work for capitalists, who pay them a subsistence wage in return for the right to use them in any way they see fit.

**7.4.2. Workers in capitalist society are alienated from the object of those activities — the *product*.**

- The product of their labor belongs not to the workers but to the capitalists, who may use it in any way they wish because it is the capitalists' private property.
- Marx tells us,

*“Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence of alienated labor.”*

Marx (1932/1964:117)

- If workers wish to own the product of their own labor, they must buy it like anyone else.
- No matter how desperate the workers' needs, they cannot use the products of their own labor to satisfy their needs. Even workers in a bakery can starve if they don't have the money to buy the bread that they make.

**7.4.3. Workers in capitalist society are alienated from their *fellow workers*.**

- Marx's assumption was that people basically need and want to work cooperatively in order to appropriate from nature what they require to survive.
- But in capitalism this cooperation is disrupted, and people, often strangers, are forced to work side by side for the capitalist. Even if the workers on the assembly line are close friends, the nature of the technology makes for a great deal of isolation.

**7.4.4. Workers in capitalist society are alienated from their own *human potential*.**

- Instead of being a source of transformation and fulfillment of our human nature, the workplace is where we feel least human, least ourselves.
- Individuals perform less and less like human beings as they are reduced in their work to functioning like machines.

**7.5. Structure of Capitalist Society**

- Capitalism is an economic system in which great numbers of workers who own little produce commodities for the profit of small numbers of capitalists who own all of the following: the commodities, the means of producing the commodities, and the labor time of the workers, which they purchase through wages.
- One of Marx's central insights is that capitalism is much more than an economic system. It is also a system of power.
- The secret of capitalism is that political powers have been transformed into economic relations. Capitalists seldom need to use brute force. Capitalists are able to coerce workers through their power to dismiss workers and close plants.
- Capitalism, therefore, is not simply an economic system; it is also a political system, a mode of exercising power, and a process for exploiting workers.

**7.6. Cultural Aspects of Capitalist Society**

- In addition to his focus on the material structures of capitalism, Marx also theorized about its cultural aspects.

### 7.6.1. Ideology

- Not only do the existing relations of production tend to prevent changes necessary for the development of the forces of production, but similarly, the supporting relations, institutions, and, in particular, prevalent ideas also tend to prevent these changes.
- Marx called prevalent ideas that perform this function - *ideologies*. As with many terms, Marx is not always precise in his use of the word *ideology*. He seems to use it to indicate two related sorts of ideas.
- **First**, *ideology* refers to ideas that naturally emerge out of everyday life in capitalism but, because of the nature of capitalism, reflect reality in an inverted manner (Larrain, 1979).
- To explain this meaning of the term, Marx used the metaphor of a camera obscura, which employs an optical quirk to show a real image reflected upside down.
- **Example:** Even though we know that money is nothing but a piece of paper that has value only because of underlying social relations, in our daily lives we treat money as though it had inherent value. Instead of our seeing that we give money its value, it often seems that money gives us our value.
- **Second**, Marx uses the term *ideology* to refer to systems of ruling ideas that attempt once again to hide the contradictions that are at the heart of the capitalist system.
- In most cases, they do this in one of three ways:
- They lead to the creation of subsystems of ideas—a religion, a philosophy, a literature, a legal system—that makes the contradictions appear to be coherent.
- They explain away those experiences that reveal the contradictions, usually as personal problems or individual idiosyncrasies. Or,
- They present the capitalist contradiction as really being a contradiction in human nature and therefore one that cannot be fixed by social change.

### 7.6.2. Religion

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

*“Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature,*

*the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”*

(Marx, 1843/1970)

- Marx believed that religion, like all ideology, reflects a truth but that this truth is inverted.
- Because people cannot see that their distress and oppression are produced by the capitalist system, their distress and oppression are given a religious form.
- Marx clearly says that he is not against religion per se, but against a system that requires the illusions of religion.
- Marx felt that religion is especially open to becoming the second form of ideology by portraying the injustice of capitalism as a test for the faithful and pushing any revolutionary change off into the afterlife. In this way, the cry of the oppressed is used to further oppression.

## Chapter Eight

### Georg Simmel (1858-1918)

#### 8.1. Biographical Sketch

- Born in Berlin, Germany (lived in an area which was at the heart of Berlin)
- His family was business-oriented, prosperous, and Jewish
- His father converted to Christianity--died in Simmel's youth
- A modern urban man--without roots in traditional folk culture

#### 8.2. What is Society?

- Simmel proposed that sociologists focus on people in relationships. Society, for Simmel, was the *patterned interactions among members of a group*, the sum of responses to ordinary life events.
- Simmel began with the elements of everyday life--playing games, keeping secrets, being a stranger, forming friendships--and arrived at insights into the *quality* of relationships. As with Durkheim and Weber, Simmel resisted reducing social behavior to individual personality.
- Nor, for Simmel, could social relationships be fully explained by larger collective patterns such as "the economy." Rather, the results of everyday interaction creates a level of reality in its own right--an "*interaction order*" that is never totally fixed and is therefore always problematic and capable of change. (Hess, Markson, and Stein 1993:13-14)
- Simmel's approach to sociology can best be understood as a self-conscious attempt to reject the organicist theories of Comte and Spencer, as well as the historical description of unique events that was cherished in his native German.
- He advanced, instead the conception that society consists of *a web of patterned interactions*, and that it is the task of sociology to study the *forms* of these interactions as they *occur and reoccur in diverse historical periods and cultural settings*. (Cosser 1971:177)

*Society is merely the name for a number of individuals connected by interactions.*



- The major field of study for the student of society is...sociation, that is, the particular patterns and *forms* in which men associate and interact with one another. (Coser 1971:178)

### 8.3. Social Forms

- In Simmel's perspective a host of otherwise distinct human phenomena might be properly understood by *reference to the same formal concept*.
- To be sure, the student of warfare and the student of marriage investigate qualitatively different subject matters, yet the sociologist can discern essentially similar interactive forms in *martial conflict* and in *marital conflict*.
- Although there is little similarity between the behavior displayed at the court of Louis XIV and that displayed in the main offices of an American corporation, a study of the forms of *subordination* and *superordination* in each will reveal underlying patterns common to both...(Coser 1971:179)

#### 8.1.1. Social Processes

- ✓ Conflict and Cooperation
- ✓ Subordination and Superordination
- ✓ Centralization and Decentralization
- The term *form* was perhaps not the best choice...Had Simmel used the term *social structure*--which, in a sense, is quite close to his use of form--he would have probably encountered less resistance. Such modern sociological terms such as *status*, *role*, *norms*, and *expectations* as elements of social structure are close to the formal conceptualizations that Simmel employed. (Coser 1971:181)

### 8.4. Social Types

- Simmel constructed a gallery of social types to complement his inventory of social forms:
  - ✓ The Stranger
  - ✓ The Mediator
  - ✓ The Poor
  - ✓ The Adventurer
  - ✓ The Man in the Middle
  - ✓ The Renegade

- Simmel conceives of each particular social type as being cast by the specific reactions and expectations of other. The *type becomes* what he is through his relations with others who *assign* him a particular position and *expect* him to behave in specific ways. His *characteristics* are seen as *attributes* of the *social structure*. (Coser 1971:182)

#### 8.4.1. The Stranger

- “*The stranger*” in Simmel’s terminology, is not just a wanderer “who comes today and goes tomorrow,” having no specific structural position. On the contrary, he is a “person who comes today and stays tomorrow...He is fixed within a particular spatial group...but his position...is determined...by the fact that he does not belong to it from the beginning,” and that he may leave again.
- The stranger is “an element of the group itself” while not being fully part of it. *He therefore is assigned a role that no other members of the group can play. By virtue of his partial involvement in group affairs he can attain an objectivity that other members cannot reach...Moreover, being distant and near at the same time, the stranger will often be called upon as a confidant...In similar ways, the stranger may be a better judge between conflicting parties than full members of the group since he is not tied to either of the contenders...*(Coser 1971:182)

#### 8.4.2. The Poor

- Once *the poor* accept assistance, *they are removed from the preconditions of their previous status, they are declassified, and their private trouble now becomes a public issue. The poor come to be viewed not by what they do--the criteria ordinarily used in social categorization--but by virtue of what is done to them.*
- Society creates the social type of the poor and assigns them a peculiar status that is marked only by negative attributes, by what the status-holders do not have. (Coser 1971:182)

*The stranger* and *the poor*, as well as Simmel’s other types, are assigned their positions by virtue of specific interactive relations. They are societal creations and *must act out their assigned roles*. (Coser 1971:183)

### 8.5. The Dialectical Method

- To Simmel, *sociation* always involves *harmony and conflict, attraction and repulsion, love and hatred*. He saw human relations as characterized by *ambivalence*; precisely those who are connected in intimate relations are likely to harbor for one another not only positive but also negative sentiments.
- *Erotic relations*, for example, strike us as woven together of love and respect, or disrespect...of love and an urge to dominate or the need for dependence...What the observer or the participant himself thus divides into two intermingling trends may in reality be only one.

Because conflict can strengthen existing bonds or establish new ones, it can be considered a *creative* rather than a *destructive* force. (Coser 1971:184-185)

### 8.6. The Significance of Numbers for Social Life

- Simmel's emphasis on the structural determinants of social action is perhaps best exemplified in his seminal essay, "Quantitative Aspects of the Group." Here he comes nearest to realizing his goal of writing *a grammar of social life* by considering one of the most abstract characteristics of a group: *the mere number of its participants*.
- He examines forms of group process and structural arrangement insofar as these derive from sheer quantitative relationships. (Coser 1971:186)

#### 8.6.1. Dyad Versus Triad

- A *dyadic* relationship differs *qualitatively* from all other types of groups in that each of the two participants is confronted by only *one* other and not by a *collectivity*.
- Because this type of group depends only on two participants, the withdrawal of one would destroy the whole: "A dyad depends on each of its two elements alone--in its death though not in its life: *for its life it needs both, but for its death, only one.*" (Coser 1971:186)
- When a dyad is transformed into a *triad*, the apparently insignificant fact that one member has been added actually brings about *a major qualitative change*. In the *triad*, as in all associations involving more than two persons, *the individual participant is confronted with the possibility of being outvoted by a majority*.

- The *triad* is the simplest structure in which the *group as a whole can achieve domination over its component members*; it provides a social framework that allows the constraining of individual participants for *collective purposes*...Thus, the triad exhibits in its simplest form the sociological drama that informs all social life: the dialectic of *freedom and constraint, of autonomy and heteronomy*. (Coser 1971:187)
- When a third member enters a dyadic group, various processes become possible where previously they could not take place. A third member may:
  - ✓ Mediate
  - ✓ Rejoice
  - ✓ Divide and Rule

### 8.7. The Philosophy of Money

- *Economic exchange*, Simmel argues, can best be understood as a *form* of social interaction. When monetary transactions replace earlier forms of barter, *significant changes occur in the forms of interactions between social actors*.
- Money is subject to precise division and manipulation and permits exact measurement of equivalents. It is impersonal in a manner in which objects of barter, like crafted gongs and collected shells, can never be.
- *It thus helps promote rational calculation in human affairs and furthers the rationalization that is characteristic of modern society. When money becomes the prevalent link between people, it replaces personal ties anchored in diffuse feelings by impersonal relations that are limited to a specific purpose*.
- Consequently, abstract calculation invades areas of social life, such as kinship relations or the realm of esthetic appreciation, which were previously the domain of *qualitative* rather than *quantitative* appraisals. (Coser 1971:193)

## References

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Ritzer, George (1996): *Sociological Theory* (New York: McGraw Hill, 4<sup>th</sup> edition) Chapter 1 (A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory); Chapter 2 (Karl Marx); Chapter 3 (Emile Durkheim); Chapter 4 (Max Weber); Chapter 5 (George Simmel)

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### Supplementary Readings

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**Mizan-Tepi University**  
**College of Social Science and Humanities**  
**Department of Sociology**  
**One-to-Five Peer Study Guiding Questions**

**Sociological Theories I: Classical Perspectives**

**Chapter One: Introduction**

1. What were the major factors responsible for the emergence of classical sociological theories?
2. The Enlightenment as an intellectual movement influenced the emergence of numerous social theories. How did this movement influence the development of classical sociological theories?
3. Why do sociologists consider Feminism as one of the key factors responsible for the emergence of classical sociological theories?

**Chapter Two: Adam Smith**

1. What is Political Economy?
2. What is the difference between political economy and economics?
3. In 1776, Adam Smith completed his celebrated treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. What were the book's major contributions to the field of political economy and eventually to economics?
4. How did Smith understand the division of labor in society?
5. To defend his stance in favor of maintaining a laissez-faire attitude toward commercial endeavors, Smith proclaimed the principle of the "invisible hand". What does the "invisible hand" refer to?
6. What were the contributions of Smith to the field of sociology?

### **Chapter Three: Auguste Comte**

1. Discuss the concept of Positivism?
2. Auguste Comte was in line with, and influenced by, the French counterrevolutionary Catholics. However, his work can be set apart from theirs on at least two grounds. What were these grounds?
3. Discuss the Law of the Three Stages as depicted by Comte?
4. Comte argued that intellectual disorder is the cause of social disorder. What do you think led him to this conclusion?
5. Comte identified two branches of sociology. What were they? How are they different from each other?
6. What were Comte's principal contributions to the discipline of sociology?

### **Chapter Four: Herbert Spencer**

1. Discuss the major similarities and differences between the ideas of Auguste Comte and those of Herbert Spencer?
2. How did Spencer define 'Evolution'?
3. How did Spencer relate organic evolution and social evolution?
4. What is the difference between militant and industrial societies?
5. Define Social Darwinism?
6. Discuss some of the ambiguities in the ideas of Herbert Spencer?

### **Chapter Five: Emile Durkheim**

1. What are Social Facts?
2. Discuss the four characteristics of social facts?
3. Discuss the differences between material and non-material social facts?
4. Discuss the four types of non-material social facts analyzed by Emile Durkheim?
5. How did Durkheim relate the division of labor with solidarity?
6. Discuss the differences between organic and mechanical solidarity?
7. Discuss the characteristics of repressive and restitutive laws?

8. Discuss the four types of suicide as identified by Emile Durkheim?
9. What is the difference between something that is sacred and something that is profane?
10. What is a Totem?
11. Discuss Durkheim's analysis of Totemism?

## Chapter Six: Max Weber

1. What is *Verstehen*?
2. What is Hermeneutics?
3. What is the relationship between Hermeneutics and *Verstehen*?
4. Discuss the differences between Class, Status and Party?
5. What is Social Action?
6. Discuss the four types of social action identified by Max Weber?
7. What is Ideal Type?
8. What is Bureaucracy?
9. What are the six characteristics of an ideal type bureaucracy?
10. What is Authority?
11. Discuss the three types of authority identified by Max Weber?
12. Discuss Weber's ideas on the relationship between the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism?

## Chapter Seven: Karl Marx

1. What is Dialectical Philosophy?
2. What is Species Being?
3. Discuss the relationship between labor and human nature as analyzed by Karl Marx?
4. What is Objectification?
5. Define and discuss the concept of alienation?
6. Discuss Marx's ideas on the cultural aspects of a capitalist society?



## Chapter Eight: Georg Simmel

1. How did Simmel define Society?
2. What is Sociation?
3. Discuss Simmel's use of social forms and social types in his analysis of society?
4. How did Simmel distinguish between a dyad and a triad?
5. Discuss some of the core ideas in Simmel's Philosophy of Money?