

SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS

B.A.(Sociology) - Third Year

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SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS

Course Objective

To understand the origin and development of Sociology as a subject. To learn the classical theories propounded by various thinkers. To learn how the various aspects of social life are analysed by early sociological thinkers.

Unit - I

Emergence of Sociology

Unit - II

August Comte: The Law of Human Progress, Positivism, Hierarchy of Science and Social Static and Dynamic.

Unit - III

Herbert Spencer: Theory of Evolution, Organic Analogy, Militant and Industrial Societies.

Unit - IV

Emile Durkheim: Social Facts, Division of Labour, Suicide.

Unit - V

Max Weber: Theory of Social Action, Concept of Ideal Type, Protestant ethic and Spirit of Capitalism.

Unit - VI

Karl Marx: Dialectical Materialism, Alienation, Class Struggle.

Readings:

1. Coser, Lewis A. "Masters of Sociological Thought", New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.
2. Aron, Raymond "Main Currents in Sociological Thought" Vol. 1 & 2, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1965.
3. Abraham, Francis, and Morgan, John Henry, Sociological Thought from Comte to Sorokin, Madras: Macmillan India, 1985.
4. Ritzer, Lewis, A. Master of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context. 2nd ed. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1996.

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UNIT – I**Lesson 1.1 - Emergence of Sociology****Structure**

- 1.1 A New Way of Thinking
- 1.2 The Renaissance
- 1.3 The Enlightenment
- 1.4 Industrial Revolution
- 1.5 American Revolution
- 1.6 French Revolution
- 1.7 Conclusion

Learning Objectives:

- To understand the social and historical background for the emergence of sociology as a discipline
- To have an understanding about the economic, scientific, and literary developments during the Renaissance
- To see in depth the philosophical developments that went into the emergence of sociology
- To look at the developments of the Industrial Revolution
- To see the origins and causes of the American Revolution
- To analyse how the French Revolution took place
- To place the history of the origins of sociology

1.1 A New Way of Thinking

For ages, since humankind has existed, there have been thought and writing about society and people. Thinkers like Plato and Aristotle in Europe, Ibn Sena (Avicenna) in the Persian world, Kautilya in ancient India and Lao Tzu in ancient China have all written and propounded their views on the world in various aspects, such as polity, war, philosophy, etc. Later, over the centuries, disciplines such as history and economics flourished, with more and more thinkers writing and thus paving ways to understand and critically analyse the behaviour of human society. Perhaps the most profound among all this was philosophy, which questioned not just human

society, but also the very reality of the world itself. It is important to note that while modern disposition teaches us that theorising about society has originated and flourished in the western societies, Asia and Africa also played host to a multitude of thinkers and theories, all writing and speaking on the human condition right from antiquity.

However, it was only in the 19th century that a specific science for the study of society originated. This new discipline- sociology- was heralded by a set of social and intellectual upheavals that not only changed society, but also prompted a radically new way of thinking about these social changes. It was no more possible to go back to the age-old ways of thinking about social relations and structures; instead the need was felt for a novel way of understanding society, which was now subject to a lot of upheavals. This is where sociology first makes its presence felt.

Never in history has anything happened in a vacuum, untouched by factors that came before it. So is the case with sociology too. Sociology may have originated as a discipline in the 19th century, in the strictest sense of the term. However, the influences for this study existed long before. Right from the later part of the Middle Ages, Europe had been undergoing a reckoning in terms of intellectual, moral, religious, cultural and political life, and these reckonings would come to be manifested in various forms. The spread of these new ideas which were espoused by writers and scholars would have its impact in the later century, and among its many results was the establishment of a new discipline called sociology.

In this chapter, we look at a few of the factors that helped in the emergence of sociology as a distinct social science. But before we look at the immediate factors, we have to take a walk back to medieval Europe, where there were stirrings that indicated a shift in thinking and which would have profound influence on the future of mankind in many ways.

1.2 The Renaissance

During the intervening years between the Medieval Ages and the Modern Era, in Europe, a vast current of changes took place in the spheres of life and thinking. Generally, this period is considered to have lasted from the 14th century to the early 17th century, varying across countries. The term Renaissance comes from the French word meaning *rebirth*. During the Renaissance, Europe underwent a lot of changes in all realms of its life. Some of the important changes are charted below.

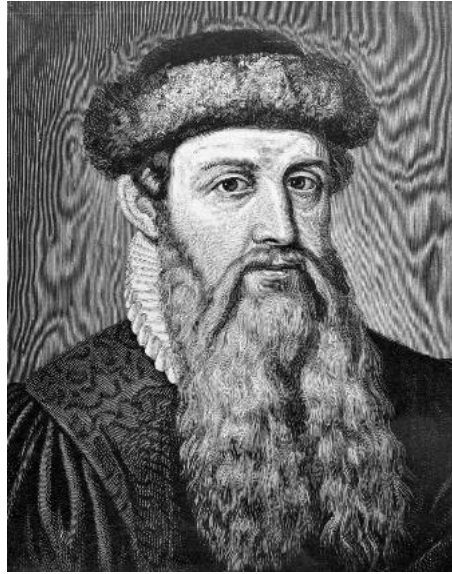


Figure 1: Johannes Gutenberg

During the Renaissance period, humanism started gaining momentum. Popularised through the works of writers such as Petrarch and Boccaccio, humanism sought to bring back to vogue the classical values of the antiquities. A lot of importance was given to science, arts and literature, and people were encouraged to seek development in these spheres. In the 15th century, the Gutenberg press was invented, which allowed for the easy circulation of books. This further popularised the humanist ideas throughout Europe. One of the defining features of this time period were the Crusades. The European armies who were crusading encountered the cultures of the Middle Eastern regions, and were able to bring back many of the things they had seen back to their countries.



Figure 2: The Medici House in Florence

In the 14th century, in Europe, the bubonic plagues ravaged across Europe, killing almost 50 million people, considered to be almost half of Europe's population at that time. With such a decrease in population, there was a large-scale restructuring of the demography of Europe. In Italy, for example, the Medici family in Florence became prominent bankers and political rulers of the city, and they wielded considerable power. Under their patronage, artists such as Botticelli and Michelangelo flourished, and Leonardo da Vinci was also associated with them. In fact, Nicolo Machiavelli, the writer of the famous European political treatise *The Prince* dedicated the book to a member of the Medici family to gain favour from them. According to many historians, Florence is the birthplace of the Renaissance and this is largely due to the influence of the Medici clan.

Italy in general was very important to the Renaissance movement. As mentioned above, a lot of artists thrived in this period, the most famous of whom was Leonardo da Vinci. Today, we use the word 'Renaissance Man' to describe someone who is skilled in many fields; perhaps the first such Renaissance Man was da Vinci, because he excelled in many fields. His art imbibed scientific principles in it, and he also filled notebooks with scientific illustrations and ideas for future inventions. Michelangelo was another Italian who is today most famous for painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, and for having sculpted David. Some other famous painters from this period were Botticelli, Raphael and Donatello. Thus, we can see that there was a flourishing of art in this period.



Figure 3: Leonardo da Vinci

Similarly, literature also gained prominence during the Renaissance. In England, writers such as William Shakespeare, John Milton and Geoffrey Chaucer were writing works which are still read and studied today. Not just literature, but philosophical works also being produced by writers both in England as well as in continental Europe. Some of the famous writers of this period were Dante, Thomas Hobbes, Descartes, Erasmus, Machiavelli, etc. Many of these writers wrote about humanism. Plays were popular during this period and could be easily circulated due to the printing press.

In the field of science also, there were a lot of revolutions that took place in this time period which would have implications on the evolution of modernity and modern science. There was a quest to find out more rational and logical reasonings behind the functioning of the world, away from a solely religious understanding. Among the most famous and the most influential of this was Nicolas Copernicus, the Polish astronomer who argued for the heliocentric theory, that is, that the sun is at the centre of the solar system and not the earth. This went against the mainstream knowledge of the time and was considered to be a major threat to the way of thinking that the Catholic Church banned his books.

Another scientist who likewise faced the wrath of the Catholic Church was the Italian scientist Galileo Galilei. He also conducted a lot of experiments with his improved telescope and he further argued for the heliocentric theory. He was accused of heresy, and was subjected to house arrest by the Catholic Church. However, his experiments concerning the speed at which objects fell to the ground influenced Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity centuries later.

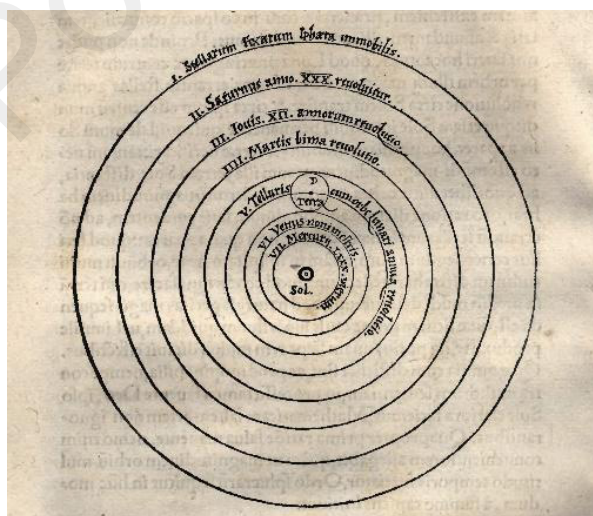


Figure 4: Copernican heliocentrism

In the realm of religion also, the Renaissance brought a lot of changes. The authority of the Catholic Church was shaken by the Protestant movement which was led by Martin Luther in Germany. Luther questioned many practices of the Catholic church, such as the notion of buying forgiveness for sins. He also believed that the holy texts should be accessible to all, and should not be exclusively interpreted by the monks alone. He argued for a more individual relationship with god, instead of one mediated by the Church. However, he was only one among many leaders of the Protestant Reformation movement of the 16th century. For example, in France, John Calvin and in Switzerland, Huldrych Zwingli protested against the Catholic Church. In England also, very dramatic changes took place with the establishment of the Church of England by Henry VIII in the 16th century, because the Catholic Pope would not allow him to annul his marriage. This was to have long-reaching consequences: subsequent rulers of England alternated with Protestantism and the Church of England, eventually leading to a group of people called the Puritans to seek to establish their own church. The Puritans, also called Pilgrims thus sailed away from England in the beginning of the 17th century in a ship called the Mayflower and established a new church across the ocean in a place they called New England. This is in current day United States.



Figure 5: Martin Luther

Another important event to take place in the Renaissance period was the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended many wars in Europe in the 17th century. This treaty is important because it recognized the sovereignty of different countries, and also sought to keep diplomacy as the primary means

by which conflicts could be avoided in the future. The Renaissance era also saw the growth in the number of people who went to explore around the world. Prince Henry of Portugal (1394-1460) started what is called the Age of Discovery, since he was responsible for the exploration of the African coasts. It was also in the 15th centuries that Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) sailed to the Americas (mistaking it to be India) and that Vasco da Gama (1460-1524) also discovered a new route from Europe to Asia entirely by sea. In the early 16th century, Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) also led a Spanish expedition around the world to discover a trade route to Indonesia. Thus, trade had a very important role in the Medieval Ages.

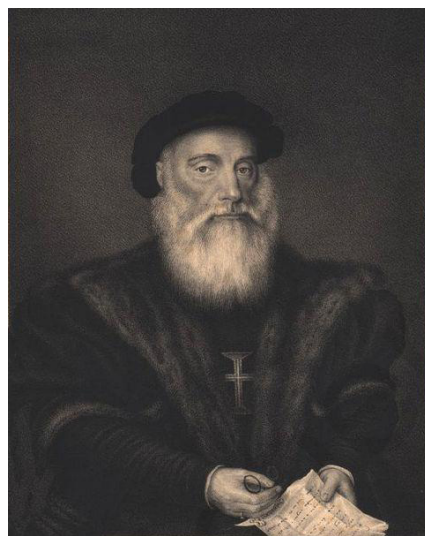


Figure 6: Vasco da Gama

Exercise: Write a brief essay on the Renaissance Man- Leonardo da Vinci- and his various contributions to multiple disciplines.

1.3 The Enlightenment

The other major change in Europe that led a great deal of change in the way people thought and structured their private and public lives was the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment period is generally associated with the 17th and 18th centuries, and led the way to rationalist thinking. France and Britain had the largest number of Enlightenment thinkers, and they believed that with rational thinking and a questioning of authority as it hitherto existed, it was possible to bring about change in humanity.

Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes from England were two of the first major Enlightenment thinkers. Apart from that, there were also others

such as Rene Descartes from France, and John Locke from England, whose works also paved the way for a new form of thinking in philosophy, science and mathematics. Scientists such as Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Isaac Newton, etc. are also considered to be towering figures in the Enlightenment era. As we know from their contributions and its importance even today, they wield considerable influence over our sensibilities.



Figure 7: *A reading of Voltaire's The Orphan of China by Anicet Lemonnier, c. 1812*

A few other Enlightenment thinkers were Voltaire, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu and Denis Diderot. As we will see in the following chapters, many of these thinkers were directly important for the emergence of sociology. Thinkers such as Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson contributed to the ideas that would eventually lead to the American Revolution.

Some of the major ideas of the Enlightenment are described here. In the 18th century, Voltaire and Rousseau in France wrote about the role of reason, rather than belief, in the society. Montesquieu wrote about the nature of government, and this in turn influenced the establishment of the United States' model of authority. Montesquieu himself would later travel the newly formed country and remark about the changes it was making in setting itself apart from the European countries. Thinkers like Spinoza focussed on individual liberty, while those such as Descartes wrote on the ways in which we perceive our realities and how we process them. Kant wrote about morals and the motivations for our actions. Thinkers like Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau wrote on the nature of societies and authority.

The Enlightenment had its origins in the *philosophies*, which is the term given to a set of thinkers and philosophers whose works contributed to the era. As mentioned above, there were French thinkers such as Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, and D'Alembert; Scottish persons such as Adam Smith, David Hume, Frances Hutcheson and Thomas Reid; and German thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Moses Mendelssohn, GE Lessing and Christian Wolf. The Enlightenment movement was influenced by the scientific discoveries of the Renaissance period. Just like the Renaissance period is associated with vital political and cultural moments, the Enlightenment is also associated with important events such as the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. Both these events signified a major challenge to the institution of monarchy, and to the absolute supremacy of the church. Typically, the Enlightenment is said to have ended by the end of the French Revolution, and the beginning of the Reign of Terror (more on the French Revolution will be seen in the following chapters).

Enlightenment and Scientific Thought

Immanuel Kant in his 1784 essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* wrote that enlightenment is *humankind's release from its self-incurred immaturity: "immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another"*. Individuals were encouraged and expected to be on the path towards awareness, away from the dogma of religion, and through one's own intellectual powers to go towards a fulfilled existence.

Let us now see some of the main persons of the Enlightenment period.



Figure 8: Rene Descartes

Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* in 1687 put forth the idea that even heavenly bodies followed certain universal rules. His work pointed

out that it was possible to understand even the most obscure laws in nature, if one used one's mental capabilities with an openness that science requires of us.

Enlightenment thinking often rests on the work of Rene Descartes. Descartes built his ideas on the presumption that humans had achieved a metaphysical knowledge of god. Having achieved that, humans ought to understand not by the senses, but by the mental faculties. In spite of his insistence on metaphysical understanding of the divine, Cartesian thought was crucial for the development of natural sciences. For example, it was due to Descartes' work that the use of geometry in the explanation of physical problems began. Even though Descartes himself lived in the late 16th to mid-17th centuries, his works are still discussed today in works on epistemology and philosophy. Cartesian duality, that is, his fundamental question whether the mind and the body are separated is still a topic of controversy in the study of science.



Figure 9: Baruch Spinoza

As a response to Descartes, Baruch Spinoza developed systematic rationalist metaphysics. Spinoza's argument was that there is only one substance, either the divine entity or nature, and these have qualities that correspond to the mind and body. In Spinoza's writings, the beginnings of the atheistic philosophy can be seen, which would last throughout the Enlightenment period. Of similar importance are the contributions of Leibniz and Wolff, whose ideas of rationalist metaphysics, and principle of sufficient reason were some of the guiding theories of this movement. The principle of sufficient reason postulated that any thing in existence

had sufficient reason to exist in the first place. What this meant for the Enlightenment thinkers is that anything could be learnt and understood. Even though many of these writers were in opposing spirits, the atmosphere and the results of these contradictions and the debates contributed to the Enlightenment period.



Figure 10: Francis Bacon

The Enlightenment period was also called the Age of Reason, because of its stress on empiricism, along with that of reason. Even by the very terminology, the Age of Reason contrasted with religious thought. If Descartes is considered to the important figure of the rationalism in Enlightenment, Francis Bacon was considered the founder of the empiricism of this period. He is considered to be the *father of experimental philosophy*. In his 1620 work called *The New Organon*, Bacon wrote that sciences should be founded on empirical observation and experimentation, on inductive reasoning and be confirmed by practical knowledge.

Bacon's works on the empirical approach influenced even doyens of the Enlightenment period such as Isaac Newton. Where the rationalists stressed on the deductive approach, that is, from the general to the specific, Bacon, Newton and other empiricists stressed on the inductive method, where the specific was studied in order to discover general and universal laws. While deductive methods relied more on the mental reasoning, inductive method was found to pave way for both natural and physical sciences because it relied heavily on the existing specific realities, independent of *a priori* first principles.

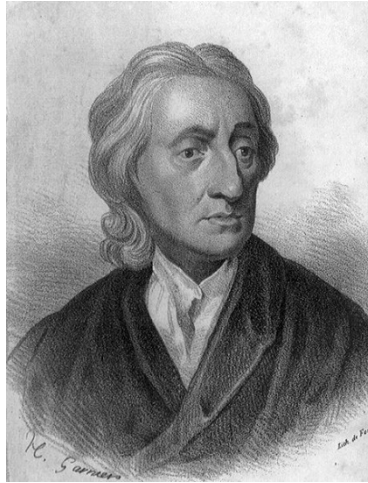


Figure 11: John Locke

Another important work of the Enlightenment was John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke argued that all human knowledge comes from lived experience and the sensitive understanding of the world. This would also influence the works of the Frenchman, Abbe de Condillac, and would together inform the emergence of psychology as a discipline in this period.

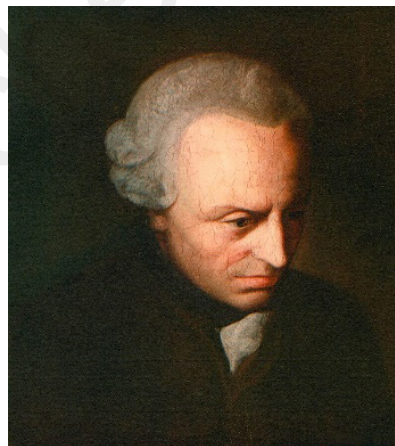


Figure 12: Immanuel Kant

In the works of Descartes, and more importantly, Pierre Bayle, one can see the importance of scepticism as a methodological tool to understand the world. In his 1697 work *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, Bayle questions dogmas of religious, metaphysical and scientific nature. Scepticism also implies questioning of authority, as is seen in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) and *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Hume pointed out to the fallacies in our reasoning abilities, and also in the inductive reasoning. He raised the question whether any

knowledge we acquire, no matter what the method, is unquestionable, since all methods are prone to fallacies.

Immanuel Kant in his 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* also checks the limits to human knowledge. According to him, knowledge is not merely knowledge about what does happen in nature, but also knowledge about what must happen, which leads to the question, how is *a priori* knowledge then possible?

Enlightenment and Political Thought

Politically speaking, the Enlightenment era is associated to the English Revolution (1688), the American Revolution (1775-83), and the French Revolution (1789-99). Since the Enlightenment thinkers were critical about religion which ensconced much of the political institutions of this time, their writings informed the revolutionary rigour of these countries. New political establishments, where the consent of those being governed were acquired, came into existence. Individual human rights were given the centre of attention in this period.



Figure 13: Thomas Hobbes

Let us briefly look at some of the writings that influenced political thought in this period. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), with its origins in the social contract theory, defends the power of the sovereign ruler. Hobbes argued that individuals came together in a mutually beneficial relationship because this enabled them to rationally achieve their goals. This also necessitated the rational agreement by subjects that they are willing to be governed. In his 1677 work *Tractus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza wrote about the need of the state to suppress superstition and to

relegate religion to a subordinated position. He espoused liberalism as a political philosophy.

Liberalism also occupied a pride of place in Locke's 1690 *Second Treatise of Government*, in which argued that even though humans were subordinate to a divine entity, when compared to each other, humans were equal to each other, with the same rights. However, by agreeing to be ruled by a politically dominant figure, humans have rendered this natural equality unfunctional. According to Locke, when this political figure is detrimental to the welfare of the subjects, any revolution to overthrow the ruler is justified. As we will see in later sections, this was to have tremendous influence on the American War of Independence.

Economic freedom was also given thought to by Enlightenment thinkers. In 1776, Adam Smith wrote *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. In this book, he argued for free trade, individual pursuit of goals, minimal government interference, etc., which came to be associated with a liberalist ideology. The role of the government was merely in protecting the individual freedoms and properties.

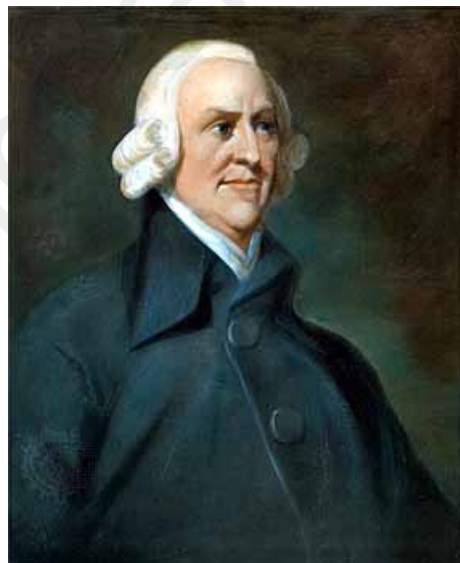


Figure 14: Adam Smith

However, a contrasting position to the liberal attitude of absolute freedom and consenting rule was expressed in the works of the (future) US President, James Madison. He argued that if the section of society who were more in number had to choose the rulers, then they may favour those who went against the spirit of individual freedom. It is important to remember the context in which Madison was expressing this argument. In the US

at this point in history, slavery was still being practised, and the number of landowners were less as compared to landless people (both enslaved and otherwise); however, these landowners were the ones who had led to war for independence, and who were also represented among the political class. Madison was one among these. It was evident that if democracy in its absolute form was practised, the landowning political class would stand to lose. Thus, according to Madison, an alternative form of democracy was to be founded; some iteration of race and landownership became the criteria by which a person could have a political say in the US.



Figure 15: Jean Jacques Rousseau

A contrasting argument to the Lockean model of liberty was proposed by Jean Jacques Rousseau in *On the Social Contract* (1762). Rousseau argues that complete and true democracy must be in existence for human freedom to exist. *The general will* of the people must be demonstrated in the political life as well. All members of the body politic must alienate all their rights to the body politic, which implies that all the members are subject to the same terms and rules. Thus, if one were to protect the right of one section, the rights of the other section is also to be protected. Every individual is to be engaged in the body politic, rather than the government being limited by expressions of individual will. Rousseau's works led to the enshrinement of ideas of equality and liberty in the modern nation-state. Another founding text of modern political theory is Baron de Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). Even though Montesquieu was also a liberalist, he wrote extensively on the nature of legislations, and how it should reflect the situations of the people for whom the legislations were

being made. He also distinguished between three forms of governments: aristocratic or democratic republics, monarchies, and despotisms. For Rousseau, a good democracy would lead people to value the collective good over the private goals. Rousseau also argued for a balance of powers in the government, something that was included in the US Constitution by James Madison himself.



Figure 16: Mary Wollstonecraft

However, in spite of all the thought given equality and human rights, there was much to be said in terms of gender and race. Most Enlightenment era thinkers did not extend the discourse on equality to women and non-white people. One exception was Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792-piece, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; there were other writers too, but they were far from common. Today, we have the wisdom to look back and acknowledge that Enlightenment era writing bore prejudice against women and non-white people, and that they held very strong Eurocentric arguments. While many political movements have adapted principles from the Enlightenment era, there have also been critiques of this period's intellectual fervour. For example, from the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued that Nazi Germany was possible only because of certain currents set in motion during the Enlightenment.

For sociology, the ideas of rationality and empiricism espoused by the Enlightenment would have lasting impacts. Early sociologists such as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer were clearly influenced by this movement to look for answers beyond the realm of the religious. Similarly, liberalism and individualism was also a major cause for concern for sociologists in the 19th century. Thinkers such as Montesquieu, Rousseau,

Locke and Hobbes are read widely in sociology. Thus, along with politics, sciences and the aesthetics, social sciences, especially sociology is one of the various disciplines which stood to originate from the ideas that arose during the Enlightenment period.

Exercise: Write a piece on how the plight of non-white people were articulated in this time period.

1.4 Industrial Revolution

In the 18th to 19th century, drastic changes took place in the economic and industrial organisation of Britain that would have implications for the rest of the world, and for history. The first industrial revolution took place in Britain approximately between 1760 and 1850. During this period, new technologies were constantly evolving and economies were expanding. Britain's GDP was growing at the rate 8-10% per year, as opposed to a mere 1.5% previously. While we commonly know of the industrial revolution as a period in which steam engines, cotton mills and refineries came into use, it also marked the mass production of many other everyday-use products as well. In fact, unlike the term *revolution* seems to suggest, the industrial revolution was not a massive restructuring that occurred abruptly. Rather, it was built on and enabled by various economic and social factors which were in play in the preceding decades.

Various factors existed in England in the 18th century that favoured the economic growth of the country. The English Revolution had changed the nature of the government. The Parliament could raise taxes; it introduced a land tax in 1693. England also collected duties on certain goods like sugar, tobacco, beer, etc. Economic growth was also possible because the British Parliament had made it possible for the government to take over private property, something that was not possible in other European countries. This made it easier for the government to make canals and roads which would cut across private property. Scientific findings of the 17th century also set the stage for Industrial Revolution. Newtonian physics posed a challenge to widely-upheld religious thoughts and there was a common feeling that it was possible to look for further universal truths in a scientific fashion. Socially too, many changes were taking place which lead to more and more villagers and artisans being educated at least till a lower level. Similarly, girls were being sent to school. Economically, labour was more expensive in England than in Austria, France and India in the mid-18th century. This

meant that there was a need to mechanise production. Similarly, England also had vast stores of coal in the north, which made it having a steady supply of energy too.

In the 18th century, cotton was the major manufacturing sector, with cities like Manchester becoming major cotton manufacture town. Traditionally, China and India were the biggest cotton exporters. However, with the import of raw cotton from West Africa, it was possible for England to enter the international cotton trade. It was this competition with other countries that led to the mechanisation of the cotton mills. In 1760s, James Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny, which became an instant hit. This was followed in 1775 by Richard Arkwright's invention of the water frame. In 1779, Samuel Crompton tied the jenny and the water frame to invent the mule. These inventions cut down the labour required for the cotton manufacture, and was responsible for most of the cotton spinning for more than a century.

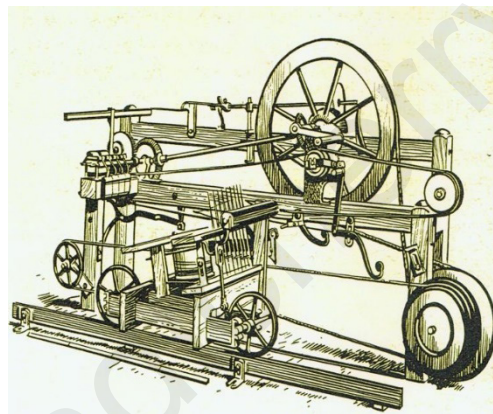


Figure 17: Spinning jenny



Figure 18: Water frame

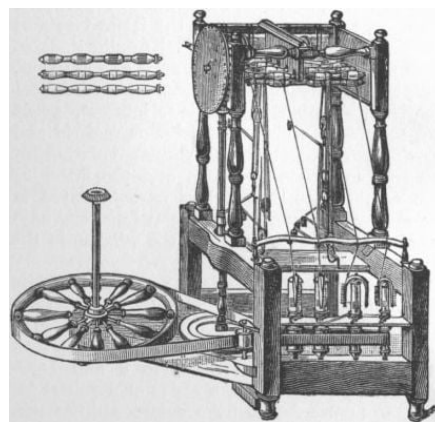


Figure 19: Crompton's Mule

These machines were not born out of any grand scientific principle, but rather out of necessity. They succeeded in needing less labour for increased production, and put England in an advantageous position in comparison to India when it came to cotton manufacture. However, this situation was not unchanged. Machinery was exported to other countries, and soon, mechanisation of cotton manufacture started all over the world, including Asia.

While the revolutions in cotton manufacturing occurred through the necessity of innovation, the invention of the steam engine was heralded by the scientific discoveries of the 17th century. Scientists such as Huygens, Galileo, and Boyle has investigated the working of atmospheric pressure. In 1675, Denis Papin of France had made a crude steam engine. In 1712, Thomas Newcomen followed this with the invention of the first fully practical steam engine. The steam engine was improved upon by various persons, such as John Smeaton, Arthur Woolf, James Watt, and Richard Trevithick. With each improvement, less coal was required, and more energy was generated. Steam engine was used in all modes of transportation, particularly in ships and trains, and this enabled the quicker spread of technology around the world.

What is notable about the Industrial Revolution is that the innovations did not end in this period. All the machinery that was invented during this period were constantly improved upon. For example, Rev. Edmund Cartwright perfected the power loom, which replaced the handlooms in England. Steam power was slowly applied in industries, and not just in transportation. Coal was being transported more and more on steam engine, as was other cargo and passengers. By mid-19th century, steam engines were replacing sail boats in water transport.

Having laid out these main inventions of the industrial revolution, let us see in brief the social changes that they brought about. The first major change brought about by the industrialisation was the rampant growth of factories. Labour was so far organised around the labourers' dwellings. In the factory system, the workers were brought to the production place. Strict and often long hours were established for work. Working and living conditions were dangerous, and the labourers often earned only paltry amounts as wages. The distinction between the house and the working place had occurred. Industrialisation also brought about division of labour, which was necessary to operate the machinery in use. Women and

children were employed in vast numbers; there were no laws yet protecting children from employment. Similarly, there were also no workers' rights yet. Workplaces were often unhygienic, and contagious diseases spread through the closed spaces. Sometimes, workers also lost life and limb by handling dangerous machinery, and worked extremely long hours with little breaks. Workers were ill-treated, and often not paid liveable wages.



Figure 20: Child labour in factories

This period in history also saw a mass migration of people from rural to urban centres. People who were hitherto employed on the farms began to seek out jobs in factories, which meant that more and more people were moving to cities, which often did not have the necessary infrastructure to accommodate these newcomers. Working class population lived in squalor, till governments slowly started building public housing for them.

Similarly, with the rapid growth on factories, there was a rise in pollution. Cities such as London and Manchester quickly became dirty and heavily polluted. In fact, one particular year, the pollution in the Thames became so bad that the river was more sludge than water. The use of coal in these industries led to unprecedented air pollution. Luminaries such as Charles Dickens were among those trying to control the pollution in the city. Other problems such as malnutrition existed among the poor. However, not everyone was poor during this time. The industrial revolution also brought about a middle-class consisting of professionals and managerial population. Their lives were significantly better than that of the working class population. Even though the Industrial Revolution had begun in England, the impacts of it soon spread to continental Europe, the USA, and later to the European colonies around the world.



Figure 21: Air pollution in Manchester

The Industrial Revolution brought about societal changes to a level never seen before. There was an upheaval in terms of family structure, city planning, division of labour, working conditions, etc., which interested social observers. There were also changes in interpersonal relations, which many deemed worthy of study. It is no coincidence that thinkers such as Comte, Marx, Durkheim, etc., tried to theorise about this large-scale industrialisation and its repercussions for society and humanity as a whole.



Figure 22: A slum in Victorian London

Exercise: Write an essay on how the innovations of the industrial revolution in Europe had its reverberations across economies around the world.

1.5 American Revolution (1775-1783)

In the 18th century, there occurred an event which would not only shock the world at that time, but in its political and social implications, would also go on to change history. This was the establishment of the United States of America as a free country, after defying the rule of England.

By the mid-17th century, continental America had 13 colonies which were settled by British people. They were under the rule of George III of England, and paid taxes to England as well. However, in the 18th century, England had fought many wars in India against the French, and to avoid scant coffers, decided to raise the taxes on the colonists in America, as opposed to raising taxes on the English landowners. This was only one of the latest in a series of taxes that the colonists were being made to pay. Other tax included the Quartering tax, which would provide for the British soldiers to stay in American cities, a stamp tax, and an import tax. What angered the colonists was the fact that there was no representation for them in the British government that they were paying these taxes too. Even though an outright revolution was not in the picture yet, the colonists from across the 13 colonies met at a Continental Congress to decide on what course of action to take. The result was a boycott of all trade with Britain, till the taxes were revoked. Most taxes on consumer goods were revoked, except for the one on tea.



Figure 23: Boston Tea Party

In 1773, at Boston harbour, a ship brought in tea imported from the East India Company. A few colonists boarded the ship and threw the tea into the sea. This was called the Boston Tea Party, and the retaliation from Britain was to take the rebelling colonists to England for trial. After

this event, the British repression became stronger, with many limits on communication and harsh suppression of any protests. It became evident to the colonists that unless they had a militia to protect themselves from the British army, they would never be safe. A considerable size of the colonists wanted to break away from the rule of the British monarchy. They also wanted to replace the old institutions such as the Assembly which were Royalists and wanted to stay with Britain with new ones.



Figure 24: Thomas Paine

One of the main features of the American Revolution was that it saw the outpouring of propaganda. Many pamphlets, newspapers and other forms of writing emerged which were critical of the Royalists and the monarchy. One of the important persons to write during this time was Thomas Paine, who was an artisan who had migrated from England to America. In England, he was exposed to the Enlightenment era ideas of Hobbes, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke- ideas of the equality of all humans. Following the harsh measures that the British were taking against the rebels, Paine published *Common Sense*, in which he conveyed the ideas of the Enlightenment from its lofty language to one that could be understood by the common person. *Common Sense* was an instant hit, and its ideas quickly found acceptance. Another important piece of writing in this period was Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence* which is one of the founding documents for the United States. This was accepted by the Continental Congress, as a guideline for the new country, essentially breaking away from the established protocols of monarchy. Jefferson also wrote about the equality of all men. However, this irony must be noted,

since Jefferson himself was a slave-owner. What was undoubtable was that radical ideas were spreading throughout the colonies- ideas of equality and a country that could be ruled by anything else except a monarchy.

As war broke out between the rebel forces and the British Army (also called the Red Coats for their uniform), there were groups of rebels and Royalists among the general population also. The rebel army was led by General George Washington. Wherever they won, they organised public shaming of the Royalists, many of whom left later with the British. There were also other actors in this war. Enslaved black people were the ones doing most of the labour in the southern plantations in Virginia and Carolina. They were offered freedom for fighting for the British Army, and many of them also left with the British ships. The British also tried to befriend the Native Americans who stood to gain from a colonists' defeat. The colonists were meanwhile supported by the French in terms of strategy and weaponry, since the British and the French were rivals in Asia at this time. There were also a lot of white artisans and small traders who chose either side during the war. During the war, the rebel army faced hunger and starvation, and other hardships, but still managed to push forth and gain ground multiple British taking over of vital cities. The final blow to the British was dealt in 1781, at the Battle of Yorktown, where they were defeated. The British ships departed to England.



Figure 25: Signing of the US Constitution

In 1788, a Federal Constitution was adopted by the states that made up the new United States. This constitution laid down the terms for the new country, such as a federal and democratic system, with men given the right to vote (but not all men- it would be decades before Black men, and women

were given that right), a free-market economy, a robust economic system. In 1789, George Washington became the first president of the United States. Also in 1789, James Madison introduced a set of amendments to the new constitution, called the Bill of Rights- each of these amendments would go on to become a corner for the US, and they remain so, even today. They are the first ten amendments in the US Constitution.

Sociologically speaking, the American Revolution or the American War of Independence was of great significance. It established the idea of a nation-state ruled by a non-monarchy. The Americans had successfully fought against the British king George III, and established a republic, where the ruler, the President, would be elected every few years. The right to vote was granted to all, but as mentioned above, it excluded a vast majority of unlanded men, women and enslaved Black people. The idea of individual liberty was crucial to American independence, and the Bill of Rights enshrined these principles of liberty and freedom. This marked a departure from the existing system, where individual liberty was superseded by the authority of the ruler.

Even though this was not immediately visible, the principles of liberty and equality would influence multiple other revolutions and struggles. Perhaps the first among those was the French Revolution. Also significant is to note that in spite of all the rhetoric on liberty, slavery was still a continuing practice in the US at the time of its independence. While some northern states had abolished the practice, the southern states still continued it- this contradiction would erupt in the American Civil War (1861-1865), after which slavery would be completely abolished in the US. However, the writings of the founding fathers would be used later to claim equality for the formerly enslaved people, not just in the aftermath of the Civil War, but also in the Civil Rights movement of the 20th century, and other anti-racism movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement of the 21st century. They would also find reverberations in various social emancipation movements around the world.

The establishment of the United States as a republic with a free economy was subject of much curiosity in Europe. From 1831-32, the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville visited the US, and based on his travels, he wrote *Democracy in America* in four volumes (1835-40). He wrote on the nature of democracy in the US, which he believed encouraged individualism. However, the organisation of religion placed checks on the excesses of

individualism. He also introduced the terms *tyranny of the majority* and *soft despotism* to refer to political mechanisms which prevent people from having to think of anything apart from themselves in most situations. The tyranny in this case is one that enslaves the souls, not just the bodies of the citizens. However, Tocqueville believed that democracy was going to be established all over the world, especially in Europe.



Figure 26: Alexis de Tocqueville

It was evident for social observers that something historic was happening in the US. Not only had a group of colonists renounced their citizenship to an empire, but they also rejected the authority of a king, established a new country, and embarked on a great democratic adventure. This new country was demonstrating in practice the principles of liberty and equality that the Enlightenment era thinkers had espoused. The American Revolution, and the fledgling country promised to be a case in the study of young societies organised along certain new principles.

Exercise: Analyse a few paintings which depict the American Revolution. Observe how the idea of a new nation is encapsulated in these paintings.

1.6 French Revolution

The revolutionary fervour of the American War of Independence did spread throughout the world. The event had sent shockwaves all over for what seemed like its radical nature. Perhaps the most significant influence

of this event was seen in France, where towards the end of the 18th century, social conditions were festering to the point of bringing the country to the cusp of a revolution.

France was ruled by monarchs for over 1000 unchallenged years. King Louis XIV of the Bourbon dynasty, was called the Sun King, had consolidated power in such a manner that made France the most powerful empire in Europe. However, things would take a turn during the rule of his grandson, Louis XVI. In 1789, in order to raise the taxes, he convened an Estates General. France, at this point was divided on the basis of the estates system: the clergy was the first estate, the aristocracy and nobles were the second, and the common people were the third. The representatives of the third estate did not agree to the new taxation, and they left the Estates General, and proclaimed themselves as a National Assembly. It should be remembered that the National Assembly was manned by professionals such as merchants, bankers, lawyers, and not by peasants or artisans. However, there was a general sense that something monumental had taken place, and all over France, people were organising themselves into groups or clubs which would discuss the issues of the day. People also formed *communes*, to decide on important matters.



Figure 27: Storming the Bastille

In July, 1789, the poorer neighbourhoods of Paris marched to Bastille, an enormous prison which was the symbol of the absolute rule of Louis XVI. They stormed the prison, and in addition to freeing the many political prisoners in there, they also seized control of the weapons from the prison.

The Revolution had started in Paris, and this was replicated in different towns of France. Even today, 14 July is celebrated as Bastille Day in France.

This prompted the National Assembly to adopt a *declaration on the rights of man*, inspired by the American Declaration of Independence. The King and the Queen, Marie Antoinette were dragged from Versailles Palace to Paris, where they were placed under watch. A new National Guard was established which recruited soldiers from the well-off sections of society. One of the leaders of the National Guard was Marquis de Lafayette, who had played a pivotal role in the American Revolution on behalf of France. He was in favour of guaranteeing voting rights on the criteria of property ownership. The actions of the National Assembly were popular at first, and in 1790, the king, the aristocrats, the middle class and the common people all celebrated the first anniversary of the Fall of Bastille.

However, this was a façade of unity. The king was writing to other European kingdoms requesting a foreign invasion against the rule of the National Assembly. The aristocrats rued the fact that they had lost many of their privileges. In 1789, there was much discontent among the peasantry that they destroyed the castles of the rural elites. The price of necessities rose. In this atmosphere of discontent formed many newspapers and clubs, which espoused new and radical ideas. One such group was Jacobin, which was led by Robespierre, and the other called the Cordelier Club, led by Danton. A newsheet called *L'Ami du Peuple* (The Friend of the People), written by Jean Paul Marat was also extremely popular during this time. However, later, a group of Jacobins who were less radical than Robespierre and Danton, split to form the Girondins.



Figure 28: Robespierre



Figure 29: Danton



Figure 30: Marat

In 1791, Louis XVI tried to escape France, but he was captured and brought back. Even then, the National Assembly did not want any challenge to the monarchy. The National Guard was called in to suppress any uprising against the National Assembly or the monarchy. However, popular unrest continued, and there were food riots in Paris. Poor peasants also joined the artisans, who were called *sans-culottes*. Leaders sprung up who organised the masses. It was at this stage that those in power- the monarch, the National Assembly, and even the Girondins- believed that a war with a foreign country would curtail the civil unrest in the country. Thus, in 1792, war was proclaimed against Austria and Prussia.

However, the war only brought the revolutionary forces together. The poorer sections of the population united into *sections* (local versions of the National Assembly), most of whom demanded the end of monarchy and the establishment of a republic. *Federes*, or volunteers for the revolution marched from all over France, most of them from Marseilles, which gave the French national anthem the name *Les Marseillaise*. Paris was controlled by the masses, with Danton having the important position of minister of Justice. People were ransacking prisons and the houses of the upper classes of society, taking vengeance for the hardships they had suffered for centuries.

In 1792, the Jacobins stormed the Palace of Tuileries, where the king was, and held him hostage. Elections were held, and all men above the age of 21, regardless of property ownership and wealth, could vote. In 21 September, 1792, for the first time in history, a body elected by the entirety of the male population of a country came into power. This was called the

Convention, and it soon passed laws to end any remnants of feudalism or tithing systems. A republic was born in Europe. In 1793, Louis XVI was tried for treason, and was executed at the guillotine. He was only one among many aristocrats who met the same fate of public execution.

However, a period of violence came into being in France. Between 1793 and 1794, Robespierre held control over the country, and he unleashed a *Reign of Terror*, during which he guillotined anyone he saw as detrimental or dangerous to the republic. He eventually started killing his political rivals as well. Danton was also guillotined. Some other measures established by Robespierre were the setting of standard prices for grain; rationing of meat and bread; shutting down of churches, and the use of the terms *citoyen* and *citoyenne* (citizen), instead of *monsieur* or *madame* (sir or madam). However, his measures were considered too drastic by those who had previously supported him, and in 1794, after conviction by a court, Robespierre himself was guillotined.

Following the fall of the Jacobins, a group of rich young thugs- the *jeunesse doree*- reigned in Paris. Once again, the city was in disarray: any sign of support for the revolution was attacked; a property ownership criterion was once again established for the right to vote. Amidst the chaos unleashed by this, the descendants of Louis XVI, who was in exile, made claims to reestablish the monarchy. During this period, a former Jacobin and an officer of the French Army consolidated power from the Directory that had replaced the Jacobin rule. In 1799, Napoleon staged a coup, backed by his army support, and became a virtual dictator. In 1804, the Catholic Pope crowned him the Emperor of France, and he had the support of some aristocrats as well as some Jacobins. With the ascendancy of Napoleon as the ruler of France, the French Revolution came to an end.

The ideals of *liberty, equality, and fraternity*, that the French Revolution introduced stayed strong even after the end of the Revolution. Napoleon himself continued many of the victories gained from the Revolution, such as ending of feudalism, making policies from the needs of the bourgeoisie, etc., and these policies would be of huge help to him in the victories he would gain through his wars with other European powers. The Revolution's influence cannot be trivialised today: much of what the revolutionaries stood for have shaped world history, and its influence can be seen in most other countries. It was into this atmosphere that the first generation of sociologists were born. As they were growing up, they were witness to the

rapid changes that had taken place in French society, where centuries' old patterns of hierarchy were dismantled, followed by a period of violence, and then the coming-into-power of a military dictator. People who were on the margins of society without any voice in previous centuries, such as women and peasants, suddenly an opportunity to exercise their agency. A republic was born with (almost) equal rights (albeit only for white men), in a country that was staunchly monarchic just a few decades ago. It is no wonder that most of the first sociological writing came from France.



Figure 31: Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic

Exercise: How did the French Revolution impact the other monarchies of Europe? To what extent is the French Revolution similar to the Russian Revolution that would take place more than a century later?

1.7 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown us, the emergence of sociology did not occur in a vacuum. Much like any other event or discipline, the emergence of this discipline was a culmination of various forces- political, economic and intellectual. The first fathers of sociology were all influenced to various extents by the events that occurred during or in the years preceding their lifetimes. Those who were observing society and were keen on understanding it, knew that there were certain patterns at play, which necessitated a separate discipline.

The Renaissance and the Enlightenment movement provided sociologists with the intellectual direction that the new science needed, especially the latter. The ideas of objectivity, rationality and empiricism have considerable influence on the methods used by the early sociologists, as will be seen below. Other scientific achievements also played an important role, as we will see in the chapter on Herbert Spencer, vis-à-vis Darwinian thought.

The various revolutions brought about changes in society at a pace never seen before. Industrial revolution heralded new forms of working organisation, unprecedented wave of migrations, and rapid urbanisation, bringing it with attendant problems of sanitation, pollution, poverty, etc. The American and French Revolution was a demonstration of the Enlightenment values. They also signified something that the American Revolutionary soldiers were singing after the British defeat at Yorktown: *a world turned upside down*. Political and social hierarchies held for centuries were overthrown, the role of the clergy in public life was diminished, and a representative government, however limited in its scope and representation, became the norm. For a sociologist, this provided a field fertile for much questioning and exploration.

These events show us that there is an interconnectedness across all the major events in history- whether they are in the real world, or in the realm of ideas. So also are the theories we see in the following chapters. Sociologists drew from each other as much as they drew from the world around them, contributing to the richness of sociology as we know it today.

Summary

- The emergence of a new discipline
- The Renaissance- Leonardo da Vinci- Gutenberg's press-rise of rich families and city-states- scientific revolutions- Copernicus and Galileo- Reformation of Martin Luther- Age of Explorations
- The Enlightenment: Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes- Rousseau, Voltaire and Locke- Isaac Newton- Descartes and Spinoza- Mary Wollstonecraft
- Industrial Revolution: spinning jenny- water frame- Crompton's mule- social impact of industrial revolution
- American Revolution: anti-monarchy ideas- impact of Enlightenment thinkers- great experiment in democracy

French Revolution- social and political background- a new form of government in Europe- Reign of Terror- a new Republic

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did the Renaissance period mark a point of change in European history?
2. How did Enlightenment thinkers of Europe reimagine the human condition? What was its impact on the future sociologists?
3. What were some of the changes in social and economic life that was brought on by the Industrial Revolution? How did this impact social observers?
4. In what manner did the rise of an independent USA mark a departure from the idea of the nation-state so far?
5. How did the new country, USA, represent a new society in the making?
6. What was the social impact of the French Revolution?
7. In the context of the early sociologists, write about the importance of the French Revolution.

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UNIT – II**Lesson 2.1 - Auguste Comte****Structure**

- 2.1 Biography
- 2.2 Important Works
- 2.3 Law of Three Stages/ The Law of Human Progress
- 2.4 Positivism
- 2.5 Social Statics and Social Dynamics
- 2.6 Sociology
- 2.7 Hierarchy of Sciences
- 2.8 Religion of Humanity
- 2.9 Conclusion

Lesson Objectives:

- To look into the personal and intellectual history of Auguste Comte
- To study the three stages of evolution
- To look at the theory of positivism as a methodologies
- To look at social statics and social dynamics
- To understand Comte's contribution towards the origin of sociology
- To analyse Comte's arrangement of sciences in a hierarchy
- To understand Comte's religion of humanity

2.1 Biography

Widely considered to be the Father of Sociology, Auguste Comte was a prolific, if a bit eccentric thinker and writer. His life and works are worth looking at in detail in order to better understand the contexts of his thoughts and largely, his contribution to the establishment of sociology as a discipline.



Figure 18: Auguste Comte in c. 1849

Isidore Auguste Marie François Xavier Comte was born on January 19, 1798, almost a decade after the start of the French Revolution, in Montpellier. His parents were religious Catholics, and even as a young boy, Comte had displayed signs of his future brilliance. He attended the prestigious École Polytechnique in Paris, where he was considered to be one of the brightest students in the cohort. In 1817, aged 19 years old, Comte's paths crossed that of Claude Henri de Saint-Simon. Saint Simon was a brilliant political, social and economic thinker, who was propounding at the time for a strong working class. Even though Saint-Simon himself was from an aristocratic family, he favoured meritocracy and was heavily in favour of an idea of society based on the strength of the industrial workers. Working with Saint-Simon, Comte was exposed to a large number of political and social circles, and came to be well-known for his collaboration with the senior thinker. In fact, a lot of the works that the both produced together were republished by Comte later in his life, and they formed the *corpus* of his most celebrated works. He also published some publications that were run by Saint-Simon, such as *L'Industrie* and *Le Politique*. However, very soon, due to intellectual differences that could not be resolved, Comte left Saint-Simon, and chose to seek his own path. It was around this same time that Comte married Caroline Massin.

In 1826, Comte started delivering public lectures on *A Course of Positive Philosophy*, which were attended by the prominent intellectuals of that age. However, he had to stop taking these lectures because of health issues.



Figure 19: Saint-Simon

In 1829, Comte resumed the lectures on *Positive Philosophy*. This is generally considered to be the second period of his life. He compiled his thoughts that he was delivering as lectures and published them in a book form: in total, he published 6 volumes of the *Course of Positive Philosophy* between the years 1830 and 1842. As we will see in the following sections, in these books Comte unveiled his idea of positivism. These were to be the most important contributions of Comte to the intellectual traditions that sociology stands on today. In 1853 *Course* was translated to English by Harriet Martineau, and this brought him popularity in England; along with this popularity came the much-needed financial support from his followers in England and other country, which enabled to stop teaching at the École Polytechnique, where he was unable to secure a permanent post.

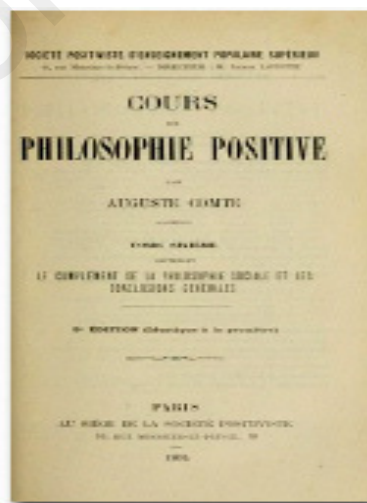


Figure 20: Early edition of Positive Philosophy

This period of his life was marked by intense turmoil. Comte was facing financial and marital problems. His wife left him by the time he finished writing *Course*. He was also feeling dejected as the intellectual world had failed to acknowledge his genius. The post that he held as an examiner at the *Polytechnique* was also denied to him because of his tendency to make enemies easily. Comte also at this point stopped other people's works because he believed that reading others' works would 'contaminate' his own.

However, in 1844, he met and fell in love with Clothilde de Vaux. Even though Clothilde resisted all his pursuits till about a year before her death, she had integral effect on his intellectual life as well. He started working on *Système de Politique Positive*. However, by the time it was published between 1851 and 1854, Comte had started losing many of his followers. This was due to the fact that in the years were he was enamoured with Clothilde, Comte had argued for a vision of the world marked by 'the healing powers of warm femininity' over 'the harshness of masculine intellect' (Coser, 1977). This caused a lot of his more rationalist followers to abandon Comte's thoughts. This chasm between Comte and his previous supporters only grew with Comte's ideas for a Religion of Humanity. Comte envisioned this new religion to be one based on positivist principles, with he himself as the High Priest. Many of those who heard his ideas for a new religion believed that this was cult-like, and a denial of all his former ideas.



Figure 21: French stamp showing Comte

At the loss of his followers, Comte seemed to slip further into a chaotic behaviour, with him writing and addressing letters to world leaders,

monarchs and religious orders as the founder of a new religion. In 1848, he founded the *Société Positiviste*, which did garner some followers. Soon, ideas of his mission spread to England, Spain, and the Americas. He once again found followers, but it was clear that Comte now differed drastically from his younger version, who while working with Saint-Simon was a proponent of the liberty of man. Comte, towards the end of his life, was a staunch believer in order and obedience.

On September 5 1857, Auguste Comte died of internal cancer. He is buried at the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, with many of his positivist disciples also buried next to him. When he died, he left behind unfinished drafts of his treatises on education, industry and philosophy, all based on the premise of positivism. Comte was thus not a professor in an esteemed university, nor was his life a consistent exhibition of the success of his ideas. However, his ideas had garnered a following of their own, including those such as JS Mill and George Eliot. His ideas are especially popular in countries such as Brazil and Mexico. In fact, the logo on Brazil's flag, *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress) is a direct tribute to Comte. Whatever influence Comte did have in countries such as USA and India was replaced by other ideas after the World War I. However, a neo-positivist movement did take place in the latter half of the 20th century, but that also drifted far from Comte's ideas.



Figure 22: Burial place of Auguste Comte

However, one must remember that it was in the contributions of Auguste Comte that sociology had its origins. No matter what the controversies were that belied his life, his ideas of positivism and the impact it had on sociology cannot be ignored and will not be forgotten.



Figure 23: Monument to Auguste Comte at Sorbonne, Paris

Exercise: explore the historical context in which Comte lived and how it contributed to his ideas

2.2 Important Works

A few of the most important works of Comte are mentioned below in their English titles:

1. *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830-42)
2. *System of Positive Polity* (1851-54)
3. *A General View of Positivism* (1844)
4. *The Catechism of Positive Religion* (1852)

2.3 Law of Three Stages/ The Law of Human Progress

Auguste Comte was always interested in the larger histories of the human race. He believed that the evolution of the human mind and the evolution of the individual mind were interrelated and that any information about one would shed more light on the other. In other words, he believed

that ontogeny (development of the individual organism) would shed light on phylogeny (development of social groups). Comte believed that society, much like the human mind is constantly evolving and that this evolution takes place towards the final destination of perfection.

Comte argued that human thinking passes through three stages: the fictitious or theological; the metaphysical or abstract; and the scientific or positive. Just as a human being in their youth accepts everything without thinking, a growing person tends to be metaphysical and hence, a bit critical; and as a mature person, is a philosopher, so does the society also pass through these stages.

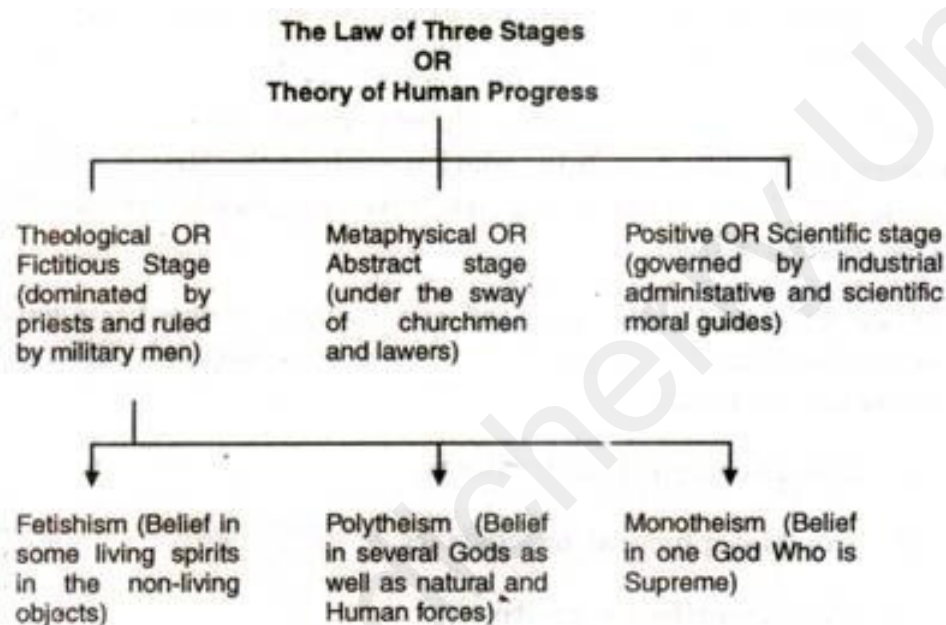


Figure 24: Law of Three Stages

In Comte's own words:

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

their laws, that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance.'
(In Coser, 1977)

Let us see these stages in detail now:

- a. The Theological or Fictitious Stage: In this stage, mankind believes that the essential nature of all beings are to be found out, and that the answers will be found in supernatural causes. God was considered to be the cause of all phenomena. The rule of such a society was rested with the priests and the military men, and all political doctrine was related to the *divine right* theory. The primary social unit was the family.

The theological stage itself could be divided into three stages:

- Fetishist stage: where god was considered to be living in concrete objects
- Polytheistic stage: where there were many gods and they were independent of the physical objects
- Monotheistic stage: where only a single god was believed in and was the ruling principle behind the functioning of all phenomena.

According to Comte, the theological stage lasted from antiquity till about the beginning of the medieval ages.

- b. Metaphysical or Abstract Stage: In this stage, people were looking for explanations not in supernatural phenomena or beings, but in abstractions. In terms of European history, this stage was seen during the Renaissance and the Medieval ages. In this stage, people started looking for explanations in the abstract concepts such as nature. This is a transitional stage between the scientific and the supernatural: humanity had started thinking independently of god, but had not yet reached the level of scientific thinking. In this stage, sovereignty drawing from populism and natural rights were the doctrines, and thus lawyers and philosophers were the most prominent people. The state is the fundamental social unit in this stage. Production, through innovation was given attention to in this stage. However, this was a short-lived stage.
- c. Positive stage or Scientific stage: In the positive stage, 'observation predominates over imagination' (Abraham and Morgan, 1989). Scientific understanding of the world is dominant and all explanation are sought through rationality and reasoning. There would be the

discovery of laws which are 'relations of resemblance and succession that facts have among themselves' (In Ritzer, 2003). This stage starts from Enlightenment and gains strength through the years of the Industrial Revolution. The human mind has evolved the highest sense of reasoning and tries to find explanations through scientific phenomena. In this stage, the scientists and industrialists have the positions of power. The entire human race is the social unit in this stage.

Intellectual phase	Material phase	Type of social unit	Type of order	Prevailing sentiment
Theological phase	Military	The Family	Domestic Order	Attachment & Affection
Meta-physical Phase	Legalistic	The State	Collective Order	Veneration (Awe or Respect)
Positive Phase	Industrial	Race (Humanity)	Universal Order	Benevolence

Figure 25: Features of three stages

It is important to note that for Comte, a purely intellectual life was not enough. He predicted that it would lead to a *pedantocracy*, where there would be no more innovation and there would only be a smug satisfaction at the society that the philosophers have created. That is why he advocated that there should be a division of powers, where the industrialists would take care of the material and practical aspects of the society, while the philosophers would deal with the intellectual matters. However, the industrialists were also to be positivist thinkers. These positive should show compassion and should be learnt in all disciplines, especially sociology. He also coined the word *altruism* by which he meant that since the positive philosophers had a lot of knowledge, it was their duty to exhibit the most sympathies. The positive philosophers would advise the industrialists who were ruling the society to help the working class population. They would also advice the education realm, by teaching people to be more compassionate and humanity-oriented in their worldviews.

From the above assessment, we see that Comte was relating the methods of the study to the particular stage of the society itself. The method was as crucial as the subject itself, and could have implications for the society also. He believed that the mental progress of the individual also follows these three stages.

Personally, Comte was living at the epoch where the metaphysical stage was dying out and the positivist stage was coming to fruition. However, he also identified the *theological-military society* which was marked by theological thinking and military activity; and *scientific-industrial society* which was marked by the scientists having moral power, and where industrialists have more power. He believed that the future of mankind was in the scientific-industrial society. Since he believed in a global order of the stages, he felt that every society on earth was moving towards the scientific-industrial society that each of the stage would take place only with the destruction of the other. Since intellectual progress was inevitable, every society would go to the scientific stage; it was only a matter of time.

However, it should be noted that the Law of Three Stages were criticized as well. Bogardus argued that the three stage theory does not envision the stage for collectivised thinking which would work for the harmony of society as a whole. Timasheff argued that often, societies would exhibit a mix of all three stages, rather than just one.

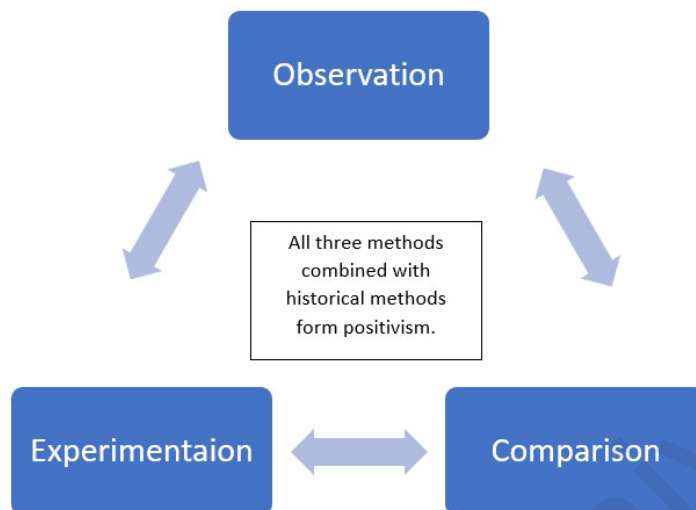
Exercise: Read about various societies around the world and try to imagine where Comte would place them in the evolutionary stages.

2.4 Positivism

One question that Comte asked was: *how do we understand the phenomena that we are trying to study?* He argued that the methods of the natural sciences namely *observation, experimentation and comparison* were the methods to be used to find this information. These methods were called the *positive* methods. This positive method could be used to study all kinds of social and political phenomena. In the positivist understanding, all kinds of speculation were to be avoided and only verifiable and concrete knowledge were to be accepted. Comte argued that once the knowledge obtained was through these measures, there would be a unification of all humanity since all knowledge would be the same. This would remove any kind of disharmony that existed in society.

This fundamentally meant that the study of society was important in the evolution of positivism. Positivism assumes that there are social laws which govern all aspects of social life. However, these laws are not as rigid as the laws in natural sciences, because of how complex the human and social relationships are. However, with positivism, it is possible to study these laws and this would show us the immutable laws of society just like natural laws do, and this would lead to humans being able to predict the social phenomena before it occurs. For Comte, such a new way of studying society was important to end the turmoil that followed the French Revolution in 1789.

- a. Observation: This means the focussed observation to identify specific questions and phenomena. In this case, the goal is to correlate a phenomena with a theory. Thus, observation has to be conducted alongside the static and dynamic laws of phenomena. We will discuss about social statics and dynamics in the coming sections.
- b. Experimentation: Again, Comte borrows this method from the natural sciences, but he calls it *controlled experimentation*. Thus, Comte considered that experimentation can be used to study only the pathological cases. Comte considered that 'disturbances in the social body are "analogous to diseases in the individual organism" and so the study of the pathological gives, as it were, a privileged access to an understanding of the normal' (Coser, 1977).
- c. Comparison: Comte opined that most important method for any social scientist was comparison. Comparison with other societies, even non-human was crucial in casting away any kind of absolutism. He said that even studying an animal society would give us vital information on how the beginning of human societies took place. However, what was important was the comparison with other human societies since this would show the various stages of the society and thus contribute to an overall understanding of humanity. Since no actual proof existed of the origins of the Western society, it was necessary to understand societies which were currently at the cusp of its evolution. Also, comparison was important to study the effects of race and climate in societies. According to him, this was the way to study societies which were at different stages of the evolution.



All these three methods were to be used together with the historical method. Comte says, 'The historical comparison of the consecutive states of humanity is not only the chief scientific device of the new political philosophy...it constitutes the sub-stratum of the science, in whatever is essential to it' (Abraham and Morgan, 1989). Comte was of the opinion that to understand any social phenomena, we have to place it in its right historical context, as only by looking at the whole picture within which the phenomena under study is observed can we get a detailed information. 'The chief phenomena in society- the gradual and continuous influence of generations upon each other-would be disguised or unnoticed for want of the necessary key, viz, historical analysis' (in Abraham and Morgan, 1989).

Thus, it was only with the appropriate use of these methods of understanding society through the methods used in natural sciences to discover the laws of society much as the aim of any scientific endeavour is to uncover the irrefutable laws of nature did Comte set upon the task of defining social statics and social dynamics, and how we need sociology to study these phenomena.

Exercise: Write a note on any social phenomena in your immediate surroundings using the methods of positivism that Comte puts forth.

2.5 Social Statics and Social Dynamics

Comte believed that all societies were governed by the same laws, and that they would largely follow the model of the French society, which in any case was making a lot of discoveries into human nature at the time.

In observing social phenomena, Comte saw two elements at work: *social statics and social dynamics*.

Social statics meant the study of social order, which is the reason why any society was existing at a particular point in time. This would mean the analysis of laws and norms, which ensured that society continued to exist in harmony. 'The statical study of sociology consists in the investigation of the laws of action and reaction of the different parts of the social system- apart, for the occasion, from the fundamental movement which is always modifying them' (Coser, 1977). Social statics showed the solidarity that people had with each other, and especially as family as the fundamental unit.

For Comte, language, religion and division of labour were vital, not for what they mean standing on their own, but to the role that they play in the contribution to the stability of social order. Art, politics, science- all these contributed to the sense of order; Comte called this *consensus universalis*. It was not necessary just for the individual but also for the integrity of humanity as a whole. Thus, statics studied the harmony and balance in society. Society would spiral down into a state of pathology.

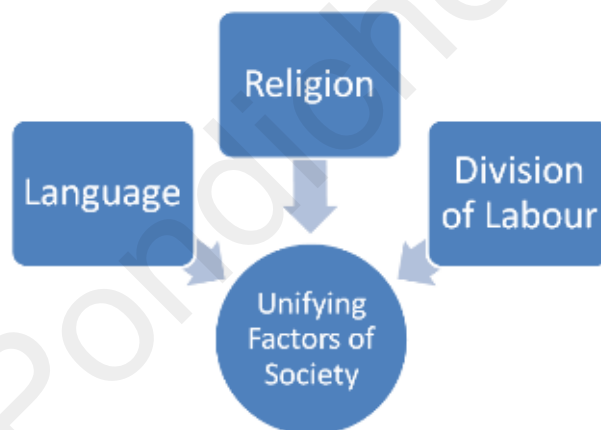


Figure 26: Statics

On the other hand, social dynamics deals with progress and evolution. However, Comte did not dwell on the specifics of this aspect of society. Social dynamics was secondary to social statics. He saw that change comes through the growth of population and the growth of mental abilities. This progress was visible in physical, moral and intellectual spheres, and could be traced in varying aspects such as race, politics, etc. He was aware, though, of the relationships he saw in his society about how law and order were creating progress and changes.

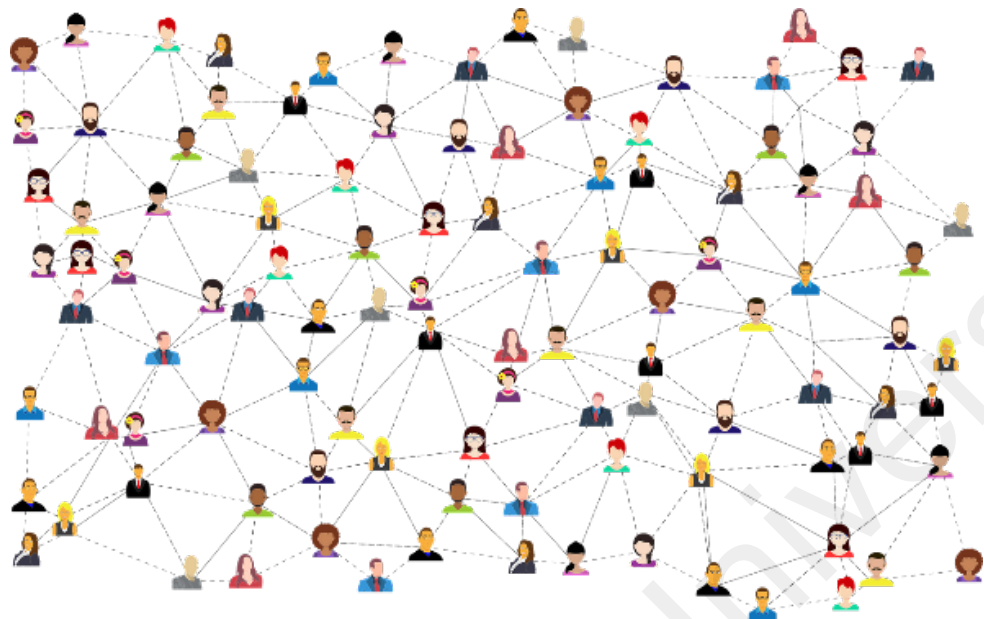


Figure 27: Social dynamics as relationships that change

Thus, for Comte, any science of society should seek to uncover the laws of both social statics, and social dynamics. According to Comte,

In short, social dynamics studies the laws of succession, while social statics enquires into those of coexistence; so that the use of the first is to furnish the true service in regard to order, and this suitability to the needs of modern society is a strong confirmation of the philosophical character of such a combination' (Abraham and Morgan, 1988).

Exercise: What are some of the aspects of social statics and social dynamics in the society you live in?

2.6 Sociology

Even though Comte drew inspiration from the Enlightenment philosophers, he did not share their optimism that reasoning and rational thinking would bring about a selfless society. In fact, he believed that humans are always motivated by emotions and not always by emotion. In his own words, 'Man is to act by emotion and to think in order to act' (Abraham and Morgan, 1988). If this is the case, then humans should be governed by emotion which would aim to bring out the collective improvement of society. That is why he believed that scientists (or people who have a positivist attitude in perception and understanding) are capable of using their emotions to the betterment of the world.



Figure 28: Father of Sociology

Comte also believed that humans are more likely to be governed also by superstitions than by reason. He believed that positivism was not a natural state of mind, and by nature, humans did not have a scientific bend of mine. Thus, being a positivist was a deliberate attempt to look for the laws that govern phenomena using observation, experimentation and comparison.

Similarly, Comte believed that the evolution of the human mind and human society are correlated. There can be development in one only if there is development in the other. The more complex a society is, the more advanced the intellectual capacities of its individual members are, according to Comte. This is why Comte argued that a true understanding of how the human mind evolved was important to understand the evolution of the human society. This was the ultimate science, that is, *positive physics* or *sociology* aims to do through observation, analysis and comprehension.

It was in *Positive Philosophy* that Comte laid down the first ideas of a new science called sociology. He intended it to be a study of human intellect and the resulting social actions. However, he soon made some more modifications to it because he wanted to state clearly the boundaries of the new discipline, and argued that this was not just a study of the human intellect, but rather a study of the collective intellect of human beings and its ensuing results.

The first name that Comte had suggested for this new discipline was *social physics*. However, he was soon made aware that this was already used by the Belgian statistician Quetelet. So, Comte formed a new word

by combining two terms from two different languages: he combined *socio* (society in Latin) and *logos* (study in Greek) to form *sociology*, or the study of society. Comte then dedicated his life to the establishment of this science and to the scientific study of this abstract knowledge systems. According to him,

'We already possess celestial physics (astronomy), terrestrial physics (geology and geography), mechanical and chemical (engineering and chemistry), vegetable physics (botany), animal physics (zoology). We still need one physical science- social physics (sociology)- in order to complete the natural sciences....I understand social physics to mean that science which occupies itself with the study of social phenomena, considered in the same light as astronomical, physical, chemical and physiological phenomena, that is to say, as being subject to natural and invariable laws the discovery of which is the special object of its researchers.' (from Abraham and Morgan, 1989).

Comte aimed to use this new science to study how human race as a whole has been evolving from its very beginnings to the complex states of today. Comte wrote that the end point of all kinds of scientific endeavour should be the ultimate betterment of the human condition. Therefore, all sciences, upon attaining the positivist stage, will converge towards this end. Thus, for Comte, the evolution in social life and human history was only an extension in the evolution of plant and animal life.

Exercise: Following Comte's argument, how does development in scientific thinking enhance the conditions of mankind. Write a small note with attention to specific examples.

2.7 Hierarchy of Sciences

The next project for Comte once he proposed the new discipline of sociology was establishing a hierarchy of the disciplines. He called the *classification of sciences* or the *hierarchy of sciences*.

Comte argued that just like human intellect and the corresponding stages in social evolution, scientific disciplines also go through stages of development. For example, astronomy has its roots in the mythical speculation regarding the workings of the celestial body, and gradually, it proceeds through abstract reasoning to attain a level of credibility backed by scientific methods of enquiry. Similarly, sociology no longer looks for religious rationale for the explanation of social behaviour, but looks at the

facts through observation and analysis. For example, earlier, when there were attempts to look into the origins of caste system, the explanations were sought in religious factors. However, over time, other theories such as occupational and migratory theories have been propounded which try to anchor caste system as originating in more specific social and historical conditions.

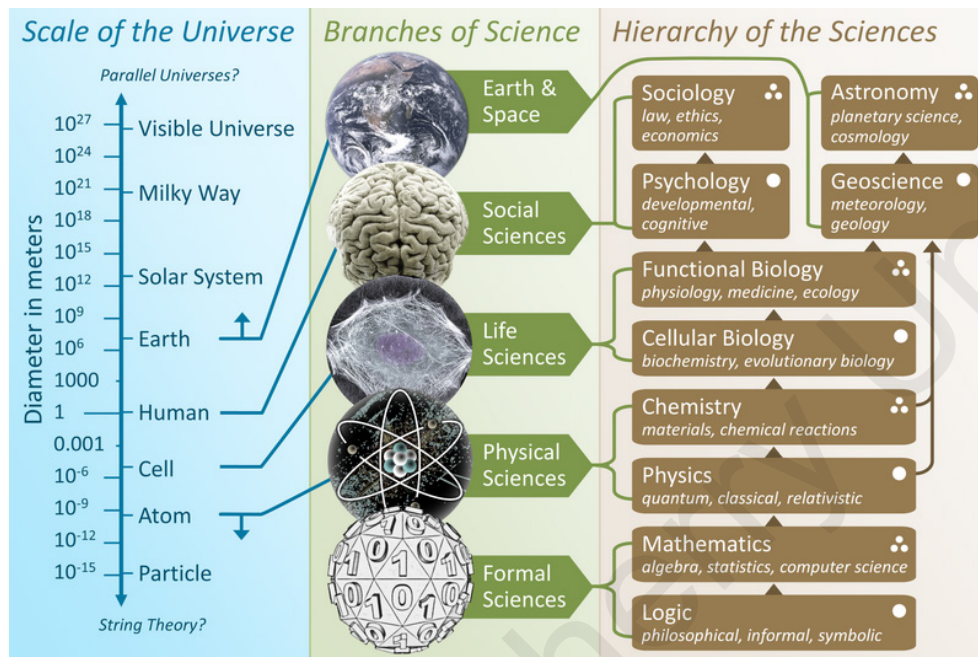


Figure 29: Hierarchy of sciences

Comte used this attainment of the scientific method to arrange the sciences on a hierarchy. According to him, not all disciplines reach the positivist stage at the same time, and therefore it is possible to classify the sciences based on when they use the positivist methods of enquiry. This is also dependent partially on the laws of mental progress.

So how did Comte say that the disciplines were arranged on the hierarchy?

Mathematics is the basis of all the disciplines and thus forms the foundation. Next comes astronomy, because positivism is first seen and is easier to apply in this discipline. Next comes physics, followed by chemistry and biology. The last discipline in which positivism is developed is sociology, owing to its complexity.

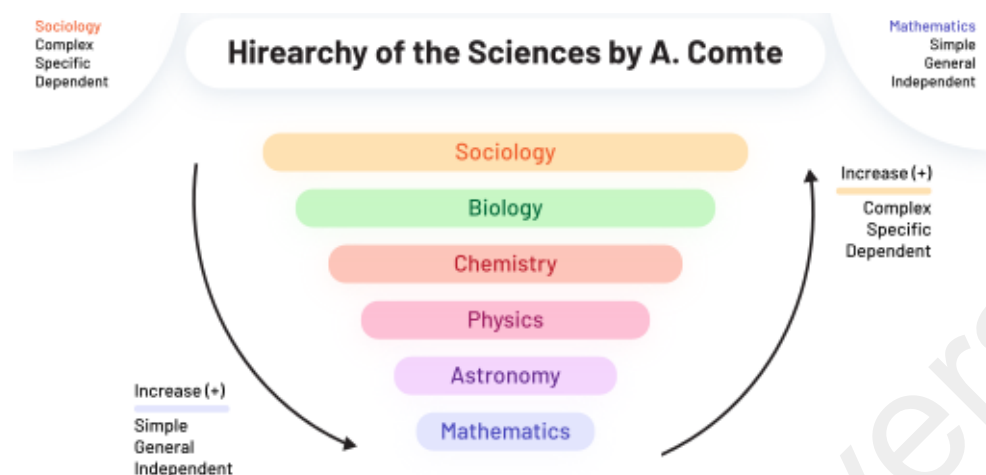


Figure 30: Hierarchy of Sciences showing complexity

Sociology depends on all the other sciences to reach the stage of positivism and thus is at the apex of the pyramid. As we move towards the top of the pyramid, the complexity of the sciences increases. For example, the principles of astronomy may remain the same, however, in sociology, each society is different and thus the study becomes more complex. Similarly, the subjects at the top of the pyramid also depend on the ones below because positivism is developed earlier on the latter subjects. Sociology also studies societies in a holistic manner and not in a fragmentary fashion. Even among social sciences, positivism develops first in history and politics before it can develop in sociology. Thus, sociology is the proof of a person's ability to analyse and theorise in a positivist manner even the more complex of sciences. That is why it is at the pinnacle of the sciences.

Exercise: Critically examine the theory of hierarchy of sciences.

2.8 Religion of Humanity

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, towards the end of his life, Comte was concerned with the establishment of a new social order. In order to facilitate this, Comte sought to establish a new religion based on positivist principles. He wrote about this in detail in *Systeme de Politique Positive* but these ideas were already existing in his earlier works, when he wrote that a *positive church* should be created.

However, it was in the *Systeme* that Comte detailed the plans for such a church. The way in which he envisioned this led to severe criticism and many of his earlier followers started questioning the credibility of his theories.

Comte saw the Religion of Humanity as the application of his ideas. In his words, the religion would be a 'systematization of human sentiments, which was the necessary consequence of that of ideas and the indispensable basis of that of institutions' (Abraham and Morgan, 1988). Thus, society needed not just material and intellectual reorganisation, but also spiritual. This religion was to be the moral basis on which society could be fundamentally restructured and based.

The following are some of the important features of this new religion:

- The Religion of Humanity would be based on altruism. It would replace Christianity in the sense that there would be a focus on secular love.
- Even though Comte was going against Catholicism, Comte wanted to find new sacraments and rituals for baptism, marriage, funeral, etc. he even made a calendar to honour the 'saints' such as Aristotle, whom he saw as secular saints.
- The act of worship would continue, as people important to European history of progress would be venerated. This would help people to have a continuity in the practices of the past and the present.
- Practices such as arts and science would be encouraged so as to enable the formation of collective sentiments.
- Comte proposed a certain kind of fetishism which would require the people to worship the 'Great Being', by which the earliest forms of religion would be replicated in a sense. This was proposed to bring humanity to the people.
- Comte himself would be the High Priest of such a religion. However, he also envisioned that women should have an important role in this religion.

Associated with the idea of the Religion of Humanity was Comte's vision for a society based on a new morality. In such a society, working class men would have more power as opposed to the male bourgeoisie of hitherto existing society. Comte also believed that people who exhibited positivism in their thinking and activities, such as workers, industrialists and scientists would be the ones to rule society.

In particular, he accorded great importance to the sociologists, as they would be the ones to know the working of society fully, and have the appropriate tools to understand any issues in the order of society. In

short, for Comte what was worth worshipping was humanity itself, and the establishment of this religion was aligned to that end. 'In the religion of humanity, "Love for Others" will be the supreme commandment, Love its major principle, Order its basis and Progress its aim' (Abraham and Morgan, 1988).

Religion of humanity was basically Comte's attempt to make catechism without Christianity. He was criticised for modelling the entire religion on the functional models of Catholicism, even while rebelling against it. He was also critiqued for *spiritual despotism*: designing the Religion of Humanity in such a way that the individual did not have any rights, merely duties. He also failed to account for the fact that such a stringent religion would cause all doors on progress to be shut. He continued with the thinking that religion was necessary for society and failed to consider a society without god. As Preus remarked, Comte believed that 'if god did not exist, it was necessary to invent him' (Preus, 1987).



Figure 31: Brazil's flag with the Order and Progress motto inspired by Comte

However, one must keep in mind that Comte did have huge impact in countries like Brazil and Turkey. In Turkey, he influenced the Young Turks movement. In 1881, the Brazilian Positivist Church was established in Rio de Janeiro. Many other countries also have their branches, such as France, USA, Japan, etc.



Figure 32: Positivist church in Rio



Figure 33: Chapel of Humanity in Paris

2.9 Conclusion

The above theories all show the genius of Auguste Comte and the way he spliced out the prominent theories of his time to frame a subject such as sociology. Though he is considered to be the father of sociology, his influence goes far beyond that, especially because of his framing of positivism as a method of enquiry.

Largely out of fashion now, positivism emerged out of a need and an aspiration to elevate intellectually social sciences to the level of natural

sciences. It was in this respect that Comte argued for the inclusion of observation, experimentation and comparison as techniques in the enquiry.

Comte regarded the whole of human race, and even when he was propounding theories, he sought to bring about the betterment of the entire humanity. He wanted social engineers to bring change in society, long before the term was used by development agencies. For him, sociology without an intention to improve the conditions of mankind was not an ideal science. He wrote 'From science comes prevision and from prevision comes action' (Abraham and Morgan, 1988). All enquiry for discovering the universal laws of nature should be geared towards providing the maximum benefit for people.

Comte also predicted the importance of division of labour in society, by pointing out that in addition to religion and language, it was division of labour which brought people together in a state of solidarity. A few decades later, Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx would also write about labour and its role in society.

Even though Comte fell out of the list of *fashionable* thinkers in sociological theory, his contributions are important. Occasionally, there are revivals of his ideas, as seen in the case of neo-positivism. We have also seen how his ideas on positivist religion was popular in various countries.



Figure 34: Statue of Comte at Sorbonne

Comte had to face many difficulties that would be faced by anyone who set out to establish a new discipline, and furthermore, a new way of thinking. In addition to this, Comte also faced many challenges in his life, and was also prone to some eccentric ideas and habits, such as *cerebral hygiene* which prevented him from reading the works of other people. He was also always reduced to being on the margins of academic establishment, and failed to ever have a permanent academic post. This further exacerbated his loneliness in the intellectual sense.

In spite of all this, his works have influenced a wide variety of theorists including those such as Emile Durkheim, Claude Levi-Strauss, etc. He maintained a life-long friendship with John Stuart Mill, who also looked up to his theories. He attempted for the first time to systematically and scientifically analyse the turbulence of his times, and to decipher universal rules of society. Most important of all, he established one of the biggest intellectual endeavours mankind has undertaken, namely, the discipline for a scientific study of society, sociology.

Summary

- Auguste Comte- early life- mentorship of Saint Simon- intellectual journey- final years- key works
- Law of three stages: religious, metaphysical and scientific
- Positivism- a new methodology- experimentation and observation and comparison
- Social statics and social dynamics
- Emergence of sociology- methodologies
- Hierarchy of sciences- flow from specific to general- movement from simple to complex
- Religion of Humanity- role of sociologists- reaction against traditional Catholicism- criticism- popularity in Brazil

Self Assessment Questions

1. How did Comte's relationship determine his contribute to social thinking?
2. What is the Law of Three Stages? Explain in detail.
3. What is the new methodology of positivism as explained by Comte?
4. Explain in detail social statics and dynamics.

5. What is the religion of humanity? What were the public's reactions against this?
6. How did Comte arrange sciences in a hierarchy? Explain in detail his arguments.

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UNIT – III**Lesson 3.1 - Herbert Spencer****Structure**

- 3.1 Biography
- 3.2 Important Works
- 3.3 Theory of Evolution
- 3.4 Organic Analogy
- 3.5 Militant and Industrial Societies
- 3.6 Conclusion

Lesson Categories

- I. To understand the life and intellectual background of Herbert Spencer
- II. To understand Spencer's theory of evolution, and its relationship to Darwin
- III. To analyse the organic analogy of Spencer
- IV. To look at the militant and industrial societies

3.1 Biography

After Auguste Comte, many theorists were writing about society. Some of them were directly influenced by Comte, along with the other major intellectual contributions of the day. One of the major thinkers of the 19th century sociology was Herbert Spencer, whose work derived immensely from the biological evolution theories which were newly gaining currency in the natural sciences.

When we look at the life of Herbert Spencer, there is nothing in it to suggest of tragedy, like Comte's life, for example. The writer George Elliot once remarked that Spencer's life had no material for a narrative, suggesting that Spencer lived a relatively conventional life for a man of his age.

Herbert Spencer was born in Derby, England on 27 April, 1820. His father was a mathematician, and Spencer was brought up in a Dissenting

family, meaning that his father was a dissenter against the religion of Methodism (a sect within Christianity). Spencer's family was Quaker, and his father practised a mix of anti-clericalism as well. He was a strong individualist, and passed down these tendencies to Spencer as well. Spencer's father, George Spencer ran a school in Derby and was also a member of the Derby Philosophical Society.



Figure 35: Spencer as a young man

Spencer was taught at home by his father because he was a sick child. In fact, he was the only child among nine to survive. When Spencer was 13, he also started receiving education from an uncle in the clergy. At this stage, Spencer was exposed to Protestantism.

In keeping with social standards of that time, Spencer was not a fully-rounded person. He did not have any skills in Latin and Greek, languages that were considered important for any cultivated man in the 19th century. Similarly, he did not have a detailed knowledge of history either. Due to all these reasons and his own unwillingness, he was not a suitable candidate for further education in a university. He decided to join the London and Birmingham Railway as an engineer when he was 17-18 years old, followed by a stint in the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway, from which he was sent home after the construction in 1841.

Even while he was working in the railway companies, Spencer continued to work on his inventions and write on the side. After 1841, Spencer published articles on the engineering and social and political

issues. Even at this stage, it was quite evident that Spencer had austerity as one of the ideal criteria of the government; he wrote in favour of a limited role for the government. He also argued that the whole of human activity, especially enterprise, should be a private affair, and that education, commerce should be run by private parties. He was also against any sort of legislation to regulate factories and did not want a strong church also.

Spencer was also a journalist, but couldn't make it as a successful one. After a few years of again working in the railways, Spencer found employment in 1848 with the London-based publication *Economist*. It was during his time in London that Spencer met a lot of his future friends such as George Eliot, Thomas Huxley and John Tyndall. During this time, he also wrote the book *Social Statics*, in which he first argued about the role of the government, and especially for the *laissez-faire* movement. He even wrote about evolution based on Lamarckian ideas. Lamarckian ideas of evolution is dated to before Darwin's time, and it talks about the inheritance of characteristics and traits that are acquired during the life course of an organism.

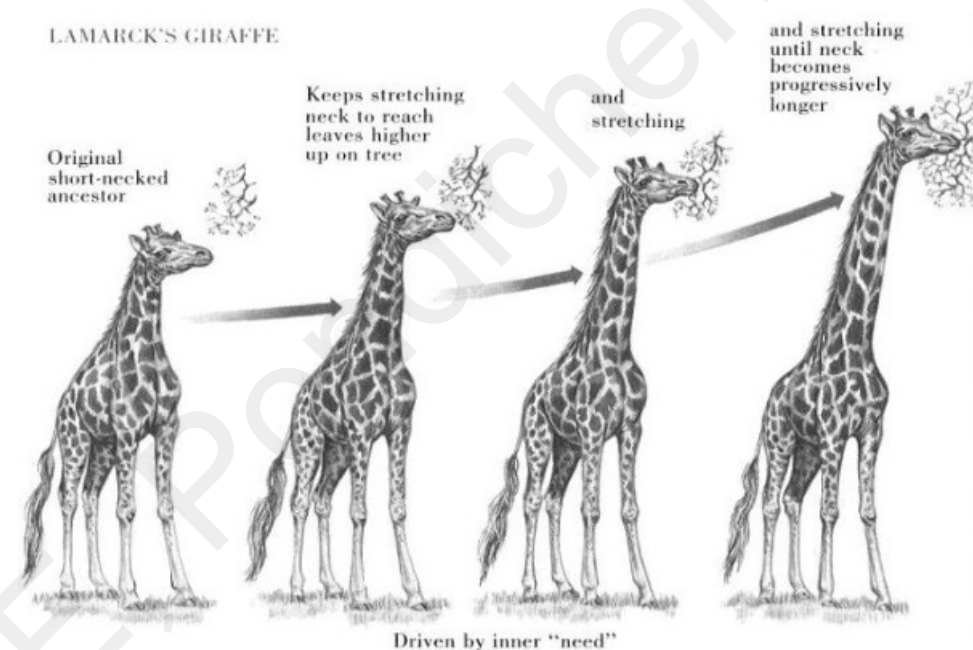


Figure 36: A common example of Lamarckian ideas

The death of his uncle left him with a substantial inheritance that would enable him to quit his job and work on his second book *The Principles of Psychology*, which was not well-received. However, he was also prone to mental breakdowns and was known to take a dose of opium.

This did not however stop him working as he produced multiple books and volumes between 1862 and 194, including an autobiography. Many of his books gathered immense interest, though not consistently. He also started a series called *Synthetic Philosophy*. Even though he had invested considerable sums into his writing, the death of his father, as well as his American readership ensured that he lived a life of relative comfort.

It is important to note that Spencer, though largely not discussed in sociology today had a reputation almost equal to Charles Darwin at the time. His book was taught at Oxford and Harvard, and his works were popular among the education sections of England. There were also translations of his works into various European languages.

In spite of this, Spencer refused the honours that were bestowed on him by various organisations and universities. He did not take any teaching position and he himself did not have a university degree.

Towards the end of his life, Spencer took on some controversial political stances, especially with his opposition to the Boer War in South Africa. The lack of popularity of his political positions led him to withdraw from public life. After his death on 8th December, 1903, his body was cremated.



Figure 37: Bust of Spencer

Spencer's influences can be seen in his friendship with George Lewes, who familiarized him with philosophy. Similarly, Spencer was also familiar with the works of Malthus, which will be seen later in this chapter. Spencer was also good friends with George Eliot and Beatrix Potter.

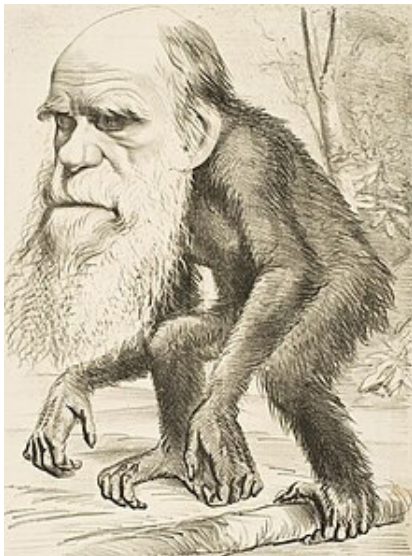


Figure 38: Cartoon criticising Darwin's theory

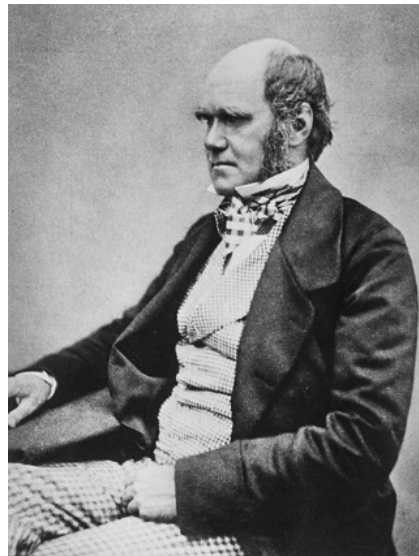


Figure 39: Charles Darwin

Considering the social setting, Spencer lived in Victorian England, where there was a lot of importance given to the idea of the empire, and the glory of monarchy. Labour movements inspired by Marxism had started taking place. In 1859, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, this book was to have a tremendous impact on society and especially on the way that mankind was conceived of. However, the idea that man evolved from and was related to other primates such as apes went against the grain of the Creationist theories, and thus Darwin was the subject of much censure from the Church and he was also caricatured by the public. But this did not stop the works of Charles Darwin were gaining currency, both in terms of admiration and scorn. Herbert Spencer on his part openly praised Darwin's work and sought to use its principles to understand society. Being of an intellectual bend of mind, it would have been impossible for Herbert Spencer to remain blind to the intellectual currents which were driving the society of the 19th century. Even though he was not learnt in philosophy, by virtue of his associations, he was aware of the debates and the nuances in philosophical thought. He would combine with his personal politics and his own scientific training to expound his theories on society as well, thus leading him to be considered as the second founding father of sociology.

3.2 Important Works

Spencer's *magnum opus* is widely considered to be *Synthetic Philosophies*, which is a series of writing, published over the course of many years. This series included:

First Principles (1862)

Principles of Biology, which had multiple volumes (1867)

Principles of Psychology, which also had multiple volumes (1871)

Principles of Sociology, with multiple volumes (1896)

His other acclaimed works are:

Descriptive Sociology, in 8 volumes (1873-1894)

The Study of Sociology (1873)

3.3 Theory of Evolution

Many sociologists consider Spencer's work to be a continuation of Comte's. However, Spencer himself encapsulated the relationship between Comte and himself thus

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 proposed to describe the necessary, and the actual, filiation of ideas. I propose to describe the necessary, and the actual filiation 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. (In Coser, 1977)

Spencer saws ideas as being *epiphenomenal*, that is, they were external and were evident in the structures of society. As mentioned above, Spencer was heavily influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution. Spencer held that societies were not different from another phenomena and was subject to the universal and natural laws of evolution. He also tried to draw comparisons between social and organic evolution. For spencer, all material-supraorganic, organic and inorganic were subject to these laws of evolution. He wrote that 'there can be no acceptance of sociology as a science, so long as the belief in a social order not conforming to natural law, survives' (in Coser, 1977). It should be noted that in spite of his adherence to his commitment to drawing similarities between the organic and the social, Spencer faced problems, because of his insistence on individualism.

So how did Spencer define evolution? He said, 'Evolution is a change from a state of relatively indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a state

of relatively definite, coherent, heterogeneity' (in Coser, 1977). Spencer's theory was a dual theory of progress, which was seen at all times in human history. He wrote that all phenomena evolved from simple to complex, whether is an organism or social.

The advance from the simple to the complex, through a process of successive differentiations, is seen alike in the earliest changes of the Universe... It is seen in the geologic and climatic evolution of the Earth; it is seen in the unfolding of every single organism on its surface... it is seen in the evolution of Humanity, whether contemplated in the civilized individual or in the aggregate of races; it is seen in the evolution of Society in respect alike of its political, its religious, and its economic organizations; and it is seen in the evolution of all those endless concrete and abstract products of human activity' (in Coser, 1977)

What should be noted is that Spencer's theory of evolution was never as simplistic as his later critics would argue. It was also not unilineal or deterministic. But Spencer was a functional sociologist. Where Comte had introduced some element of analogies, Spencer tried to put them in a functionalist and evolutionary perspective. It is this latter part of Spencer's work that we will pay attention to now.

To better understand Spencer's evolutionary theory, it is important to understand in simple terms his work in the *First Principles*. In this book, which was published in 1862, Spencer wrote about organic and inorganic evolution and change. He proposes three principles which govern the universe. These three rules are:

1. Law of the Persistence of Force- force or energy causes the universe to expand
2. Law of the Instability of the Homogenous- when the universe thus expands, it goes from being homogeneous to heterogeneous
3. Law of the Multiplicity of Effects- as and when there is a shift from homogeneous to heterogeneous, the effect of the heterogeneous multiplies and thus the universe becomes more and more heterogeneous- in other words, it is *a change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity, accompanying the dissipation of motion and integration of matter.*

In addition to these three laws are Four Secondary Propositions:

1. persistence of the relationship between the force (uniformity of law)

2. transformation and equivalence of forces
3. tendency of everything to move along the line of least resistance and greatest attraction
4. the principle of the alternation or rhythm of motion (Abraham and Morgan, 1989).

For Spencer, this evolution is essential and he equated this with progress. This could be seen in all phenomena. As he wrote in 1857:

Whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of Commerce, of Language, Literature, Science, Art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through successive differentiations, holds throughout. From the earliest traceable cosmical changes down to the latest results of civilization, we shall find that transformation of the homogenous into the heterogeneous, is that in which progress essentially consists. Spencer was of the opinion that society goes through three stages in its evolution:

1. simple societies
2. compound societies
3. doubly compound societies
4. trebly compound societies

Throughout all these stages, societies have a tendency to move from very simple and homogeneous to complex and heterogeneous. For example, he claimed that simple societies were just a group of families, compound societies were a group of clans, doubly compound societies were tribes, and finally, trebly compound societies were nation-states. Thus, the universal trend towards complexity and heterogeneity prevails in society, which will allow for greater adaptation with the environment.

How did human societies evolve through these stages of complexities? For Spencer, the answer lies in the population growth and its related themes, such as high birth rates, population growth through conflict and annexation of other groups and migration. For Spencer, it was evident that with any kind of population growth, there was going to be increased segmentation of already existing social structures. This is because there would be increased needs for diversity in logical factors such as sustenance and distribution.

Some of the main points of these laws of increasing complexity as given by Spencer are as follows:

- *The Law of Differentiation*- the population grows and so there will be greater differentiation in productive, reproductive, regulatory and distributive systems in a society.
- *The Law of Production*- The increasing complexity of the productive abilities of a society are due to
 - increased population
 - condition of technology
 - labour and human capital
 - natural resources
 - complexity of distributive structures
 - complexity of political and legal structures
- *The Law of Reproduction*: The reproductive structures of cultural and symbolic phenomena become complex due to
 - increased population
 - complexities in productive, distributive systems and in symbols and culture
- *The Laws of Regulation*: complexity is due to
 - increased population
 - level of surplus
 - level of exchange transactions
 - level of inequality
 - levels of internal and external threats

In this section, Spencer also talks about how power gets centralized: when there is either internal or external threat, depending on the duration of the threat, the conservative forces in society could bring about the case for a stronger centralization of political governance. In contrast to this, there is a greater tendency for decentralization of power, if the threat (both internal and external) are less, if there is a long duration of excessive control by the political authority, and if there is a strong liberal movement in the society, which demands lesser political restrictions.

**The Laws of Distribution*: The infrastructures that with distribution and circulation in a society, that is, the markets, become more complex

when there is increase in complexity of production processes and in the complexity of the regulating structures.

Social Darwinism: One of the main concepts in Spencer's theory of social evolution is the idea of Social Darwinism. As mentioned earlier, Spencer was heavily influenced by Charles Darwin. Before we go into the theory of social Darwinism, let us briefly look at the importance of Darwin's contributions to scientific knowledge.

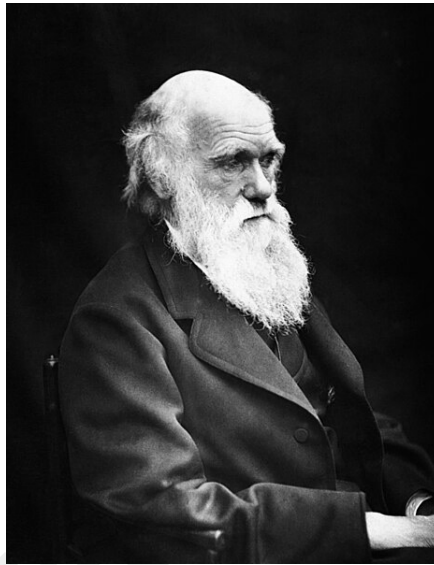


Figure 40: Charles Darwin in 1869

Charles Darwin, while still a student at Cambridge, was a naturalist on the ship HMS Beagle, which voyaged to Australia, South America, and to the Galapagos. Darwin collected specimens for his later study, based on which he was able to conduct research upon his return to England in 1836. However, it was not for another two decades, that is, in 1859, that Darwin published his findings in the book *On the Origin of Species*, which was an instant hit, while also setting off a controversy. Darwin suggested that an individual from an animal species exhibits 'variation' from its parents, which would later be attributed to genetic differences. The second part of Darwin's thesis was that many of these variations point to a distinct advantage for the succeeding generations, in terms of better adaptability to its environment, and thus, providing better chances at survival. This enables the species to endure, and over generations, some of these genetic variations will result in the creation of new species.

As much as Darwin's ideas were important for evolutionary biology, it posed a critical counterpoint to the widely-held religious beliefs of the day.

It argued against the creationism implicit in Christian tenets, especially in the Genesis, and as Darwin himself expected, he was subjected to criticism by the Church in both England and in the USA. Darwin's evolutionary theory also did not give any special place to human beings, as was given by the Christian beliefs. Darwin's demonstrations that human beings were related to the ape family was ridiculed.

However, it should be noted that as powerful as Darwin's critiques were, he also had the support of many ardent followers and contemporaries, such as Thomas Huxley, who was also Spencer's friend. Even though criticisms of his work continues, Darwin, by the end of his life, has the reputation of a scientific luminary. When he died, he was buried in the same Westminster Abbey, where also lies buried Sir Isaac Newton. His burial at the Abbey also points to a middle ground being achieved in terms of scientific thinking as well as the Church's position on the topic of evolution, and also sheds light on the widespread acceptance of Darwin's evolutionary theory by the Anglican Church.

Lamarckism is based on the work on Jean Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de Lamarck, who proposed his theory of evolution before Darwin did. Lamarck argued that over time, organisms evolved from simple to complex inevitably. He differed from Darwin in the sense that while Lamarck pointed to the complexity in the evolution, Darwin saw complexity not as inevitable, but as merely adaptive techniques to their surroundings. Lamarckian theories are not considered completely valid today, yet Lamarck is one of the first thinkers of evolution.



Figure 41: Jean Baptiste de Lamarck

When *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859, one of the intellectuals to receive it warmly was Herbert Spencer. He believed in the idea of natural selection and its role in evolution. He was also in contact with Darwin. However, according to Lewis Coser, it would be wrong to call Spencer a social Darwinist, because his ideas of evolution is more in line with Lamarckism than with Darwinism. Coser also argues that since Spencer's theories on social evolution was formulated before Darwin's publications on evolution, it would be inaccurate to call the former a social Darwinist. However, this stand has not been taken by many other writers, and thus let us see the extent to which Spencer's theories were influenced by those of Darwin:

- i. *The Principle of the Survival of the Fittest*: Spencer believed that nature has a way of weeding out those who were incapable of survival through conflicts. He extended this to social understandings also, arguing that it would be beneficial to all, if individuals who are incapable of surviving in society are ridden of 'through natural selection' (as opposed to any deliberate and violent actions). Spencer chose as his criteria for the 'less fit' categories of people who were disabled, chronically sick, etc. He wrote

It seems hard that widows and orphans should be left to struggle for life or death. Nevertheless, when regarded not separately but in connection with the interests of universal humanity, these harsh fatalities are seen to be full of beneficence- the same beneficence which brings to early graves the children of diseased parents, and singles out the intemperate and the debilitated as the victims of an epidemic.

In a line of thinking that would not be completely out of place in today's capitalist and market-oriented world, where many countries are reducing their social assistance and security budgets as austerity measures, Spencer also believed that states should not have to take on the responsibility of taking care of such destitute people. However, he was never against individual philanthropy. In fact, this was in line with his belief in individualism and *laissez-faire* economy that private individuals should have the freedom and the responsibility to act according to their best interests and if some sort of social security for the less privileged and the destitute in society has to exist, then it has to exist through these private actions.

- ii. *The Principle of Non-Interference*: As mentioned above, Darwin believed unwaveringly in the individualism espoused by the *laissez-*

faire political thinking. He argued that even services such as post, public health and sanitation, money and banking, etc., should not be the responsibility of the state, but should be entrusted in private hands. The state for Spencer, only existed to protect the individual liberties.

Spencer's idea of 'selection' went beyond Darwinian notions of selection. For example, contrary to Darwin's selection which is based on density, and hence on competition, but rather on the scarcity of mechanisms which regulate the above-mentioned functions of production, reproduction, reproduction and regulation. But Spencer also added another point to the functioning of the super-organic social structures: the ability to perceive and make changes as and when new challenges occur. Turner calls this *Spencerian selection*, as opposed to *Darwinian selection*.

Exercise: Make a collection of pictures and cartoon which show Victorian England's reactions- positive and negative- to Darwin's Evolution Theory

3.4 Organic Analogy

One of the major theories that is still associated with Herbert Spencer is his theory on society as an organism, in other words, *the organic analogy* or the *social organism*. Spencer first introduced the idea of society as an organism as an argument against those who wanted to counter the 'natural' progress of society, as he saw it. Spencer argued that '*society as certainly has its governing principles as man has*', in *The Proper Sphere of Government* (1843). In a call that would later find popularity in the works of functionalists of the 20th century, Spencer argue for the tendency of society to seek equilibrium, just as biological organisms do.

Spencer's desire to draw an analogy with society and something else did not start with the biological organism. He started with a comparison of the human society and mechanical engineering, but he abandoned it because it did not suffice to explain the living conditions of human society and its constituent elements. It is at this point in *Social Statics* that Spencer points out to the need for understanding the social organism:

'men cannot break that vital law of the social organism- the law of equal freedom, without penalties in some way or other coming around to the,. Being themselves members of the community, they are affected by whatever

affects it... we commonly enough compare a nation to a living organism. We speak of the "body politic", of the functions of its several parts, of its growth, and its diseases, as though it were a creature. But we usually employ these expressions as metaphors, little expecting how close is the analogy, and how far it will bear carrying out. So completely, however, is a society organised upon the same system as an individual being, that we may almost say there is something more than analogy between them' (1851).

Over a period of many works, Spencer used the word *social organism* to express specific forms of control and division of labour as a requisite of development, for example, the development of a legal system, a religious system, etc., with ceremonies and officials to conduct those ceremonies and so on. There were three questions that Spencer posed, which he answered in an essay titled *The Social Organism* (1860):

1. *how does a society become a social organism?*
2. *what are the morphological features of this social organism?*
3. *what is the relationship between the whole and the parts of this social organism?*

Society passes through changes in small and imperceptible ways, according to Spencer. He says that it is impossible that a higher power created society, and that it, in fact, evolves through the natural processes of growth. Talking about the growth of the economic system, he writes that '*society has become the complex body of mutually-dependent workers which we now see*'. According to Spencer,

It is also a character of social bodies, as of living bodies, that while they increase in size they increase in structure. Like a low animal, the embryo of a high one has few distinguishable parts; but while it is acquiring greater mass, its parts multiply and differentiate. It is thus with society, As first, the unlikenesses among its groups of units are inconspicuous in number and degree; but as population augments, division and sub-divisions become more numerous and more decided. Further, in the social organism as in the individual organism, differentiation ceases only with that completion of the type which marks maturity and precedes decay.

The following are the ways in which societies resemble organisms:

- i. Societies, just like organisms, start out as small aggregations, but then grow in size and density.
- ii. As the size grows, the complexity in structures also grow.

- iii. Increasing complexity results in increasing interdependence of the parts.
- iv. in both individual organism and society, even if the component parts end in their existence, the overall structure continues to exist and even grow and become more complex.

The differences between individual organisms and societies are as follows:

- i. Societies, unlike most organisms do not have a physical form
- ii. In a society, there is no mass of 'living tissue': the living components are spread throughout the society, and not concentrated in one place.
- iii. the individual components of a society are capable of movement, whereas in an organism, it is not the case,
- iv. feeling is not centralised in society, unlike an organism where only certain parts of the body are capable of feeling. In a society, every individual part is capable of feeling.

Spencer argues that just as in lower species of being, there were no great divisions of labour between the organisms, there were no economic division to labour in the earliest, non-complex societies. As societies tend to grow in size and become more complex, various systems also start to develop, just as in biological organisms. Consider the following similarities:

- i. an ectoderm in a biological organism is analogous to a warrior class in a society- both are functioned with the protection duties
- ii. a vascular system in an organism and a distributive system of traders, and middlemen in society is concerned with the transport of 'nutrients'
- iii. nervous system is compared to railways, telegram, etc., in its role as communicative agents
- iv. the brain is considered to be similar to a parliament where the representatives bring issues to the forefront and where decisions are made

However, Spencer, writing later, reiterated that the 'social organism' was to be taken as a metaphorical construct. By 1876, Spencer was clear to break off the superorganic from the organic, even though the former did evolve from the latter. He admitted that while many insect societies did exhibit

super-organic traits, they nowhere reached the complexity and growth shown in the human societies. These super-organic entities grow based on factors such as environment, mass of population, knowledge, culture, etc. However, in a fashion typical of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Spencer argues that the *society is a growth and not a manufacture*. Rather than a deliberate and planned phenomenon, this increasing complexity was one that happened with the simultaneous growth of societies.

The idea of a social organism was met with various types of reactions in the context in which Spencer introduced it. For example, Thomas Huxley- even though a friend of Spencer's- believed that Spencer's arguments were *unpersuasive*. John Elliot Carines, an economist, wrote that Spencer had neglected societies were members were aware of a corporate existence, and thus where the complexities were a deliberate action. He also added that in most societies, voluntary associations were almost always a deliberation action, and not one that arose naturally. Echoing Huxley was JA Hobson, who argued that in Spencer's argument was the idea that societies remain a lower order of organism.

In spite of these criticisms, *social organism* or *organic analogy* does remain one of Spencer's most important contributions to understanding society, and one that Spencer himself would use as a *scaffolding* to understanding the evolution of societies.

Exercise: Draw a diagram or a flow chart, showing the major functions of society, and draw comparisons to the same functions as performed by a biological organism.

3.5 Military and Industrial Societies

As we have seen above, Spencer argued that human societies were evolving. For him, there were two aspects in the changes of human societies: *progress* and *evolution*. For Spencer, the growth of population or the increase of mass was a very important factor that brings about this change. As population increases, societies are confronted with a situation where they have to adapt and make changes, in other words, to *evolve*. This situation forced human beings to make the best use of the resources available to them through various techniques including division of labour.

Over the course of his works, Spencer talked about different criteria on the basis of which societies could pass through different stages of evolution.

On the basis of complexity, Spencer divided societies into

- i. Simple society
- ii. Compound society
- iii. Doubly compound society
- iv. Trebly compound society

Each of these societies become more and more structurally complex as they pass into the next stage, with the last two also having a complex political system.

Next, on the basis of the nature of settlement, Spencer divided societies into

- i. Nomadic societies
- ii. Semi-settled societies
- iii. Settled societies

However, it was Spencer's differentiation of society on the basis of *internal regulation* that remains important today. The first introduction of this idea was in *First Principles* in 1862. Spencer argued that social organisation is based on the types of social regulation, and that these were bound to change in each stage of society's evolution. The two types of society based on this criterion were *militant* and *industrial societies*. According to Spencer, societies can be divided into 'predominantly militant and predominantly industrial- those in which the organisation for offence and defence is most largely developed, and those in which the sustaining organisation is most largely developed. Even though Spencer used the term 'types of society', some scholars argue that the use of term 'social relations' is a better signifier for this classification, as each of these societies are characterised by relationships of coercion or voluntariness.

Even though internal regulation was the primary factor here, Spencer also shed light on the relationship that one society has with others: they could be one marked by militancy, or by peaceful, industrial bonds. The nature of this external relationship determines the internal organisation of a society, thus implying that the nature of the social regulation was not reliant purely on the stage of evolution at which a society was, but rather on the basis conflict, or lack thereof, with other societies.

Militant Societies:

In a militant society, the primary characteristic is that of *survival of the fittest*. This kind of society is defined by either positive or negative regulation. Positive regulation means that the state exists to *stimulate and direct*, whereas negative regulation only serves to restraint.

In a militant society, the society is organised in such a way that it is always ready for a war-like situation. All corporate structures (it should be noted that 'corporate' here means the combined or social structures) are organised in such a way that all necessary resources can be mobilised immediately for an emergency, conflict-ridden situation. According to Spencer, 'So long as militancy predominates, the constitution of the state must be one in which the ordinary citizen is subject either to an autocrat or to an oligarchy'. In such a case, all individuality is lost.

A military society is based on compulsion: individuals do not have an option but to become part of the social structure, which in turn is part of a larger regime of hierarchy and order. The individual's personal will counts for very less, as it can be superseded at any moment by the order of the state. There is a chain of command, which is ardently followed. The hierarchy is strict and since a militant society is based on status, much importance is placed on unquestioning obedience to superiors. Every individual relates to the next person through a relationship of either superiority or subservience. According to Spencer, 'From the despot down to the slaves, all are masters of those below and subjects of those above'.

In a militant society, there is excessive centralisation. As we have seen above, all individuals are assigned statuses, and the ranking of these statuses are strict. Over a period of time, the statuses and ranks are inherited and inflexible. This makes change very difficult in militant societies. Since commercial relations are closely tied to the political system, a society which is in a state of conflict with others, the economic system is not flexible and is subject to a state control as well- trade is thus usually internal and economical self-sufficiency is prized above free trade.

Individual characteristics also reflect the type of society. In a militant society, individuals have as their primary motive to take vengeance on anyone who might wrong the system. Even when they are not in the presence of a leader, the rules and orders are followed, partly because this obedience is crucial to the maintenance of the system. Thus, in Spencer's own words, 'the militancy moulds the citizen into a form not only morally

adapted, but also intellectually adapted- a form which cannot think away from the entailed system.'

Some examples of a militant society, as given by Spencer, are the Roman Empire, Sparta, and the Russian Empire under the Romanovs.

Industrial Society

In most ways, the industrial society is an antithesis of the militant society. It is one based on voluntary co-operation as opposed to coerced co-operation. According to Spencer, an industrial society is one in which '*co-operation by which the multiform activities of the society are carried on becomes a voluntary co-operation...(it has) a regulated apparatus of a diffused and uncentralised kind*'. Decision-making is decentralised in an industrial society. However, this does not mean that there is no hierarchy at all- in fact, a strict hierarchy and chain of command is seen in parts of society which evolved during the militant stage, such as the army and other parts which are associated with maintaining regulation and order.

Individual liberty supersedes all other facets in an industrial society. The government or any other kind of representative body exists to protect the individual liberty of each person from encroaching upon that of the other. In Spencer's own words, '*the individuality of each man shall have the fullest play compatible with the like play of other men's individualities*'. Since there is no major threat to existence of the society from outside forces, the main responsibility is to maintain the internal order so that individuals are free to pursue their activities and prosper. There are no restraints apart from the ones that ensure freedom to all. This also implies that individuals are to bear the responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

Economically, an industrial society is less isolated than a military society. There is awareness that the isolation necessitated by the military dangers is no longer feasible, and that there has to be increased exchange of products and other economic ties, and that in contrast to posing a risk, these ties are advantageous to all parties involved.

In an industrial society, women occupy a higher position than in militant society. When the risk of warfare is low, more attention is given to the upbringing of children, and eventually this led to the emergence of monogamy as a norm.

What is to be kept in mind is that for Spencer, these types of society was based on the political organisation. Militant societies force integration of the individuals to the social order. Only once this integration has been achieved can the differentiation that is characteristic of industrial societies be achieved. Thus, it is the kind of political organisation of the society which determines the nature of co-operation and the extent of liberty.

For Spencer, an industrial society is the pinnacle of the evolutionary process. In such a society, Spencer writes, *'progress is not an accident, not a thing within human control but a beneficent necessity'*. These societies are best suited for functioning in peacetime. The fact that the society is together is a consequence of the individual desire to be together, rather than a coerced fact of life. Again, in Spencer's ideology, since *laissez-faire* was the ideal type of society, industrial societies reflected these free-market tendencies as well.

Where warriors (and traits associated with warriors) were considered prestigious in militant societies, in industrial societies, merchants were the prestigious posts.

In conclusion, it can be said that Spencer's classification of societies into militant and industrial is in agreement with Henry Maine's theory of the transition from *status* to *contract*. Where the idea of status was supreme, and where it was fixed in social organisation in a militant society, in an industrial society, the contract between individuals to maintain order for the collective pursuit of their individual liberties are supreme. However, it cannot be negated what Spencer was the role of government as this transition takes place: less government control. In his own words,

...the time was when the history of a people was but the history of its government. It is otherwise now. The once universal despotism was but a manifestation of the extreme necessity of restrain. Feudalism, serfdom, slavery- all tyrannical institutions- are merely the most vigorous kinds of rule, springing out, and necessary to, a bad state of man. The progress from there is in all cases the same- less government.

Exercise: Compare some kingdoms from ancient India and try to analyse where they fit on the scale of military and industrial societies.

3.6 Conclusion

Herbert Spencer's life turned out different from that of Auguste Comte, in a major part due to his ideas being widely accepted and popular during his lifetime. His insistence on *laissez-faire* society and echoes from Malthusian thought found popularity in western Europe, the USA, and in Russia. Spencer even visited the USA in 1882.

Much is also to be attributed to the timing of Spencer's life and works. In the mid-19th century, when many intellectuals were beginning to move away or at least question the tenets of the church, Spencer's evolutionary ideas provided a new language with which to think of social change. History was at a point where European countries were also encountering or establishing their colonial dominance over other regions of the world. Spencer's works enabled people to think of themselves, and by extension, others, as occupying a position on the evolutionary scale. Spencer's strong argument that all societies move towards progress and that this was mandatory enabled European thinkers to consider their own position vis-à-vis others as a result of the natural progression that the preceding centuries had led them to.

In the United States, Spencer's works found acclaim, especially with Charles Horton Cooley and William Sumner. The latter even prescribed *The Study of Sociology* as part of his course at Yale University.

However, in the 1930s, Spencer's works were critiqued and relegated to the sidelines. It is to be noted that these were the interwar years, and also the years of much economic turmoil in most parts of the world. Austerity measures were not in vogue; in fact, governments were investing more and more in public services during this time in the USA. However, in the 1960s, Spencer's works were popular again, especially three themes: functionalism, social engineering and individualism, and his critique of governments. Another critique of Spencer is that even when societies are in the stage of their evolutionary processes, the difference in organisation, environment, and their cultures mean that no two societies are ever completely similar. Some other drawbacks of his works are that today sociologists do not consider 'evolution' but rather think in terms of 'system'. Similarly, the idea that a society can be so easily compared to an organism in terms of external boundaries and consciousness has come under fire too.

However, in spite of all these critiques, Herbert Spencer remains one of the first sociologists to have written such a huge *oeuvre* of works. Future sociologists were influenced by his works, some even improving on them, as Vilfred Pareto did. Perhaps the most influence was seen immediately in the works of Emile Durkheim, in whose works on the comparative analysis of societies, division of labour and functionalism can be seen echoes of Spencer's own theories.

Summary

- Herbert Spencer: early life and career- Darwinian evolutionary theory- important works
- Theory of evolution: influence of Darwin- First Principles- Four Secondary Propositions- Evolution and progress- Laws of increasing complexity
- Organic analogy: comparison with living organisms- analogous functions of bodies and societies
- Types of societies- based on size: simple, compound, doubly compound, trebly compound- based on settlement: nomadic, semi-settled, settled- internal regulation: military and industrial

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How does Spencer's idea of evolution of society differ and concur with that of Comte?
2. Describe the ways in which Spencer was influenced by Darwinism.
3. Explain in details Spencer's laws and propositions about the increasing complexity of societies.
4. How did Spencer demonstrate the analogy between human societies and biological organisms? What are the criticisms of this approach?
5. What are the different types of societies based on different criteria, according to Spencer?
6. How was the military society different from the industrial society? Explain in detail, with special reference to the traits that were held in high esteem in individuals.

References

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DDE, Pondicherry University

UNIT – IV**Lesson 4.1 - Emile Durkheim****Structure**

- 4.1 Biography
- 4.2 Important Works
- 4.3 Social Facts
- 4.4 Division of Labour
- 4.5 Suicide
- 4.6 Conclusion

Lesson Objectives

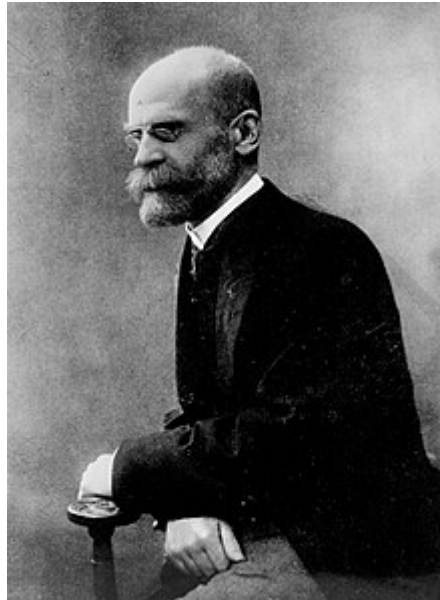
- To understand the personal and intellectual history of Emile Durkheim
- To look at the methodology of Durkheim, namely social facts
- To understand Durkheim's theory of division of labour
- To analyse the theory of suicide as given by Durkheim, and its relevance to sociology

4.1 Biography

If Auguste Comte is credited with establishing sociology as a discipline, it is Emile Durkheim to whom credit is due for establishing sociology as an academic discipline. Unlike Comte and Spencer, who were not academicians-either by choice or by circumstances- Durkheim was a well-respected professor at Sorbonne in Paris, and was also the brain behind the first sociological journal, *L'Annee Sociologique*.

Emile Durkheim was born in Epinal, in April, 1858, in an eastern French province called Lorraine, which currently borders Germany. He was born to a family of Ashkenazi Jews, and his father was also a rabbi. The Ashkenazi Jews of France, unlike their Sephardic brethren, were a tight-knit community, whose integration into French language and culture was minimal, and who spoke mostly Hebrew and Yiddish. Even while attending a secular school, Durkheim was also taught the Talmud, in line with his

religious upbringing. However, in his early teenage years, Durkheim came under the influence of Catholicism, but this was also short-lived, as he soon renounced any kind of religious faith, and would spend the rest of his life as an agnostic. However, his Jewish upbringing, and in particular the historical condition of Sephardic Jews was reflected in a life-long interest in group solidarity and social cohesion.



Durkheim was a brilliant student, and in 1879, he gained admission to the prestigious *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in Paris. Here, he was part of a cohort which also boasted of such luminaries such as Henri Bergson, Pierre Janet and Jean Jaures, many of whom he was good friends with. Even though he was trained in Philosophy, Durkheim demonstrated a penchant for social and political life. After his training at the Ecole, Durkheim embarked on a career of teaching, but from 1885-1886, he went to study further at Berlin and Leipzig. He wrote on German scholasticism, and collaborating important German scholars of his day. During this time, he also started writing on various subjects, and in 1887, the first position for a professor of social sciences was created for him at the University of Bordeaux. During his time at Bordeaux, Durkheim wrote critical tracts on the works of Tonnies, and also his major works such as *Division of Labour* and *Suicide*. He also married Louise Dreyfus, and had two children, Andre and Marie. It has to be noted that Durkheim's position at Bordeaux was important not only because it was the first time a sociologist was given an academic position, but also because it marked a change in the sensibilities of the university: even just a few years before had a sociologist been refused a teaching position at the university, because of his association with Auguste Comte.

Similar to Max Weber, Durkheim focussed on sociological theory in his writings. The first example of this was his doctoral thesis, later published as *The Division of Labour*. His work on the larger social mechanisms at play, especially guided by the works of Rene Descartes and Jean Jacques Rousseau, as well as his association with Comte and Saint Simon's writings, and his own teacher, Fustel de Coulanges.

The popularity of Durkheim's writings resulted in a large number of scholastic-minded people gathering around him, motivating him to found *L'Annee Sociologique*, in 1898. This journal, of which Durkheim himself was the editor, was the primary publication where sociological debates and discussions took place.

In 1902, Durkheim was offered a chair in Sociology and Education at the Sorbonne, the most prestigious of France's universities. Once again, this post had been created specifically for Durkheim. Over his time at Sorbonne, in addition to his work on the *Annee*, Durkheim also fostered a new generations of sociologists.

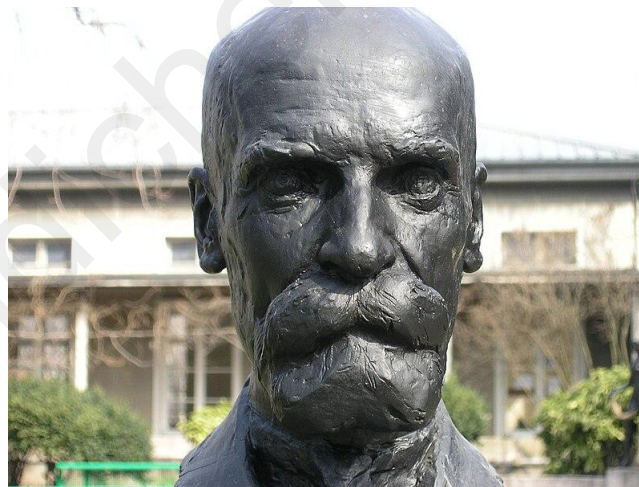
In 1912, Durkheim published what would become one of his most influential works: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. This book, though based on the primary works of other scholars and writers, contributed much to the sociological understanding of religion and its nature across time and space. It also indicated that in spite of leaving any form of organised religion, Durkheim still harboured intellectual curiosity about religious practice.

Durkheim was not content with academic work; he was also a vocal public figure. When the Dreyfus controversy broke in France, Durkheim came out in support of Dreyfus, thus cementing his image as a left-of-centre spokesman. Durkheim also worked towards the restructuring of the education system in France, and introduced sociology as a mandatory curriculum for civic service training. He tried his best to imbibe the secular spirit of his own moral values into the French public life. Considering his Ashkenazi roots, Durkheim's agnosticism, and his avid French nationalism was of immense importance.

Durkheim was influenced by the works of Rousseau, Montesquieu, Comte and Saint Simon. He saw himself as continuing the legacy of Comte and Saint Simon. Apart from that, Durkheim was also well-aware of non-French writers as well. Though he disagrees with Herbert Spencer's highly individualist doctrines, he agreed with Spencer on the question of

social order, and social evolution. In his work on religion, Durkheim was influenced by the British anthropologist William Robertson Smith. During his time in Germany, Durkheim was swayed by the moral imperatives of Immanuel Kant's works. Interestingly, it was the experimental psychologist William Wundt who influenced Durkheim greatly in Germany. Wundt's idea of the *great soul* would inform Durkheim's idea of *collective conscience*. Thus, it was evident that unlike Comte, Durkheim did not close his mind to the scholarly works of others, but rather thrived on the engagement and critiques of other's works.

The outbreak of the World War I in 1914 would take a toll on Durkheim. He lost many of his students in the battle-field. Intellectually too, as a scholar focussed on understanding social solidarity, such destruction and conflict on a massive scale caused him despair. To make matters worse, in 1915, Durkheim got information that his son Andre had died in the Eastern front of the war, from injuries sustained on the battlefield. The loss of his only son caused moral and physical deterioration in Durkheim, who also passed away on 15 November, 1917.



4.2 Important Works

1. *The Division of Labour in Society* 1893
2. *The Rules of Sociological Method* 1895
3. *Suicide* 1897
4. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* 1912
5. Establishment of *L'Annee Sociologique* 1898

4.3 Social Facts

One of Durkheim's most important contributions to sociology is methodological. He was of the opinion that as a separate discipline, sociology ought to have a firm rooting, and should be methodologically on par with the other sciences. This is also evident in his books on the division of labour, suicide, and religion. He sets out with elaborating the problem, then critiques other explanations of the phenomenon, and finally, he offers a sociological explanation. He was specifically interested in making sociology move away from the methodologies of philosophy, and for this, he proposed that sociology was the study of *social facts*. When he critiqued other explanations of social phenomena, Durkheim was simultaneously positioning social facts as the sociological explanation. In fact, he described sociology as the study of social facts. According to Durkheim,

(social facts) are endowed with coercive power, by...which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will...(it is) every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint'.

Even though Durkheim was curious about the social order in his first work on the division of labour, it was in his second book *The Rules of Sociological Method* that Durkheim started charting out his agenda for an objectival study of the empirical aspects of society. Social facts were one tool of this agenda; they were 'ways of acting, thinking and feeling that present the noteworthy property of existing outside the individual consciousness.' Social facts exist *sui generis*, and are not reducible to economic, geographical, or psychological aspects. In fact, Durkheim argued that social facts are to be considered as things.

He gave four characteristics to social facts:

1. they are not reducible to psychological or biological explanations
2. they are external to the individual
3. because they are external to the individual, they outlive the existence of the individual, or a group of individuals
4. they have coercive power, meaning that social facts are imposed on the individual, irrespective of his willingness.

Having set a basic understanding of social facts, let us see in detail how Durkheim set about establishing this as a methodological tool.

The Rules of Sociological Method was Durkheim's second book, written in 1895, after *Division of Labour in Society*. Durkheim's interest in this book was two fold: to show that there is a subject matter for sociology to study that was not being studied by any other discipline; and that there are certain methodological rules for this study, which would make sociology different from other sciences, even while having the same methodological rigour as those other 'established' sciences. This is where he introduces social facts, and argues that they are to be studied as things.

What does Durkheim mean when he says that social facts are *things*? Durkheim says that even though we are aware that we live surrounded by social phenomena, we do not have a clear and scientific understanding of these phenomena. For example, even though we live in- and are aware of this- a system marked by social organisations like state, law, etc., we do not have the scientific tools with which to study them. Whatever knowledge we do have about them is vague, which necessitates that we need a methodology to understand these social organisations and phenomena in a scientific manner.

At this stage, Durkheim argues that anyone interested in studying society should understand that social realities cannot be known without a deliberate seeking of that knowledge; in other words, social realities cannot be taken for granted. They should be studied just as physical facts (which are the focus of other sciences) are studied. This is why Durkheim uses the word *things*- to denote that they are to be made subjects of observation. Durkheim is also arguing against the strand of thought which considered that the *meanings* attached to these social phenomena are to be studied. Durkheim fervently argued for the study of the *phenomena in their objective conditions*, and not in terms of its assigned meanings.

What constitutes a social phenomenon? Social phenomenon exerts *constraint* on the individual. According to Aron, 'we recognize (a social phenomenon) by the fact that it forces itself on the individual'. According to this meaning, anything from a collective reaction such as anger or laughter, or even a fashion trend is a social phenomenon.

Social phenomenon is also linked to another term that Durkheim talks about, which is social currents, or currents of opinion. These are certain impulses that are strong in the society at one point, and which can be used to explain low birth rates, high rates of marriage, high migration, etc., at one particular point in time. These social currents will also be discussed

later, when we discuss Durkheim's contribution to the study of suicide. Social phenomenon can also extend to include, as mentioned above, state, law, morality, etc.

For Durkheim, all these social phenomena, in their varied forms, are social facts. This is because each of them arises from a collective- none of it is created in isolation. They have an impact on human beings. According to Durkheim, '*(social fact is) any way of behaving, fixed or not, which is capable of exercising an outside constraint on the individual... any way of behaving which is universal throughout a given society and has an existence of its own independent of its individual manifestations.*'

One point of contention, and an inconsistency that arises in Durkheim's own writings is the argument he makes that *understanding* has to occur on an objective plane, and not in terms of its *meaning*. In Durkheim's own later writing, it can be seen that when he sets about trying to understand a social fact, he starts with the meaning ascribed to it by people. Later sociologists would also dwell on the meanings given to phenomena by the actors when they attempt to scientifically understand said phenomena. Perhaps it can be taken that what Durkheim is arguing for is that this understanding comes a place of slow, systematic and scientific actions, and not one that takes place immediately and in urgency. We shall see more on the importance of *understanding* as a methodological tool in the works of Max Weber, when he writes about *verstehen*.

The next clarification to be made is regarding the use of the word *constraint*. The popular meaning of the word would indicate something that individuals are forced to partake in; such meanings are not applicable when we talk about things like a positive reaction like laughter, or something like a fashion trend. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish the meaning of constraint from popular usage and the Durkheim's usage.

Raymond Aron poses another question regarding the importance of constraint in social facts: '*is constraint the essence of the social phenomenon or is it merely an external characteristic which helps us to recognize it?*'. In Durkheim's own works, it is the latter- the constraint that a social phenomenon places upon the actors helps us to identify it as a social fact, and thus as something that can be studied scientifically.

Let us now briefly see how Durkheim himself applied his methodology of using social facts in his own works. Durkheim, being a conceptualist, set about defining the phenomenon that he was undertaking to study. His rule

was as follows: *take for the subject of investigation a group of phenomena previously defined by certain external characteristics which are common to them, and include in the same investigation all those phenomena which answer this definition*'. Durkheim classifies all the available information about the social fact, since this will help in arriving at an explanation of the phenomenon.

However, Aron criticises this aspect for two basic fallacies: 1, sometimes, while defining the causation of a social fact, it is possible to slip up and consider the extrinsic definition by an intrinsic one, and 2, to club all the social facts in the same category as having the same cause.

Now that Durkheim had established the *sui generis* quality of social facts, he sets about how they are to be studied. They are to use methods outside of introspection, which is used in philosophy or psychology. Thus, for the construction of objective knowledge, sociologists need to collect externally observable data such as religion, family, etc., and delineate them from the existence of the constituent beings. If, according to Durkheim's definition, sociology is the study of social institutions, and if institutions are social facts, then sociology is the study of social facts. Contradictory to Spencer, for whom sociology is to be based on individualism, for Durkheim, the roots of sociology is in collective coming together, and shared social realities. According to Durkheim, '*our emotions, impulses and habits*) are elaborated in the individual consciousness and then tend to externalise themselves; the (social constraint) are at first external to the individual, whom they tend to fashion in their image from without'.

This brings us to another aspect of the social order was Durkheim was concerned about: collective conscience. His understanding of collective conscience is similar to the understanding of culture by social anthropologists. Social conscience is also linked to the idea of social integration: members of a society feel integrated with others, when they partake in activities such as rituals, etc., which also draws on the social conscience of the group.

Social facts are guides to behaviour for Durkheim. These facts, by nature of their externality and constraint at the same time, are internalised by individuals. The constraint that individuals experience is the obligation to obey a rule, which in fact is perceived as something that is bigger than the individual themselves.

Thus, for Durkheim, the study of social fact is the goal of sociology. He dismisses radical individualism in the fashion of Spencer, arguing that while it gives an image of humans as independent, it denies the truth that humans exist in a system of realities constructed by the collective, and that this reality exists over and beyond its constituent individuals.

Exercise: Observe any social phenomena around you such as education, dietary patterns, etc., and write a small essay on it considering them as social facts as described by Durkheim.

4.4 Division of Labour in Society

The Division of Labour in Society (1893) was based on Emile Durkheim's doctoral thesis. In this book, Durkheim questions the relationship between the individual and collectivity, by enquiring the specific ways in which a group of individuals form a society, and the way in which this society continues to exist.

Durkheim wrote against Herbert Spencer's theories which were grounded in individualism, even though this was well received in England and America. Durkheim wrote that in no way was the collective less-stronger than the individual, merely that modern society contained in it many chances for the individualistic tendencies to be exposed, but the overall social cohesion still reigns true.

Before we go in detail about the social division of labour, let us take a quick look at some concepts we discussed in the previous section.

Collective conscience: the sum total of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of society and forming a system in its own right. (Abraham and Morgan, 1989). When the similarities between the individuals in a society are high, the degree of collective conscience is also high. Thus, logically speaking, simple forms of society, where there is not much differentiation exhibits higher forms of collective conscience. This stronger collective conscience is exhibited in certain situations like that of breach of law. More on this will be discussed in a later part of this section.

The *Division of Labour in Society* was an attempt by Durkheim to engage with the historical change that France was going through in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and with trying to understand the changes happening in social, cultural and religious realms. During this time period, France had a number of monarchs, three republics, and a

violent defeat against Prussia. There was a very violent revolution called the Paris Commune, during which time it was a lack of social cohesion and individualism which was blamed.

Durkheim expressed his most Comte-influenced ideas in this book, albeit in the form of disagreement. Where Comte was of the opinion that the events of late 18th century France pointed to lessening morality and the need for a social science which would also bring back morality to society, Durkheim countered that there was only a new kind of morality which was rising, and not the complete lack of it.

Durkheim also countered Comte's argument that social cohesion would decline due to the fact that more and more people were performing different tasks, as opposed to similar tasks. Durkheim argued that a new type of solidarity would arise out of differences as well.

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

Division of labour was an inevitable result of the growth of population and density. What Durkheim was interested in was how societies managed to remain together even when there was a complex division of labour. Durkheim wrote that there were two types of solidarity in a society: *mechanical* and *organic* solidarity.

Mechanical solidarity is seen in a society which is marked by similarity. It is a *solidarity of resemblance*. Most individuals are alike, and they perform the same tasks, go through the same rituals, have the same emotions, and hold the same values to be valid and important. Social cohesion exists because of similarity.

In a society which is marked by organic solidarity, individuals have been divided on the basis of separate tasks they perform in the larger structure. The solidarity comes from a place of differentiation. Since each member has a different set of functions to perform, they are dependent on each other for the other functions. Such a solidarity arising out of differentiation is termed organic because much like a living organism, where each organ performs a separate task, but need all of them to survive.

In societies marked by mechanical solidarity, the collective conscience is stronger, since they share norms and values. As the population increases and the division of labour also increases, and societies marked by organic solidarity exhibits weaker collective conscience. Following Anthony

Giddens, George Ritzer (2011) has typified the two kinds of solidarity, based on four dimensions, in the following manner:

Solidarity	Volume	Intensity	Rigidity	Content
Mechanical	Entire society	High	High	Religious
Organic	Particular groups	Low	Low	Moral individualism

Volume here refers to the extent to which collective conscience is applicable in a society; intensity is the depth to which the collective conscience is permeated; rigidity is how strongly it is defined, and finally, the content is the form that collective conscience takes in a society. In societies with mechanical societies, or archaic societies, collective conscience supersedes all individual will, and even becomes a great part of the individual's existence. However, in a society with organic solidarity, the areas of social life where collective conscience is strong is less in number.

In Durkheim's own terminology, mechanical solidarity is seen in *segmental societies* and organic solidarity in *societies with modern division of labour*. Durkheim puts this down to a difference in to a difference in *dynamic density*. Dynamic density is the *number of people in a society and the amount of interaction that occurs among them* (Ritzer, 2011). Dynamic density is usually high in societies where due to population growth, there is a struggle for resources. When such a struggle takes place, society organises itself in such a manner that there is co-operation among people to make the most efficient use of the available resources, and to specialise in a particular use. Thus, organic solidarity allows for greater interaction, and thus dynamic density, than mechanical solidarity. However, it should be remembered that whenever Durkheim is talking about division of labour, it is in the larger sense of a *social* division of labour- the economic division of labour is only one expression of this.

Repressive and Restitutive Law

However much Durkheim was interested in the material facts such as division of labour and dynamic density, he was keener on understanding the nature of solitude based on the nature of law in these societies. Durkheim stated that there were two types of law: *repressive law* and *restitutive law*.

But before that, let us see what Durkheim meant by *punishment* in the first place. A crime is any act that has been committed, and which goes against the collective conscience of a society at any particular point. The relativist attitude towards crime, that is, claiming that a certain action will not be a crime in a different place and in a different time does not carry any weight, since what matters is the collective conscience at that particular point of time and in that particular place. If this is crime, then what is punishment? Durkheim did not agree with the argument that punishment exists to deter any future instances of the crime. Rather, it exists to demonstrate that the collective conscience will be protected. Durkheim also took another interesting perspective towards crime, one that would later be taken by functionalists also- that crime is a normal part of society, and not pathological. Durkheim argued that crime determined the boundaries of the collective conscience, by checking how much of a transgression will be tolerated.

A society marked by mechanical society has a tendency to exhibit repressive law. The nature of solidarity in such a society is such that all members of society believe in the common norms and values, and as such any threat against the collective was taken as an existential threat. The value system is shared, and since there is a common morality, any action against the collective morality will be severely retaliated. In repressive law, the nature of the retaliation is punitive- since any transgression is taken to be threatening to the entire social order, the punishment will try to balance the wrong-doing, for example, cutting off the hand as a punishment for theft, etc.

Organic solidarity is characterised by restitutive law. In these societies, a common morality is weaker than in the mechanical solidarity, and thus the breach of the morality is not considered to be a threat against the entire society. Rather, any breach is considered to be merely an action against only one part of the society, and in this sense, they are treated accordingly. The punishment is not in form of exacting an appropriate revenge, but in the form of restitution to those who have been affected by the crime.

Even though many modern societies around the world have some form of repressive law, such as capital punishment. However, this does not mean that all crimes are dealt with in this severe manner. For example, in India, even if there exists a repressive law like the capital punishment for the rarest of the rare cases, most crimes are punished using restitutive law,

such as juvenile delinquents being sent to a reformation centre rather than to prison.

Durkheim also pointed to three scenarios in which the division of labour will not be properly executed for the welfare of the society. They are:

- i when the division of labour is anomic- a situation where there is too much individual-centred division of labour
- ii when there is forced division of labour
- iii when the division of labour is not co-ordinated

Durkheim argued that for a functional division of labour, which would take the society to its best functioning form, it was necessary to have a clear idea of justice which rectifies these imbalances.

In conclusion, Durkheim also seems to be influenced Darwinian notions of the struggle for survival, which brings about differentiation when confronted with increasing interactions. Division of labour comes into existence because the other option would be elimination due to scarcity of resources. Division of labour enables the individuals to continue their survival, because each of their contributions are important to the society's existence. Durkheim also believed that this social differentiation is key to individual liberty. Only where division of occurs and the collective conscience loses some of its hold do individuals have the freedom to exercise their will without fear of rebuke or punishment. However, this also implies an idea that would be later propounded by theoreticians such as Michel Foucault: the idea that individuals themselves imbibe the collective conscience. After a certain point, even when the collective conscience need not be imposed from the outside, individuals themselves are capable of self-regulation because they themselves become holders of the collective conscience.

Durkheim's preoccupations with collective conscience, justice and social cohesion could be seen right from his very first book. Even though these were themes that he would return to in his future works also, the most abstract versions of these were dealt with in *Division of Labour in Society*.

Exercise: Read ethnographic monographs of any tribal community, and understand the patterns of solidarity. Compare it with what you observe in the immediate neighbourhood around you.

Exercise: In the wake of the rape and killing of young women, how is the collective conscience of the society challenged? What do these events and their reactions tell us about the nature of repressive and restitutive law?

4.5 Suicide

In 1897, Durkheim published his third book *Suicide*. While the book detailed the factors for increasing or decreasing rates of suicide, this was not the primary aim of the work. Having introduced a new methodology for a burgeoning new social science, Durkheim set about exploring its applications in *Suicide*. Was it consider to take a specific social problem such as suicide, and treat it as a social fact, which in turn is linked to and can be explained by other social facts, this was Durkheim set out to in this book.

The reason that Durkheim chose suicide as his object of study was that there was sufficient data available to deaths by suicide. Moreover, it was an easily observable and concrete phenomenon. Suicide is one of the most private and individualistic acts possible, and by demonstrating that there are social tendencies and currents in determining such an act, Durkheim was aiming to show that there are hardly any events in a person's life that are outside the realm of the social. Even an individual act such as suicide could be subjected to sociological study, using the methodologies suggested by Durkheim in his previous works.

Durkheim also criticised the notions of suicide as studied by other sciences. For example, he refuted any racial or geographic theories, stating that these theories do not explain the more or less consistent rate of suicide in society irrespective of location and climate. Similarly, he also refuted the psychological theories, since they denied the social realities of suicide. Thus, Durkheim was of the opinion that only social currents helped to explain the difference rates of suicide in different parts. Durkheim also negated the imitation theory which was espoused by Gabriel Tarde, which argues that people imitate the actions of others, leading to high rates of suicide. Since this was a very popular theory at this point in history, Durkheim invested a lot of energy in refuting it. He argued that this theory wouldn't hold, because of the fact that regions that border countries with high rates of suicide. Durkheim critique of psychological explanations of suicide is based on two terms: *psychological predisposition* and *social determination* (from Raymond Aron). Durkheim admits that

even if certain people are more inclined to commit suicide by virtue of their mental states, the push for them to take the decision is social. Even though some of Durkheim's negations of the individual (and thereby the psychological, genetic, geographical, etc.) factors have been critiqued over the decades, it is his sociological explanations of suicide that are being put forth in this book.

Suicide is based on two kinds of comparison: one, the rates of suicide across societies, and two, the rates of suicide, in the same society, but across time. In both cases, the social currents are the reasons for the change in the suicide rates. Various sociological factors bring about these changes in rates.

Before we go into the typologies of suicide as given by Durkheim, let us look two main problems in society that he talks about.

Durkheim introduced the problem of *anomie* in his book on division of labour. Anomie refers to a state of *absence of norms or disintegration of norms*. Various factors may bring about this disintegration such as a breakdown of existing economic situation, violence, etc. According to Durkheim, in traditional society, there is no free will accorded to individuals. However, in modern society, with complex division of labour, the individuals are allowed, and even expected to have desires and ambitions that are solely individualistic in nature. In spite of this, modern societies do continue to work under the frame of collective conscience, which, if weakened, may cause disintegration in society. How the individual is related to the group is a main cause for concern in modern society. There has to be clear norms and rules which dictate the extent to which individuals are assimilated into the groups. For Durkheim, the best way of this integration is through professional groups.

In *Suicide*, Durkheim was demonstrating the extent to which any problem in the individual's relationship to the group can cause social ripples. No matter how modern, or how individualistic a society is, they are influenced by social currents. For Durkheim, even in the most individualistic act such as suicide, society is still present in the inner workings of the individual. To quote Raymond Aron, '*When an individual is alone and desperate enough to kill himself, it is still- speaking in Durkheim's manner- society which is present in the consciousness of the unhappy man; it is society, more than individual history, which governs this solitary act.*'

Let us now look at Durkheim's definition of suicide: *every case of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act performed by the victim and which strives to produce this result.*

A positive act in this case means an act which is performed to cause death, for example, shooting oneself, consuming poison, hanging oneself, etc. A negative act is one where a person avoids taking an action which would save their life, for example, not trying to escape from a burning building, deliberately starving to death, etc.

The terms 'directly' and 'indirectly' in this scenario also relates to the ideas of positive and negative deaths: either an action directly aimed at causing death, or an act which is avoided to indirectly cause death.

The sophistication in this definition is that Durkheim is talking about all kinds of deaths that could be counted as suicide, and not merely the acts which are commonly termed as suicide. For example, a Japanese samurai who may disembowel himself for protecting his honour, or medieval Indian women who committed *sati* would not be considered as having committed suicide in a general sense. However, in Durkheim's definition, it can certainly be considered as such.

When talking about suicide, Durkheim talks about two facets: individual cases of suicide, and suicide rate. The suicide rate is the frequency of the act in a certain place, whereas the individual suicide refers to the motivations behind one person in performing the act. For Durkheim, it was important to see how the individual phenomena are tied to the social phenomena.

In order to study suicide, Durkheim used statistical data from the death records in various parts of Europe. Having described this background, let us now look at the types of suicide according to Durkheim.

Egoistic Suicide

In egoistic suicide, the nature of social integration is weak. This kind of suicide is seen in societies where individualism is highly valued, often at the cost of social cohesion. Durkheim gives the example of unmarried people being more prone to suicidal acts than married people. This may be because unmarried people are integrated into society through their spouse or their children. Similarly, Protestants were seen to report greater rates of suicide than Catholics. Durkheim attributed this to the fact that Catholic

life is heavily regulated by the Church, whereas Protestants have more freedom, and also individualist ways of worshipping. The Church does not provide a tool of integration for Protestants, like it does for Catholics. The social currents which integrate an individual to a group protects individuals from egoistic suicide when it is strong. Durkheim says, *'religion protects man against the desire for self-destruction... what constitutes religion is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, also the greater its preservative value.'* (from Ritzer, 2011). When individualisation is greater, the desires are more, and often, there is no avenue to meet these desires. The ability to meet the desires are not compatible with the social group, or are restricted by the group. This may drive a person to commit suicide. To quote Durkheim, *'However individualised a man may be, there is always something collective remaining-the very depression and melancholy resulting from this same exaggerated individualism. He effects communion through sadness when he no longer has anything else with which to achieve it'* (from Ritzer, 2011).

It is an interesting fact that the cases of egoistic suicide are reported less when there is a nationalistic fervour. For example, during times of war, people may feel more integrated to society, because of a spirit of patriotism. This causes a lesser tendency towards egoistic suicide, thus showing that social currents determine even egoistic suicide.

Altruistic Suicide

Altruistic suicide is one which occurs when there is excessive integration of an individual to society is high. The individual may choose death because it aligns with the social imperatives. The collective conscience of the society has been internalised by the individual to the extent that they may even choose to die to protect the values of the society. Group directives are obeyed, sometimes to the point of death. Durkheim also attributed altruistic suicides to *'hope, for it depends on the belief in beautiful perspectives beyond this life'* (from Ritzer, 2011).

Examples of altruistic suicide can be seen in plenty. *Sati* is an example of altruistic suicide, when the widows of a man prefer to maintain the social values attached to the loyalty of a wife, and to die with him, rather than to challenge such notions by continuing to be alive. Ritzer mentions the mass suicide at Jonestown at the behest of the cult leader Jim Jones as

an example of altruistic suicide. In this case, almost a thousand individuals preferred to consume cyanide and even fed it to their children, because of their utmost belief in their leader and his teachings, rather than risk the possibility that their values were under attack. Another example of altruistic suicide is from Japan- samurai warriors would kill themselves by disembowelling themselves. This method of suicide was called *hara-kiri* or *seppuku* and was often perfumed to protect one's honour. Similarly, during World War II, Japanese fighter pilots called *kamikaze* would crash their fighter planes against enemy ship to cause damage, but this inevitably meant that the pilots themselves died. Both these examples prove the deep imbibement of social values by the individual.

The example of the *kamikaze* pilots brings us to the most interesting example of altruistic suicide given by Durkheim: that of soldiers in the army. Most people who sign up to be enlisted in the army are those who have already pledged an oath of loyalty to the values of the land. The organisation of the army also cherishes obedience and loyalty most of all. Thus, they are in a position diametrically opposite that of unmarried people- that is, they are excessively integrated into society.

The above examples show the rates of suicide in times of excessive integration to society. To quote Ritzer, '*when integration is low, people will commit suicide because they have no greater good to sustain them. When integration is high, they commit suicide in the name of that greater good*' (2011).

Anomic Suicide

This was the kind of suicide that most interested Durkheim. Anomic suicide occurs when there is a complete breakdown of the social norms and values. The regulating factors in a society have completely broken down and individuals are in a state of competition with each other. There is excessive individualism, and individuals face the risk of suffering from the disappointment of their aspirations not being met within the framework of the social realities. This results in a social current of uncertainty which makes suicidal tendencies quite strong.

In anomic suicide, there is a statistical correlation between the economic crisis and rate of suicide. What is interesting is that anomic suicide rates are high in times of economic lulls as well as during economic booms. During both these periods, the regulatory forces in society are

weak, leading to anomie. The old norms are not applicable anymore, and individuals are prone to feeling rootless. For example, when a person loses his job, he loses the immediate sense of identity and structure that the job provided him. This may lead to suicidal tendencies. On a more interesting vein, when a person becomes suddenly rich, the change in life situation means that the individual is set adrift from the social conditions that she has got used to so far. Sometimes, this may lead people to move away or even cause upheaval in their domestic life, and bring in anomic social currents.

Durkheim's analysis of anomic suicide shows his ultimate interest in checking the forces of the social regulation and individual will. There has to be a regulating factor on the individual whims. When the individual desires are left without control, a state of anomie may be the dominant social current, leading to higher rates of anomic suicide.

Fatalistic Suicide

The fourth kind of suicide that Durkheim wrote about was fatalistic suicide. Durkheim himself did not elaborate this much, and this was only a footnote in his book. On the scale of regulation, if low regulation leads to anomic suicide, then excessive regulation leads to fatalistic suicide. According to Durkheim, this may occur among '*persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline*' (from Ritzer, 2011).

A common example of fatalistic suicide is the case of the slave who knows that his life is doomed to bondage. Faced with such a bleak scenario, the slave may choose to commit suicide, rather than look for another option out. Similarly, in oppressive societies, people may be driven to commit suicide because of the inability to escape their situation.

To conclude, one can say that even when suicide is a very individual act, the causes are fundamentally social. There are *suicidogenic impulses* in every society, and this may rise or fall according to any of the scenarios mentioned above. Understanding the nature of these social forces would help in curtailing the rates of suicide. For example, understanding how anomic situations may arise may help in setting up a system where help is available to those with suicidogenic tendencies. But the importance of this theory was that Durkheim was able to demonstrate the extent to which social forces played a role, even when the individual thought that he was only following himself.

Exercise: Write an essay on farmers' suicides, or students' suicides, and analyse them using Durkheimian lens.

4.6 Conclusion

Apart from these theories, Durkheim also wrote about religion among the aboriginal tribes of Australia. Once again, Durkheim's arguments veered around the collective conscience, whereby the tribe worships itself through its rituals and its totems. Durkheim also laid out in detail the mechanics of the sacred and the profane, and these are concepts that sociologists of religion study even now.

Durkheim established the groundwork for sociology as a discipline: he put down a strong methodology, started the first stirrings of structural functionalism, and was crucial in the establishment of an academic sociology. But what best encapsulated Durkheim's ideas is his belief that the individual is superseded by the social. Society exists *sui generis* for Durkheim, it is not merely a collection of individual. In other words, society as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that is individuals. This also means that the constituent elements cannot be reduced to its parts. The individual phenomena cannot be understood solely in individual terms. Durkheimian thought establishes that the society exerts over individuals in all situations. Perhaps this has no greater demonstration than through his arguments in *Suicide*.

Perhaps the only other sociologist of his time who had such a great impact on sociology was Max Weber. Durkheim's contributions can be understood in three categories:

- a structural functional analysis of society
- a critique of the psychological explanations to understand social phenomena
- introduced concepts such as anomie, social integration, and also popularised terms such as social currents, collective conscience, etc.

However, Durkheim was also critiqued for wanting to bring the individual under the collective whole, even though he himself tried to balance the two. In spite of these critiques, Durkheim's influence cannot be understated. Talcott Parsons introduced his work to American sociology, and in the 1950s, a whole range of functionalists would also attribute their

theoretical influence to Durkheim. Today, along with Max Weber, Emile Durkheim occupies the pride of place as the most important contributor to classical sociological theories.

Summary

- Emile Durkheim: early life and education- first teacher of sociology at Sorbonne- *L'Année Sociologique*- key works
- Social facts- Durkheim's contribution to methodology- features of social facts: social, external, coercive- social facts as things
- Division of Labour: social solidarity- mechanical and organic solidarity- collective conscience- restitutive and repressive law-
- Suicide: importance of this study in sociology- types of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. What was Durkheim's status in early sociology?
2. What did Durkheim mean when he said that social facts are things?
3. How can one use social facts as a methodological tool?
4. Compare Durkheim's social facts with Weber's ideal types. Can they be used in congruence with each other?
5. What is social current and collective conscience?
6. How did Durkheim differ from Herbert Spencer in the understanding of the evolution of society?
7. How does the nature of law change according to the type of solidarity in a society?
8. Explain the concept of anomie.
9. What did Durkheim mean by 'positive or negative death'?
10. What are the types of suicide according to Durkheim?
11. What was the significance of Durkheim's book *Suicide* in early sociology?

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UNIT – V**Lesson 5.1 - Max Weber****Structure**

- 5.1 Biography
- 5.2 Selected Bibliography
- 5.3 Social Action
- 5.4 Ideal Types
- 5.5 Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
- 5.6 Conclusion

Lesson Objectives

- To locate Max Weber in terms of his historical, intellectual, and social background
- To look at the methodology of ideal types
- To analyse the idea of social action
- To look at Weber's theory of religion and economy critically

5.1 Biography

Max Weber is one of the greatest German thinkers, one star among a constellation of thinkers that Germany has produced. Among his greatest contributions to sociology are the methodological tools with which he proposed that society could be studied with the same objectivity but a different manner from natural sciences. Weber's contributions to the understanding of social hierarchies and economy and society and on par with that of Karl Marx in sociology, though they do not carry the same political legacy.



Figure 42: A young Max Weber

Max Weber was born in 1864 in the German town of Erfurt. He was the first of seven children. His family were Protestants. Weber's parents were different in their personalities, with his mother being a devout Calvinist, and his father a member of a secular group, National Liberal Party. Weber's father was part of the political establishment, as a member of the Prussian House of Deputies, and the German Reichstag. He was a bourgeois politician and was not inclined to dabble in any idealistic ventures. Weber's mother came from a family of Huguenots who were driven away from France as a retaliation against Protestantism. It was in this diverse and seemingly contradictory household that Weber grew up, being exposed to politicians, historians, academicians, etc.



Figure 43: Weber's parents, Helene and Max, Sr.

Weber first enrolled for a jurisprudence degree at Heidelberg University, after which he opted for military service. In 1884, he returned from the military service to enrol in the University of Berlin, where he was under the tutelage of Jakob Goldschmidt. Weber submitted his PhD thesis entitled *History of Commercial Societies in the Middle Ages* in 1889, following which he wrote a work on *Roman Agrarian History*.

During his time in Berlin, Weber was very disciplined, and he wrote tomes running into 900 pages. He found employment at the University of Berlin as a lecturer, and was also a member of the bar. In 1893, he was appointed as a chair in economics at the University of Freiburg. He also married Marianne Schnitger, with whom he enjoyed an intellectual relationship.

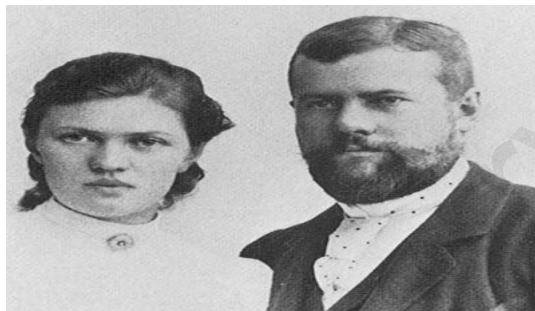


Figure 44: Max and Marianne Weber

In 1895, Weber delivered the inaugural address on *The National State and Economic Policy* brought him the publicity from across the country. He was known for his rather specialised knowledge, which led him being appointed at Heidelberg as a professor of economics in 1896. Weber was a leading intellectual in Heidelberg, and he drew other scholars into a network at the centre of which was Weber.

In addition to academics, Weber also had some political aspirations, probably to follow in the footsteps of his father. He played an important role in Christian-Social political circles. However, in 1898, following a family tussle, Weber suffered from a nervous breakdown, which would claim five years of his life. However, during this period, Weber travelled in Europe and to the USA, where the extent of modern and industrial life must have enthralled Weber.

It was only in 1903 that Weber was able to join the *Archiv fuer Sozialwissenschaft*, as an editor. This was the leading social science journal

in Germany. It was in 1904 that Weber travelled to the USA, to deliver a lecture in St. Louis, following which he travelled in the New World for 3 months, clearly drawing impressions that would influence his views on capitalism.

When he returned to Heidelberg, Weber embarked on a writing career. His work of methodologies were published during this time, as was *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In 1910, along with George Simmel and Ferdinand Tonnies, he co-founded the German Sociological Society. In 1914, when the World War I broke out, Weber volunteered to the German army, and he was posted as a reserve officer. During the war, Weber gave many political advice regarding the conduct of the war, but most of which was not heeded.

Upon the end of the war and the armistice in 1918, he joined a new party *Deutsche Demokratische Partei*. From 1918, till his death in 1920, politics played a very important role in Weber's life. He was an adviser on the German delegation to the Versailles palace, and even participated in the writing of the new German constitution. He opposed to the extreme right as well as the extreme left.



Figure 45: Max Weber, in 1918

Weber died on 14th June, 1920, after developing pneumonia through what is considered to be the Spanish flu. It is said that his dying words were '*The truth is the Truth*' (in Coser, 2011).



Figure 46: Weber's tomb in Heidelberg

Weber left behind not only a legacy in sociology but in the politics of his time period. He was steadfast in his political beliefs and stood by those that others shunned, such as Jewish people and Eastern Europeans. His house was open to those who the mainstream scholastic community had closed their doors to. He even testified at the trial of the poet Ernst Toller. He truly was a political man, as much as he was a scholar, which meant that he also had his fair share of enemies.

5.4 Selected Bibliography

All of Weber's writings were in German. In this section, a few of his important works alone are mentioned, with their titles as translated in English and the year of the first translated edition.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, 1930 (original 1904-05)

The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism, 1951

Ancient Judaism, 1952 (original 1917-1920)

The City, 1958 (original 1921)

The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism, 1958

5.3 Social Action

If Durkheim analysed society through the lens of social facts and the strength it exhibited through social currents on individuals, and if for Marx, society could only be understood in terms of the conflict of the

individuals, then for Weber, a study of society meant the study of meanings that people attached to their actions. Weber differed from the preceding sociologists in the sense that he considered the individual action and motivations to be worthy subjects of study. Based on this, he created a methodology that was had the individual as the focus, as opposed to the collective. However, in terms of the actual subjects of his study, they were based on the collective, and not on individual subjects: for example, his works on capitalism and bureaucracy show us that he was interested in the collective and larger entities, just as his predecessors were.

Let us look at what Weber's idea of sociology was. According to Raymond Aron, *Weber - conceives of sociology as a comprehensive science of social action* (Aron, 1967). According to Weber himself, '*sociology... is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences*' (in Ritzer, 2011). From this definition of sociology, we see that for Weber three things are vital in sociology: there is no doubt that sociology is a science; a look at the causative backgrounds (which would link sociology and history); sociology is to be studied using interpretative methods (*verstehen*, which will be dealt with in the next section).

Weber first wrote about the theory of social action in *Economy and Society*. Social action is the focus of Weber's sociology. According to him, '*Both for sociology in the present tense, and for history, the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action*' (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009). For a long time at its beginning, sociology swung between the subject matters of social action, or Durkheim's social facts. In fact, the origin of social action in Weber's theories can be seen in the distinction he sought to maintain between *interpretative practices* and the practice of natural sciences. Sociology, the subject matter of which was subjective factors, as opposed to the objective events that were being studied by the natural sciences, had to employ interpretative theory. This led to his second argument that natural sciences sought to discover general laws, which social sciences wanted to find the '*internal or subjective states of individuals*'. He also made the point that in natural sciences, it was enough to observe the factual relationships as it existed, however, in social sciences, there must be an attempt to understand the human actions, that goes beyond a mere reporting of the action. We see here that Weber was laying down the foundations for his theory of social action. He wanted to make the distinctions between the natural and social sciences different. He argued that the human beings perceive the actions

of other individuals by interpreting them, whereas in natural sciences, for example, the fact that an apple falls to the ground does not depend on the apple's understanding of the concept of gravity. Therefore, there was the need to study the *meaningful interpretations* that humans make in terms of their relationship with others.

The other aspect of social action for Weber was its value relevancy. Weber was responding to the ideas of German philosopher Heinrich Rickert, who had also sought to distinguish between natural and social sciences in terms of the value-orientation in human actions. Rickert saw all human action as being a combination of value-oriented in means and ends- art, language, religion were all a result of human actions to attain value-related goals. Weber agreed Rickert on the question of values in social action.

According to Weber, a difference is to be made between action and behaviour. Action is social, and has a meaning attached to it by the individual. According to Weber, *'action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual, it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course'*.

Weber differentiated between action and behaviour in terms of meaning. Behaviour is merely a response to a stimulus, for example, the need to swat a mosquito, or the need to eat when one is hungry. However, action is something that has a meaning attached to it. This meaning is not decided on the basis of whether it is positive or negative, but rather on the social acceptance of it. For example, if the same person who is hungry does not steal a fruit because it belongs to someone else, then that is a social action, because his action (to not steal a fruit) is caused by the norms around what is right and wrong. However, it is important to remember Weber's clarification here surrounding the value attached to social action: a particular action cannot be said to be social action, only when it is right. In fact, a negative action such the self-disembowelling seen among samurais of Japan is a social action as much as the act of a child saluting her national flag, because there are meanings attached to it. To quote Weber, *'In no case does (meaning) refer to an objectively 'correct' meaning or one which is true in some metaphysical sense'* (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009). This renders all actions without meaning, that is behaviour, *nonmeaningful behaviour*.

Weber, like Durkheim, refutes psychological aspects in social theory. Even while he concedes that individual factors and mental states may

determine the social action performed, he stresses on the social aspects as having more of a say in this. Even though he was interested in studying the importance of *personality* in social action, this is not seen to be reflected in his major works. However, the fact that Weber did talk about the role of psychological influences in social action, and especially reflected about the role of the individual's personality in choosing the course of social action was of importance to later schools of theory such as phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, etc. These schools, who unlike functionalism and conflict theory which are called macrosociological, come under microsociology, and deal with the small-scale interactions in a social setting. Weber's influence on microsociology is seminal, since he was the only founding father who ascribed importance to the study of *meaning*, which is reflected in individual actions, and not merely in larger social structures. In his own words, '*Action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behaviour exists only as the behaviour of one of more individual human beings*' (in Ritzer, 2009). However, he also added that in some cases, the collective had to be understood as an individual, when it was about the analysis of action. In any case: there was no confusion: if social action was the phenomenon being analysed, then the individual, and not the collective was the unit.

Weber used his ideal type methodology (which will be discussed later) in typifying social action. Based on this, he divided social action into four types. He did this by analysing the possible reasons for an individual's actions. The four types are:

1. **Zweckrational:** This is also called goal-rational action, or instrumental rational action. This kind of action is purely rational. The actor has a goal to be met, and decides to pursue a course of action which is best suited to attain this goal. For example, if a person wants to pass an examination, then she will study well and prepare for the same, or try to make the arrangements to cheat in the exam. Instrumental rationality is the best suited action to attain personally beneficial results. There is a subjective rationality: an actor assesses her needs and the possible ends, and lines up the actions according to that. It is also larger in scope compared to the other kinds of rationality. In instrumental rationality, the actor is free to assess the conditions (perceptions, reactions, etc.) of the surrounding people, and assess her own action accordingly. Further, various means can be considered for the attainment of a single goal, and then the best

suited one can be chosen. The secondary consequences of the action can also be assessed.

2. Wertrational: This kind of social action, also known as value-rational action, is where the individual chooses a rational path of action to attain their goal, but rationality is not the only deciding factor here. In fact, an even greater deciding factor is the value system, that is, is an action right or wrong? For example, in the above example of a student preparing for an exam, the value rational action would be that she studies hard to pass the exam, because cheating on the exam would go against her values, even if it means a failure in the exam. Thus, even if the means chosen are rational and efficient, the goal may be determined based on values. Another example of this is that a soldier may attempt to ambush an enemy group, even if it may be fatal, because he values the idea of patriotism. In a value rational action, the means is carried out because it is binding on the actor. The outcome of the ends does not matter as much as the value itself which is oriented in the means. Value rational is different from traditional and emotional action, because here, the actor acts not according to a subjective decision, but rather according to what is rational and has meaning. Value rationality may not lead to best effective results, and thus may not be the best suited for political needs, etc. To quote Weber, in a value rational action, an individual tries to '*put into practice their conviction of what seems to them to be required either by duty, honour, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call or the importance of some cause no matter in what it consists, regardless of possible cost to themselves*' (in Morrison, 1995).
3. Affective action: This is also called emotional action. According to Weber, emotional action, '*satisfies a need for revenge, sensual gratification, devotion, contemplative bliss or the working off of emotional tensions*' (in Morrison, 1995). All social actions which are driven by emotions in both its means and ends are affective action. For example, the way that a mother will skip a meal if her child is starving goes against all rationality, but it makes sense if viewed through the affective lens. The response to the situation is made based on affective and emotional grounds. There is again a specific goal which is the focus of the action, but rather it is governed by impulses. Along with traditional action, this is also farthest from rational action, as emotions and affections are often removed from rational thinking.

4. Traditional action: This is also called ritual action. In this case, the action is determined not by rationality or by affection, but rather by the customary way in which something is performed. For example, in some places, pilgrims may walk for miles barefoot to reach their church or temple. This may defeat rationality, but tradition may dictate that the means (walking barefoot) is the only way to attain the ends (reach the destination). The individual does not think of a goal in this action, since the action is determined by past actions. In fact, the action is rooted in the traditional beliefs. Weber calls traditional action *meaningfully oriented action*, because it is the least rational of all. In a traditional action, the actor's perception of the situation is based on a reality that is dictated by custom.

As mentioned above, for Weber, the atom of social relations are the individuals and their actions. Weber's typology of social actions was influenced enabled to look at the society in its historical context. To borrow from Aron, this perspective of society helped Weber to see '*the paradigm of sociology which is both historical and systematic*' (in Coser, 2011). Weber argued that as societies were becoming more and more modern, traditional action was becoming less prominent, in favour of instrumental rational action. In fact, Weber's ideas of rationality was closely tied to his theory of social action.

Social action and rationality

According to Morrison, Weber meant rationality to '*denote a standard of calculation that is introduced into action for purposes of the 'methodical attainment' of specific goals in the world*' (1995). Weber's historical understanding of the world was seen reflected in his arguments on rationality also. He saw rationality as an orientation of thought and action, that served to control nature and order the world in a manner that suited modern sensibility.

Weber classifies rationality into the following:

- i. Practical rationality: Through practical rationality, humans try to gain some level of control over their everyday realities by regulating their lives. Very practical and efficient means are employed for the attainment for ends, and the employment of the means take place after calculated thinking. Past experiences and causation are taken into consideration in this rationality, and the ends may be economic, legal, religious, etc.

- ii. Theoretical rationality: Also called conception rationality, this type employs abstract concepts. These concepts are used to understand the world. Through conceptual categories and theories, a person's view of the world is formed, and this then guides all practical actions to fulfil this view. For example, in 19th century, one guiding principle of American politics was called Manifest Destiny, which meant that it was the destiny of Americans to expand their settlements further to the west of the continent. This concept influenced their political decisions, and more and more people started moving out west, establishing farms, and taking land from the Native Americans, with protection from the political classes.
- iii. Formal rationality: This is a quantitative kind of rationality. In this case, the world is structured and ordered in terms of numbers, so as to attain the desired goal. Once the conceptual rationality is fixed, and the desired worldview is known, then formal rationality is employed to attain that goal. To draw from the above example, when the Americans were moving westward to establish their settlements over new lands, the government also employed the very quantitative tasks of regulating land ownership, taxation, collection of revenue, etc. This comes under formal rationality.
- iv. Substantive rationality: This is the fourth type of rationality that Weber proposed. In this type, the orientation to the world is not in terms of the quantitative nature of the formal rationality, but rather by the values and principles. Decision-making is also done on these principles. Justice, ethics, etc., are considered. For Weber, formal and substantive rationality are opposite, but complementary to each other, with the former being used in the meeting of ends laid out by the latter.

Weber was certain that modern life was more and more ruled by rationalism. Nowhere was it more visible than in the preponderance of bureaucracy, which ruled over all aspects of modern living. To quote Weber, *'from a purely technical point of view, a bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior to any form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for the heads of the organization and for those acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency*

and in the scope of its operations and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks' (in Ritzer, 2011).

He even gave some features of bureaucracy such as: clearly spelt-out hierarchy with a flow of command; rules determining the function of each position; the post is more important than the person, so even if one person is not available to perform the task, he has to be replaced by someone else; selection to the job is to be done on the basis of qualification, etc.

Even though Weber looked at bureaucracy as the ideal form of administration suited for the highly complex modern society, he was also aware of the problems that an overly rationalised system could pose. He lamented the *red-tapism* that bureaucracy would introduce in the simplest of tasks. They were almost incapable of being done away with, once introduced. He was also critical about the role of bureaucrats who would be centres of power in a modern capitalistic society. According to Weber, even while capitalism accorded a limited amount of individual freedom, this would come under the functioning of bureaucrats. Weber's solution for this juxtaposition of the power of the bureaucrats and the efficient structuring of modern life that bureaucracy itself provided was that the political class oppose the overarching power of bureaucracy.

Another aspect in which Weber related his work on rationality to political structures was in his study of authority. According to Weber, there are three types of authority:

- i. Traditional authority: In this type of authority, the source of the power comes from a traditional source such as custom, scriptures, etc. Ancient rules are evoked to maintain this authority. In such an authority, the leader has a more personal than a strictly impersonal position. Strict allegiance from the followers are expected, and the teachings or the dictates of the leaders are to be followed blindly and with unwavering obedience. An example of traditional authority is that of the followings that religious leaders attract: some of the religious leaders rely on interpretations of holy texts to emboss their claim to authority, and they are seek loyalty from their followers. Similarly, in patriarchal societies, typically, men, especially older men, have authority over others, accorded to them by custom and tradition. In feudalism, the authority rests with the feudal lords, and this is transmitted to the next generation by way of inheritance, thus making it traditional as well.

- ii. Charismatic authority: In this kind of authority, certain qualities of the leader attract the followers and give the leader the authority. Often, these qualities are difficult to be enumerated, but they have the ability to occupy the position of leadership. Sometimes, it may be that the person does not actually possess any such traits, but is considered by the followers to have some unique traits. In any case, the charismatic leader is thought to have superior or superhuman qualities that the rest do not have. Charismatic leadership is a revolutionary force: leaders whose leadership qualities do not stem from tradition or from law, but rather from certain mysterious qualities have the ability to ferment social change. They can bring about radical changes in attitudes as well as in social and political structures. Examples of charismatic leaders are Mohandas Gandhi, who was able to unite the majority of Indian population against the British.
- iii. Legal Authority: This is the kind of authority most seen in a modern world. In this case, authority is granted not by tradition or virtue of charisma, but rather, by legal and political measures which have established an organised hierarchy, where the power and authority available to each person is already fixed. Weber draws the connection between legal authority and bureaucracy in modern society. Similarly, we can also see that the authority of a prime minister or a president in a democracy is a legal authority, because it is granted to them by the legal and political forces such as a parliament or a constitution.

Thus social action for Weber is something that extends from the most individualistic to the largest of structures. This is why his idea of social action is important for both micro- and macro-sociologists.

Exercise: Analyse 10 different actions of your immediate social circles (friends, family, etc.) and use Weber's typology of actions to understand them.

5.4 Ideal Types

Max Weber's contribution to the study of society is also methodological in nature. Even as he was fully in accordance with the arguments of Durkheim and Comte, that a science of society is possible, just as natural and physical sciences are, Weber was of the opinion that other methodologies

should be constructed which would enable a study of society, but not using the methodologies of natural sciences. In this regard, he introduced three tools: *verstehen*, ideal types, and causation.

We shall see ideal types in detail and look at the other both in brief at the end of this section.

Weber first introduced the concept of *ideal types* in 1905, in an essay titled *Objectivity in the Social Sciences and Social Policy*. According to Weber, an ideal type is “*a conceptual pattern which brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex whole whose purpose is to describe historical societies by comparing their internal and external characteristics*” (in Morrison, 1995). Ideal types are considered to be one of Weber’s foremost and important contribution to society. His intention in introducing ideal types was to formulate a tool that could be used not just by sociologists but also by historians. In his own words, ‘*an ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct...In its conceptual purity, this mental construct...cannot be found empirically anywhere in this reality*’ (in Ritzer, 2011).

Weber was influenced by many other theories and philosophies in his construction of the ideal types, among the metaphysics of Immanuel Kant, and the historicism of Dilthey. Based on the above definitions of ideal type, we see that it is a conceptual tool. It is not a statistical average of some kind of quantitative measurements, nor is it a hypothesis out to test the relationship between two elements. Rather, it is a mental construct, which is made after thorough consideration of historical and social realities. The phenomena under consideration is something that has a historical reality, and in which certain features are exaggerated so as to give a point of comparison with the real phenomenon. The ideal type of a phenomenon need not replicate the real phenomenon as it is- in fact, it would be almost impossible to do so- but it should be close enough to fall into the definitional framework of the real phenomenon.

Weber allotted three levels of abstractions for ideal types:

- i. Historically particular ideal types to denote historical realities such as a medieval city

- ii. Abstract elements which were found in these historical realities, such as feudalism, trade relations, etc.
- iii. Ideal types which denote rational behaviour in social phenomena, such as the economic behaviour of human beings, etc.

Among these, the most important for Weber were the *historical ideal types*. Here are concepts which have a large number of features, and so broad ones too, based on historical societies. The method of construction of a historical ideal type was as follows: first, the features that were common among many historical societies were taken into consideration; second, these features were combined into a definable context, such as religion, economy, etc. to enable the analysis of this reality. Using this information, an ideal type is constructed. The purpose of such an ideal type is to get a *full picture of events*, which would most resemble the society and its organization. For example, let us consider that based on the information available about the social relations in a medieval city, we construct an ideal type which shows how different castes, religions, and other groups interacted with each other. A full model of the relations is constructed, including all facets, such as the political structure, residence patterns, etc. The point to keep in mind is that this ideal type is not constructed based on one city's information, but rather from the general information from many such representative cities. Once the ideal type is constructed, the comparison is made with individual medieval cities, and points of similarity and differences are discerned. The historical ideal type does not take into account all the traits of the phenomena under study, merely the essential traits. In the case of historical studies, this ideal type allows for weeding out certain features which would not have been remarkable at first, but which later comes to be an essential feature of the phenomenon.

Weber used ideal types to study *developmental shifts*. He introduces the idea of shifts to ideal types, by making theoretical and analytical conclusions of how the phenomenon is at the present, and using these ideas to predict the possible direction of change. An example of this as used by Weber was to understand the shift in the decision-making structures of society. In medieval times, legitimacy rested with a select few individuals, such as nobles, who made the decisions. However, in the modern world, this decision-making rested with people who wielded legal authority, that is bureaucrats or politicians. In the shift that took place, Weber saw the currents of change to a rationalism, decline of magic and inherited claims of superiority, etc.

Ideal types sometimes involved the *tendency to build up a model of empirical reality in contrast to simply describing it* (Morrison, 1995). In this scenario, an ideal type is constructed by looking at the features of different types of society, in order to draw a comparison between them. Weber said that this type of ideal types was most efficient in understanding economic ideal types. For example, one could construct an ideal type of a capitalist society, and then use it to compare the different manifestations of such societies throughout history.

Weber elucidated the different ways in which ideal types could be used as a methodological tool:

- i. Ideal types help in making judgements about whether a phenomenon really exists, and the extent to which this phenomenon can be studied.
- ii. Ideal types are the best tool in a comparative analysis of different societies, especially for an understanding of their social and historical features, and the processes of change they go through.
- iii. Even though ideal type is not an accurate depiction of reality, they help in getting a clearer picture of reality, and to build a thorough depiction of it.
- iv. Ideal types allow for the understanding and sometimes, the unveiling of new concepts in its comparison for different societies.

One of the criticisms that Weber received for this methodological tool was that ideal types could possibly point to value judgements, since the construction of the model itself could reflect some moralistic bias of the researcher. However, Weber was quite clear in articulating that there was to be no moralistic ideal type. An ideal type itself is a 'perfect' scenario, one that will not be replicated anywhere in reality. Furthermore, an ideal type can be constructed of any social phenomenon, including a crime ring or a brothel, which would normally be considered to be outside the pale of moral thinking. According to Weber, *'the elementary duty of scientific self-control and the only ways to avoid serious and foolish blunders require a sharp, precise distinction between logically comparative analysis of reality by ideal-types in the logical sense and the value-judgement of reality on the basis of ideals'* (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

The other clarification that Weber makes is regarding the 'verifiability' of ideal types: ideal types are not hypotheses to be proven, neither by inductive or deductive methods. According to Weber, *'It is not the actual*

interconnections of things but the conceptual interconnections of problems which define the scope of the various sciences. A new science emerges where new problems are pursued by new methods and truths are thereby discovered which open up significant new points of view (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

Similarly, Weber was also aware that ideal types do not, and cannot, explore every aspect of social phenomena, because social realities are way too complex for that. This was also one of the reasons he was against using the methods of natural sciences in social investigations: the methods of the former are more aligned with exploring something that is finite, whereas social life is multidimensional to the extent that such methods will not suffice. According to Weber, the ideal type has only one function: *the comparison with empirical reality in order to establish its divergences or similarities, to describe them with the most unambiguously intelligible concepts, and to understand and explain them casually* (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

Weber also advised against using ideal type as the sole tool in sociological method. Even though the ideal type itself was constructed on the range of rational actions, the discovery of rationality in reality should not be the goal, because reality is too complex. Ideal type should enable one to have firstly, *an observatory understanding*, and at the second level, *an explanatory understanding* of the phenomenon. We can see this in an example that Weber provides for the study of religious groups:

The ideal-type is an attempt to analyse historically unique configurations or their individual components by means of genetic concepts. (for example), 'church' and 'sect.' They may be broken down purely classificatorily into complexes of characteristics whereby not only the distinction between them but also the content of the concept must constantly remain fluid. If however, I wish to formulate the concept of 'sect' generally, with reference to certain important cultural significances which the 'sectarian spirit' has had for modern culture, certain characteristics of both become essential because they stand in an adequate causal relationship to those influences. However, the concepts thereupon become ideal-typical in the sense that they appear in full conceptual integrity either not at all or only in individual instances. Here as elsewhere, every concept which is not purely classificatory diverges from reality. (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009)

This passage shows us that contradictory to a classificatory system that many German thinkers wanted, Weber's ideal-types are tools created from the abstractions of the real phenomena, that enable one to compare against the reality- for example, the ideal-type depicts what a person *would do* in a completely rational manner in a given setting. However, upon comparison, we may find that the person's action is irrational and thus goes against the ideal type.

Weber's construction of the ideal-type methodology draws heavily on two of his other methodological contributions: *verstehen* and causality. We shall see them in brief now.

Verstehen: The closest English word for the German term *verstehen* is *understanding*. According to Weber, social scientists had a distinct advantage over natural scientists, in that they were able to understand the actors that they studied, whereas, for the latter, it was impossible to understand in the same way an atom or a plant.

Verstehen drew its conceptual beginnings from the already existing idea of *hermeneutics*, which was applied to the written text. It was a manner of reading in depth, and extracting subtle meanings from the text. The goal of hermeneutics was both to understand the thinking process of the author, as well as to analyse the structure of the text, and thereby to analyse the meanings.

This was the same sense in which Weber wanted to use *verstehen* in social sciences: analysis at the level of meaning. In natural sciences, laws could be deduced from observations of similarities and differences. However, in social sciences, the actions of the actors can be observed, and their subjective meanings can be understood, thus making comprehension immediate: thus, observation and comprehension of meaning takes place in *verstehen*. Weber's use of *verstehen* was perhaps his most controversial of methodological contributions. In trying to analyse the interrelations of human behaviour behind any kind of legal, economic and political action, Weber was attempting to sociologically understand human history itself. According to Rossides, '*For Weber, verstehen sociology was not a search for the underlying principle of existence, but a conscious search for insights and solutions to the unique and changing problems that human beings face, an orientation that Weber stated epigrammatically when he said that social science has 'eternal youth'*' (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

Many thinkers of the age criticised *verstehen* as something that relied on feelings and emotions, rather than as a genuine method of study. Naturally, Weber rejected these arguments and held *verstehen* as method of rational study, which requires the same rigour and systematic discipline that all sociological methods demand. Another key question that arises with *verstehen* is whether it can be used only for understanding individual behaviour, or also be extended to the level of a large-scale phenomenon such as culture. While those interested in micro phenomenon borrowed his work for the former, there are sociologists who study not the individual meanings behind the actions of countless individuals, but rather the framework of norms and values within which such action takes place, which means that an understanding of larger structures can be attained by this tool. There are also sociologists who argue that both micro and macro sociology can use *verstehen*. Ritzer quotes the example of PS Munch, who argued that *'to understand action we must 1, identify the sense of the action as intended by the actor and 2) recognize the context in which the action belongs and makes sense'* (Ritzer, 2011).

Causality: Weber's methodological toolkit included one more tool: causality. According to him, the study of causality of any social phenomenon was in the realm of history, not merely sociology. In making this argument, he was arguing that history and sociology could not be separated beyond a certain extent. A sociologist had to look at the probability that event A will be accompanied or followed by event B. Historical changes could be analysed in terms of the meanings, and possible factors for it. Even though Weber's approach was different from the dialectical approach of Karl Marx, he did include in the causative study multi-dimensional approaches, as will be demonstrated in the study of capitalism and religion in the next section. He was careful to add the effect of multiple causality in his investigations. In his own words, *'We shall as far as possible clarify the manner and the general direction in which...the religious movements have influenced the development of material culture. Only when this has been determined with reasonable accuracy can the attempt be made to estimate to what extent the historical development of modern culture can be attributed to those religious forces and to what extent to others'* (in Ritzer, 2011).

Weber classified between two types of causality: historical (event A occurs because a unique circumstance was in existence, which made event A inevitable); and sociological causality (the relation between event A and event B). To borrow the example from Abraham and Morgan (2009),

historical causality will point out to the factors in the past or social conditions that made the outbreak of Chinese Revolution inevitable. However, sociological causality will point out the exact factors that led to the immediate outbreak of the revolution, rather than the conditions which birthed it. Weber argued for the inclusion of the both in the study of a social phenomenon.

There is one element of studying causality that serves to distinguish natural from social sciences. Natural sciences also study causality, but there is no need to study the objective realities in which the causation takes place. However, in social sciences, *'this additional achievement of explanation by interpretive understanding, as distinguished from external observation, is of course attained only at a price- the more hypothetical and fragmentary character of its results. Nevertheless, subjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge'* (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

Another feature of Weber's causality methodology is that he opted for a path between nomothetic and idiographic knowledge. He called this *adequate causality*, wherein if event A has occurred, there is a probability that event B will occur. This negates thinking of causality in terms of absolutes, but rather as being defined by certain conditions.

Exercise: Choose a social phenomenon at your discretion (e.g., social institutions such as family, marriage, education, etc.). Apply each of Weber's methodological tools to understanding at least one aspect of these phenomena.

5.5 Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Between 1905 and 1906, Max Weber published what would be one of the first treatises on economy and society, in addition to being one that would go on to leave a lasting impact on the sociology of religion. This was *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In this book, Weber traced the impact of religion, especially of Calvinism (a part of Protestantism) on the rise of capitalism in Europe. Since its publication, this book (originally a compilation of two essays based on his earlier work on religion), has been considered a classic in the sociological tradition. However, it has also garnered a lot of criticism from economists, sociologists, as well as from historians, and even today, it continues to be studied upon.

Weber's main questions regarding religion and economy came from his observation that capitalism as an economic system only originated in Europe, and nowhere else. Even though Weber himself was not a religious person, he connected the rise of capitalism with the rise of rationality in Europe, which also simultaneously occurred with the rise of a rational system of law, polity, science, etc. Weber did not directly relate Protestantism with capitalist institutions; rather, he related some ethics and values associated with Protestantism to some principles of economics, that would enable capitalism to emerge as the singular most prominent economic system in Europe. Through this work, he was also responding to the economic determinism of Karl Marx, by arguing that economic activities do not occur in themselves, but that social factors such as religion does play a role in it.

Weber's aims in writing this book were as follows:

- i. There was a congruence between the rise of Protestantism, and the emergence of some cities as centres of dense commercial activity in 17th century Europe.
- ii. Protestantism espoused certain religious maxims and ethics, which would lead to a clear reorganising of economic structures by behaviour.
- iii. Weber wanted to investigate into the teachings of John Calvin, whose teachings informed the religious population about a rational behaviour, as well as one that encouraged simplicity and restrains.
- iv. Related to the above point, Weber wanted to demonstrate that this restraint was not merely an afterthought, but a series of actions which would tie religion and economic activity together.
- v. Weber wanted to investigate the importance of the *predestination doctrine*, which Calvin espoused, and which removed to a large extent the role that the medieval church played in social life, thereby freeing up resources to be used for further use in the economy.

Weber had noticed that most capitalist leaders were Protestants, more specifically, Calvinists. Also, places around the world such as India, China, and the Middle East, which were also home to some of the world's religions with a large following such as Hinduism, Confucianism, and Islam did not see the rise of capitalist economies the way that Europe had seen it. He also rejected the idea that capitalism arose because of the psychological tendency to acquire: afterall, this tendency has existed for ages, but why

did capitalism arise only in the 17th century? He also rejected theories proposing material factors as being the reason for the rise of capitalism. Roman Catholicism, which was the dominant religion so far, clearly failed to lay the seeds for the growth of capitalism to this extent. This is the departing point for the investigation: does Protestantism contain in itself some ethics or teachings which are fundamental in the birth of capitalism?

In the first chapter, we have briefly seen about the Reformation movement. To be brief, in the 16th century, Europe saw diverse, but largely connected movements which challenged the Catholic Church. Though the reforms were headed by Martin Luther in Germany, there were many other leaders in various countries, one of which was John Calvin. Following the reformation, a large portion of Europe's Christian population left the Catholic Church, and embarked on a system of belief, based on a new interpretation of the Bible, and with different religious tenets. These will be seen in detail below.

Methodologically, the tool that Weber used to analysis religion and capitalism was ideal-type. He constructed an ideal-type of Protestantism based on the wide dogmas and ethics, and compared it to the sect under study. Similarly, he took capitalism to mean an economic organisation, in which the ultimate aim was the maximisation of individual profit, by the rational organisation of the economic system. What was interesting to Weber was that western capitalism went beyond using speculation as a tool to maximise profit; it also endorsed discipline and religious values in its stake.

What is the spirit of capitalism? According to Weber, there were certain traits in capitalism that makes it different from other economic systems. Firstly, in capitalism, there was a stress on hoarding of wealth, way beyond what the individual needs. Secondly, capitalism seemed to consider hardwork to be admirable, even when it came at the expense of comforts and leisure. Third, while personal leisure was being renounced and personal luxuries avoided, wealth was being invested back into the business; this was the most important ethical factor that led to the immense growth of capitalism in Europe. Weber borrowed from the writings of Benjamin Franklin, especially his 1736 treatise called *Necessary Hints to Those That Would be Rich*, in which he offered advice to young entrepreneurs. The ethical maxims that Franklin put forth stressed on the need to be active, to save money, to invest, and to be punctual in all payments and expenses.

What stuck out for Weber in Franklin's writings was that they demanded qualities such as honesty, prudence, promptness and thrift, which were also grounded in ethics. There were echoes of self-denial and asceticism which were also seen in religion.

What is Calvinism? Next, Weber moved on to the question of Calvinism. In 1529, John Calvin (1509-1564) started criticising the Catholic theology for failing to reject worldly pleasures. He believed that the idea of salvation in Catholicism- a cycle of atonement, good deeds to compensate for the nature of sin committed, confession and sacraments- was too tolerant. In 1535, he interpreted the Old Testament in a strict manner, which made salvation more difficult. Eventually, these interpretations coalesced into the *doctrine of predestination*, in his 1536 work entitled *The Institutes of Christian Religion*.

The doctrine of predestination goes as such:

- i. Even before the world was created, god had classified humans into two: those who would attain salvation, and those who would not. These were the ideas of eternal grace or eternal damnation.
- ii. Whether they have been damned or saved would be revealed to an individual only upon death.
- iii. No amount of prayer or good deeds would reverse the damnation that an individual has been predestined to.



Figure 47: John Calvin

What Calvin did was to reverse the idea of the possibility of salvation that Catholicism offered. Weber took this point to mean that Calvinists were thus in a state of anxiety, where they were not aware of their own

afterlife. In such a scenario, they looked for signs that they were one of those elected for salvation. By eliminating the possibility of salvation through prayers and beseeching of the priests, Calvinists were also more and more isolated.

This isolation also reflected itself in the worldly conduct of Calvinists. In his own words, '*We are interested not in the influence of church discipline or in pastoral work, but rather in something entirely different. This is in the influence of those psychological sanctions which, originating in religious beliefs and the practices of religion, gave direction to practical conduct in the world and held the individual to it*' (in Morrison, 1995).

The following were the terms of conduct that were different for Calvinists as opposed to other forms of Protestantism: a sense of worldly asceticism that was brought about due to the isolation of Calvinists; church asceticism and everyday life were fused; a restraint on consumption and an emphasis on saving.

Calvinism, Salvation, and Capitalism: In this section, we will broadly see the ways by which Calvinism and its tenets facilitated the growth of capitalism in Europe.

- i. Shift in orientation from ritual to pragmatic: Calvinism believes that since there is no understanding of the mysticism of the divine, rituals are futile, and hence a more pragmatic approach should be taken in this sense.
- ii. Work is worship: Calvinism regarded work as a virtue, something that was also in celebration of the divine. For Catholicism, work was a result of the Original Sin and the exile of Adam and Eve from Eden, which made it akin to a necessary evil. However, for Calvinists, work was something that was a virtue in itself.
- iii. Predestination: Since the fate of all souls are also destined for salvation or damnation, there is nothing much that can change it. However, individuals tried to understand whether they were saved by looking at signs in this life; one of these signs that God had chosen them for salvation was economic comfort. Thus, every man tried to follow an occupation and gain material wealth. This was in contradiction with Catholicism, where ascetics, and those who wanted to be saved, renounced the pursuit of wealth, and entered a life of poverty.

- iv. Restrictions on alcohol: Protestantism, in contrast to Catholicism, prohibited the consumption of alcohol. This further restricted the actions and the spending of Calvinists.
- v. Learning: One of the basic tenets of Protestantism was that every individual learns how to read the Bible in order not to rely on the church for its interpretation. This stress given to literacy and learning also aided in the entrepreneurial realm as well.
- vi. Collection of interest: Catholicism had forbidden the collection of interest on loans. However, Calvin, in 1545 wrote that collection of loans was allowed, thus lifting a restriction. This led to establishment of new banking and lending houses, and a spurt in economic growth.
- vii. Lesser number of holidays: In Catholicism, the calendar is marked with holidays, in honour of saints and other feasts. In contrast, Protestantism does not observe many holidays, since work itself is a glory to god. Thus leaves businesses with more functional days that leads to greater productivity.
- viii. Asceticism: Calvinism, and all Protestantism in general argued against the accumulation of worldly pleasures. While the followers were encouraged to accumulate wealth as a sign of being elected for salvation, it was looked down if they chose to spend it on worldly pleasures. This meant that the wealth was being invested in business, thus bringing in more profit and allowing for expansion of the business.

Weber himself summarised the relationship between Calvinism and the growth of capitalism as follows, *'The religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means of asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of the spirit of capitalism'* (in Ritzer, 2011). Calvinism, in addition to the above factors, also approved of a hierarchised world, which gave the *'capitalist the comforting assurances that the unequal distribution of the goods of this world was a special dispensation of Divine Providence'* (in Ritzer, 2009).

Why not capitalism in other societies? Weber also argued that capitalism could not have originated in other parts of the world because they lacked the same factors that allowed for its growth in Europe.

In China, kinship was a strong element, and the primary unit of production and consumption was the household, rather than the market. China also lacked the political stability and administrative set-up which would make the growth of the capitalist economy more feasible. Similarly, under Confucianism, more stress was given on intellectual pursuits than on the pursuit of wealth. This eventually became the state policy, and the state also minimally tried to rationalise economic activity. Taoism also concentrated more on the state of the mind, and the psychic, than on accumulation of wealth in the material world.

In India, one factor that deterred the growth of capitalism was the caste-based division of occupations. Caste prevented social mobility from becoming a full reality and erected barriers to this. Similarly, the dominant religious thought, Hinduism, looked at the actions of this life as determining an outcome on the next; this would mean that there were limits to the extent of activities that could be done, without jeopardising one's chances at salvation. This naturally limited the nature of innovation in the economic sphere, which is necessary for the growth of capitalism.

Exercise: Using Weber's theory of religion and economy, analyse the economic structures of today. Attempt to find similarities and differences between the model prescribed by Weber, and the condition as it exists today.

5.6 Conclusion

Max Weber was one of the sociologists to respond to Karl Marx in his work on class, status and party. In contrast to Marx, he considered social hierarchy to be based on decision-making power and on the traditional prestige and honour that some groups wield. This theory has found great application in the study of social hierarchies in countries such as India, for instance in the works of Andre Beteille.

In the words of Raymond Aron, *'Max Weber is the greatest of the sociologists; I would even say that he is the sociologist'* (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009). Weber's contributions to sociology have carried a positive impact, especially in his fusion of historical thinking and sociology.

History was of utmost importance to Weber in any understanding of society. In fact, he himself demonstrated a great wealth of knowledge about the historical conditions of what he investigating, and at that, not

merely the factual history, but also the behaviour, processes and political, legal and economic situations of those societies as well.

His theories on rationalisation and bureaucratisation are still matters of discussion. Weber's work on economy and society also put forth arguments based on rationalisation, which led to a reassessment of how economy operates in the world. Again, Weber differed from Marx in his assessment of economy.

Weber's contributions to sociology can be assessed in two ways. One is that of his methodological contributions. Through *verstehen*, Weber was basically laying down the foundation for future symbolic interactionists in sociology. Phenomenology, though it started off as a philosophy, drew heavily from Weber's theory of social action. Similarly, his contributions to macrosociology are also profound. Even though through his social action theory, he aimed at studying the individual behaviour of people in a social setting, in his work on economy and religion, and on the nature of social hierarchies, Weber was reaching into an understanding of human society at a large. Both these put together made an understanding of Weber inevitable for both empiricists as well as hermeneutists.



Figure 48: Max Weber

Max Weber was undoubtedly the foremost social thinkers of the early 20th century. Among those influenced by his work can be counted Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Leo Strauss, Raymond Aron, and Carl Schmitt. Even Michel Foucault, who in his works on postmodernism breaks down the Enlightenment ideals, borrows from Weberian thought.

In contrast to Durkheim's or Marx's works, Weber's work contains within it the seeds of future questioning and relearning of sociology. Weber sought to understand the meanings of social life, and in that process contributed more to early sociological methodology than anyone

else. He also differentiated between the methodologies of social and natural sciences, all the while maintaining the need for objectivity and the scientific understanding of social phenomena.

It would be fitting to end this chapter on Weber with a quote that Abraham and Morgan also ended their chapter with: *(Weber) developed a remarkably probing and sympathetic understanding of alike world views, while affirming the cultural significance of his own civilization. Such work may well become increasingly relevant to the generation now growing to maturity, as it must come to terms with a world in which the values of western civilisation are challenged* (Bendix, in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

Summary

- Max Weber: early life and education- family background- academic accomplishments and early career- career in politics- role in WWI- key writings
- Social action- importance for microsociology- influence of Rickert- subjectivity of social action- types of social action: rational, value, traditional, affective- rationality and social action- types of rationality: practical, theoretical, formal, substantive- rationality in action- bureaucracy- types of authority: charismatic, traditional, rational-legal
- Weber's contributions to methodology- ideal types- developmental shifts- verstehen- causality
- Religion and Economy: *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*- Weber's definition of capitalism- Calvinism and its tenets- Calvinism and the growth of capitalism- capitalism and other religions (Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism)

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did the family life of Weber during his upbringing influence his later thought and career choices?
2. What is social action? What are the different types of social action according to Weber?
3. How does Weber relate the ideas of rationality to modernity?
4. What are the different forms of authority according to Weber?
5. How does rationality express itself as a form of authority suited for the 20th century?

6. What are Weber's key contributions to sociological methodology?
7. Describe in detail the use of ideal types in sociology.
8. What is Calvinism and how did it differ from Roman Catholicism?
9. What is the spirit of capitalism according to Weber?
10. How did Weber correlate religious belief and practice with economy?
Explain this in the context of development of capitalism, and the lack of capitalism in certain societies.

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UNIT – VI**Lesson 6.1 - Karl Marx****Structure**

- 6.1 Biography
- 6.2 Important Works
- 6.3 Dialectical Materialism
- 6.4 Alienation
- 6.5 Class Struggle
- 6.6 Conclusion

Lesson Objectives

- To look in detail into the personal, social, and intellectual history of Karl Marx, and his friendship with Friedrich Engels
- To analyse Hegel's dialecticism and see how it influenced Marx's historical dialecticism and material dialecticism
- To understand Marx's idea of alienation in a capitalist society
- To understand the concepts of surplus value, and the processes of class struggle

6.1 Biography

Perhaps no other singular person has had an influence on modern economic and political thought as Karl Marx has had. His influence goes beyond the realm of the written word, and into the sphere of political organising and statehood, with millions of people claiming membership in movements influenced by Marxian thought, and many countries being established on his political visions. Yet, even during his lifetime, Marx was a divisive figure, as much hated as he was revered for his radical vision of a communist society as an alternative for capitalism. In sociology, he is unique among the founding fathers, in the sense that he was not a sociologist, nor did he try to establish a new discipline. But Marx's understanding of the capitalist society, his method built on the dialectics of class structure, and his incisive economic writings have earned him a place among the sociologists. In fact, there is hardly a discipline in which Marx's works would be irrelevant.

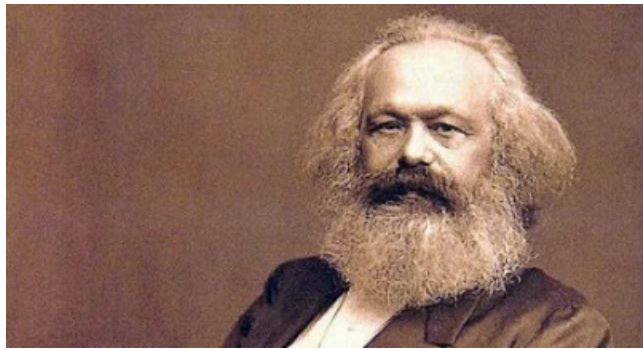


Figure 49: Karl Marx

Karl Marx was born in 1818, in Trier, in Prussia to a Jewish family. Marx came from a long line of rabbis, but in 1817, his father, Heinrich Marx had joined the Lutheran Church of Prussia, because only then could he practice law in the Prussian empire. Marx was raised in a bourgeois household, where the spirits and the lessons of the Enlightenment ruled, and as such, Marx also had access to the best education of his age. In 1835, Marx attended the University of Bonn to study law. In 1836, he went to the University of Berlin, where he came under the influence of the writings of Georg Hegel, and joined the Young Hegelians group. Marx took up the study of philosophy, and in 1841, at the University of Jena, Marx submitted his doctorate of philosophy thesis, entitled *On the Differences between Natural Philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus*. In 1842, he became the editor of a radical left-wing newspaper called *Rheinische Zeitung*, in Cologne. However, due to Marx's writings, the Prussian government had the newspaper shut down, prompting Marx to move to Paris. In 1843, Marx had married Jenny von Westphalen.

It was in Paris that Marx gained familiarity with the socialist literature that had been inaccessible in Germany. In addition to reading the works of Adam Smith, Saint-Simon, etc., Marx also met with revolutionaries such as Mikhail Bakunin. However, it was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who influenced him the most. Proudhon wrote on property.

However, more notable that this is that it was in Paris that Marx's friendship with Friedrich Engels began. Engels was from Rhineland in modern day Germany. He was the son of wealthy industrialists, who had become a socialist because of the misery of the working class he observed in both Germany and England (where he was a manager of his family's factories). Engels introduced Marx to the realities of the working class, and it will be seen how much they influenced each other. In Paris, Marx

also met with many artisans and craftsmen who were in alliance with the socialists. In Paris, Marx's conversion to socialism was complete. His *Paris Manuscripts* delineated his ideas on various themes such as alienation, and would later be important for western political and economic thought. He was writing in newspapers about these ideals, and was soon expelled from Paris by the government of Francois Guizot, who had been requested to do so by the Prussian government. Thus, in 1845, Marx moved to Belgium.



Figure 50: Friedrich Engels

In Belgium, Marx made his acquaintances with many German and Belgian socialists. It was in Belgium that Marx started thinking of himself not as an individual, but as someone part of an international socialist movement. In the words of Isaiah Berlin, 'His personal history which up to this point can be regarded as a series of episodes in the life of an individual (became) inseparable from the general history of socialism in Europe' (in Coser, 2011). With the German workers, he became part of the German Workers' Educational Association. This organisation was oriented with the Communist League of Europe. It was under this organisation that Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. In the same year, revolution broke out in Germany, and Marx tried to go back to Rhineland. He started a newspaper, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, with Engels, in the hope that a liberal bourgeoisie will ally with a working-class population. However, he was given an ultimatum by the French government, and he decided to go London in 1849.



Figure 51: First German edition of Communist Manifesto

In London, disheartened by the failures of the revolutions in continental Europe, and by the lack of contact with the British workers, Marx withdrew almost completely into his family and a close circle of friends, which obviously included Engels. It was in London, in the British Museum's reading room, that he researched for and wrote the *Das Kapital*. Marx's time in London was marked by poverty because he was unable to find gainful employment. Two of his children died due to malnutrition, and his poverty was such that he could not afford a coffin for one of them. Engels' financial help held the family afloat during this time.

During this time, in addition to work on the *Kapital*, Marx also wrote *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. He was offered a job by the *New York Daily Tribune*, and once again, was helped by Engels when he could not write for it. Marx's articles spread through many topics and even today they hold a key to the working of Marx's mind. Both Marx and Engels looked out for workers' movements that could ferment a revolution, but this was not to be. Till the end, Marx remained detached from the workers' union leaders in England.

In 1863, after a visit to England by some French workers, it was agreed to start an international cooperation of workers from various European nations, who would work towards the ending of private property and the establishment of common ownership. This was called the *International*, and Marx wrote the inaugural address for it; this document continues to

be an important among all Marxian writing. Marx soon became the leader figure of the *International*, and he unified its ideology. There were branches of the organisation in almost all the European capitals, and leaders also started paying attention to it.

In 1867, the first volume of *Kapital* was published, and it found praise in Germany and Russia. However, following the Paris Commune in 1871, and the subsequent divisions among the members of the *International*, Marx moved the organisation to the USA, where is finally died down in 1876.

From then to his death in 1883, Marx did not produce any major work. However, he was now known as a socialist leader and writer, and was visited often by people seeking advice, often from different countries. Even though he was intellectually active, he wrote less and less, but could claim some amount of material comfort. In 1881, Jenny Marx died, quickly followed by the death of Marx's daughter, also named Jenny died of cancer. Two months later, Karl Marx died, on March 14, 1883. He was buried in Highgate Cemetery in London, and only a few friends and family attended the ceremony. Even after his death, his work was published by Engels, as is seen in the below list.



Figure 52: Statue of Marx and Engels in Berlin

It was after his death, especially in the 20th centuries that the intellectual world would embrace Marx. In the early 20th century, the Russian Revolution would prove the political significance of Marxian thought. For academic theory across all disciplines, Marxian thought was something

that one could not ignore. Either in its support, or writing against it, but there was no ignoring Marxian thought.

6.2 Selected Bibliography

The full list of books, manifestos and other manuscripts written by Marx would number into dozens. Most of the work that Marx is known for today was written in collaboration with Friedrich Engels. The following is a very brief list of the Marx's most important works:

Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1843

The Holy Family, 1845 (written with Engels)

Theses on Feuerbach, 1845 (posthumously published in 1888 by Engels)

The German Ideology, 1845 (written with Engels)

Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848 (written with Engels)

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, 1852

A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859

Das Kapital: vol. I (1867); vol. II (posthumously published in 1885 by Engels); vol. III (posthumously published by Engels in 1894).

6.3 Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical materialism is the key term in Marxist thought. All kinds of Marxist theories, political action and social movements have drawn on dialectical materialism as methodology, and as a perspective through which to analyse reality, be it thoughts, ideas, or material reality. In to a speech given in 1938, Josef Stalin said, '*Dialectical materialism is the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist Party. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is dialectical, while its interpretation of the phenomenal of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is materialistic.*' In this section, we will see in detail what dialectical materialism means and entails.

Dialectic and Materialism

Dialectics is a tool used in philosophical investigations, where contradictory processes are pitted between opposing sides. One of the earliest use of dialecticism was by Plato, who would use the arguments of Socrates against another person, who would put forth arguments

contradicting those of Plato's. Over the course of this exchange where opposing viewpoints were being expressed, a synthetic of the two sides emerge, even as both sides seek more nuance in their arguments. In other philosophical modes of enquiry, there is an attempt to understand the phenomenon in its stable form, as it exists. However, in dialectics, the mode of enquiry is to understand something when it is in motion, when its relationship to other phenomenon, and the contradictory processes that arise in these relationships. According to Ken Morrison (1995), dialectics as a philosophical tool sought to overcome the shortcoming of an observation method of enquiry. The three features of dialectic method according to Morrison are:

1. Social and historical conditions ensure that individuals are connected to each other, in a relationship that can be marked by difference or similarity.
2. These interconnections, and the totalities to which we belong determine our humanity and our being.
3. All these social and historical phenomena are constantly in a state of flux. They keep moving, with existence and fading away being a natural state.

In dialectics, the truth is not the 'relativity' of how they are understood, but rather in the whole picture of interconnected phenomena. In the words of Fredrich Engels,

the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process- i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development.

In order to understand the works of Karl Marx, it is important to understand the works of one of Europe most foremost thinkers: Georg Hegel. Hegel is associated with a philosophical doctrine called *philosophical idealism*. Hegel argued that the task of philosophy was to understand the abstract categories which determined human life, such as *spirit, history, being, etc.* History and the individual were not free of each other- they were interconnected. For Hegel, the object of investigation were abstract categories such as history, spirit and reason. The real conditions of existence and every day existence did not hold much in terms of being the questions of philosophical meditation for Hegel. He used dialecticism in a manner unlike Plato's method. Where Plato's method centred on

two individuals being the opposing sides, Hegel chose the study and the object of the study as the two opposing sides. For example, in his book *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel used dialectics to develop clearer and more sophisticated definitions of consciousness. Hegel himself called the dialectical method '*speculative mode of cognition*', and remarked that it was the fundamental part of his philosophical work.



Figure 53: Georg Hegel

When Marx was a student at the University of Berlin, he was well aware of Hegel's work, even though Hegel himself had died in 1831. In fact, Marx was a part of the Young Hegelians group at the university. This group consisted of young men, who, even while admitting that the philosopher did raise some important points, were starting to question and move away from his teachings, and gave them new interpretations. Marx's familiarity with Hegel was an important point in his intellectual trajectory, since at this point, Marx questioned the basis of philosophy, and whether it was an adequate enough tool to explain the conditions of human existence.

Hegel developed a theory of dialectics in the following manner. The first stage was called *affirmation*, more commonly known as the *thesis*. In this stage, a particular phenomenon (in this case, an idea) affirms its existence, thereby allowing for its own propagation. In the next stage, there is the *negation*, or the *antithesis*. This is a refusal or a denial to the propagation of the thesis. The antithesis puts limits on the development of the thesis, and thus forms a crucial part of the dialectic process. The third stage is called the *negation of the negation* or the *synthesis*. In this stage, the negation is altered. The terms of the limitations are surpassed, and the

result is the reconstitution of the antithesis into a new idea, that is, the synthesis. For Hegel, the world is constantly reconfiguring itself into new forms of existence through these stages of movement and change.

Marx's engagement with Hegel came from a contradicting place. He criticised Hegel for '(standing) the world on its head'. In *The Holy Family*, Marx attacked Hegel's tendency to make the world into a *thing of thought*. Marx himself was meanwhile working towards the creation of a line of thought to understand history and reality. Since Marx's disagreement with Hegel was that the latter was too idealistic, it is only to be expected that his own theory would be rooted in reality. Marx developed an understanding that focussed on social and economic realities, and this marked a departure from Hegel's idealistic notions.

Marx's critique of Hegel's idealistic materialism can be categorised into four points:

1. The first critique came regarding Hegel's idealistic view of the world. According to Marx, Hegel understood the world in abstract categories, such as reason and history. The Hegelian argument is that only such philosophical categories are real. The job of the philosopher then is to look at history and understand the abstract categories through which human experiences go through. Marx disagreed with this argument. If the object of enquiry are only the abstractions such as spirit, history, etc., then there is a *mystification* of the human existence. Such abstract categories result in human experiences being abstracted as well. For Marx, it was clear that the more abstract the categories of understanding are, the more the likelihood that the very real problems of human existence will be overlooked.
2. The second critique of Hegel came from the centrality of ideas in Hegelian thought. Hegel's stress on ideas led him to argue that the ultimate goal of human existence should be *reason*. However, Marx saw this centrality of ideas as misplaced. He believed that it was not ideas, but the physical conditions of human life which determined the flow of history. There are very physical needs for human beings that should be met, before the intellectual needs are met. It was human beings who had lived experiences of their own, not ideas, and thus, the optimum conditions for the human experiences are to be met before one could go in depth into the realm of ideas. Thus,

in contrast to Hegel, Marx believed that the most important part of human existence is *material well-being*, which would allow for other pursuits, including intellectual. As opposed to idealism, what Marx was suggesting was materialism.

3. The third point of contention between Marx and Hegel was regarding the state. According to Hegel, the state was an express manifestation of the ethical ideas of humanity. Argued in this manner, the state has something of an eternal quality to it, since the state marks the culmination of the overall *spirit* of the people, and hence cannot be changed at whim. The state emerges from historical processes, rather than from individual acts. For Marx, however, the state, and the attendant social and political inequalities that come with it, is a result of realities that can be altered, and not something that is a natural outcome of historical processes. Inequalities point to disadvantages that exist in society.
4. The fourth critique of Hegel stems from the nature of human suffering and inequality itself. For Hegel, the suffering that exists among humans emerges from the abstract and from consciousness itself. For example, Hegel would argue that the suffering of the enslaved people during slavery was due to their mindset, which gave them the belief that they could not break away the shackles of slavery. Marx opposed this view. He argued that it was not the consciousness but the very real factors such as ownership of resources. Social inequality existed because of historical conditions that made it necessary for one group of people to be dominant over others. Hegel believed that social relationships (such as those of dominance and subordination) will change once the consciousness is changed. But Marx believed that the opposite of true: the social relationship will change when the concrete circumstances that make it necessary change. For Marx, Hegel's opinion that individuals ought to interpret their reality differently amounted to nothing; rather, he wanted individuals to see the reality as it is, and then changing the real social conditions.

Marx's answer to the idealism of Hegel was a form of dialecticism grounded in material reality: dialectical materialism. Marx introduced materialism as a way to step over the limitations of abstractions that Hegelian idealistic dialectics had introduced. Rather, in its most essential sense, materialism is *a theoretical perspective which looks at human*

problems by studying the real conditions of human existence, especially those related to the satisfaction of simple economic needs (Morrison, 1995). For Marx, all interpretation of the world had to start at the point of economic productivity and the satisfaction of human needs.

Marx's going against Hegel's idealism in favour of materialism is important: one, it signifies the grounding of theory in material reality. Marx believed that all theoretical reasoning had to contribute to the changing of this material history. Second, Marx's critique signified a break with the idealist traditions in philosophy, where abstractions and speculations were the goal. Marx rooted his philosophical investigations in material reality, and specifically in economic production, which was the most basic of all human activities.

Historical Materialism

It is was in *German Ideology* that the Marxian view on dialecticism and history is set out. Also called *The Critique of German Ideology* was originally written between 1845 and 1846 by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, but was not published till 1932. In this book, Marx and Engels critique the works of the Young Hegelians, especially the works of Ludwig Feuerbach, and proposes that what makes human existence special is the ability to produce things that have value.

In *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels also propose a materialistic understanding of history. This historical materialism was the cornerstone of Marxian thinking and continues to this day to be one of the most influential and well-studied themes in social sciences. The following are the main premises of historical materialism, which will demonstrate that economic activity was the main point of investigation for this approach:

1. As mentioned above, before any kind of philosophical enquiry, human beings seek to have their immediate needs met. Thus, the obtaining of food and shelter will precede other activities, and in this regard, production of thing for economic value is one of the first historical acts.
2. Unlike animals who seek to have their needs met through nature directly, human beings produce the means which satisfy their needs. Human beings produce the means of subsistence, after entering into a nuanced relationship with nature.

3. Human beings create things based on what they find in nature originally. In this manner, the material conditions in which humans live determine the social realities of existence, including their production.

Before we go into an explanation of historical materialism, let us see a summary of it given by Marx in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

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

Based on this passage, let us see a few of the terms that Marx used in detail:

1. Means of production: Throughout history, humans have used land, animals, tools, machinery, and other external factors for production of the necessities of life. These are the means of production. Humans cannot create the means to satisfy their needs by themselves; only by engaging with external factors is this production possible. However, not everyone has access to these means of production. According to Marx, historically, one class of people have had the ownership of means such as land and tools. The others only own their labour, which they have to sell in order to meet their needs. This distinction between those who own and those who do not own the means of production is a crucial one in Marxian thought. Those who do not own the means are the producers of labour, and they do not have an unobstructed path to the means of production.

2. Relations of production: This is related to ownership of means of production, especially the producers and non-producers of labour. By relations of production, what Marx meant was the social relations that exist in society during the production process. This is related to the various classes, based on whether or not they own the means of production. Depending on the role that an individual or a class performs during the production process, their relationship to the means of production, as well as the other classes are determined.

The producers of labour, since they do not have ownership of any other means of production, enter into a relationship with the non-producers of labour, who instead have ownership of means of production. This relationship is not one of equality, but rather of economic and social dominance. This relationship of production is itself one where the non-producers dominate over the producers. The owners of labour produce for those who do not in turn produce for them. They are only paid for their labour, but in the end, the non-producers stand to gain more than the producers. The non-owners of labour also wield authority over the owners of labour, and also have the rights over the economic product that this labour has created. Marx also pointed out that the owner of labour are not only subject to physical control by the non-producers, but that this is maintained by the political and legal structure, which serve to protect the interest of the non-producers. These differential relations of production have existed in all historical epochs. In fact, changes in these relations often signify a new stage of economic production. More on this historical aspect will be seen in a short while.

3. Mode of production and forces of production: Marx had not elucidated clearly what *mode of production* is, but rather explained it over his various writings. To understand mode of production, it is necessary to understand *forces of production*, which refers to any land, machinery, etc., used in the production of a livelihood. These forces can be used only when people enter into a relations of production, and these are subject to change throughout history. For example, in ancient society, when a person entered into a relation with a person who owns the means of production, the former is transformed into a slave. In a capitalist society, the employer and the worker has entered into a relation, where the former has ownership over the latter's labour, for a fixed time, in return for

a wage that is less than the value of the final product. The mode of production thus refers to the manner of relations depending on the historical period, and the forces of production. The mode of production also indicates the structure of social relations in each stage. For example, in an ancient society, there is a relationship of domination and subordination between the lord and the serf. Marx argued that this unequal relationship existed because of the unequal economic relationship between these classes. (Related to this is Marx's theory of base and superstructure, which will be discussed in a later section.)

Modes of Production in History

For Marx, as mentioned above, all through history, there have been class conflict. Marx saw different historical stages of humanity in terms of the economic relations that existed at that point. He gave three features to each stage of human history, and divided the stages according to nature of these features. The features are:

1. The production system and division of labour
2. The system of ownership of property
3. The nature of class relations

Based on these traits, Marx argued that there four stages: tribal, ancient, feudal and capitalistic.

- Tribal society: In this stage, subsistence was primarily by hunting and gathering. There was no systematic production process in place. Division of labour was minimal, and hence no solidified classes existed. The crux of all social organisation was kinship, and since the community as a whole took part in the rudimentary production processes, tribal societies were egalitarian, and no patterns of exploitation existed.
- Ancient society: When tribal societies give way for the creation of city states, a more formal political and civil system comes into existence. Ancient societies were primarily agrarian, with some basic industrial production, with networks of trade. As opposed to the egalitarianism of tribal society, in ancient society, private property exists, and class is determined based on the ownership of property. Division of labour also exists, with some people being slaves, and they are the sources of most of the labour. In most city-states, the

owners of property were also those who commanded high positions in the military, and so the manner of expanding the property was through military conquest, with the conquered population being turned into slave labour. An example of an ancient system of mode of production are the ancient Greek city states.

- Feudal society: This kind of society was seen in Europe in the medieval ages, that is, between the 9th and 17th centuries. In a feudal society also, the primary economic activity was agricultural production. Even though small industries and towns did exist, they did so for the fulfilment of the agrarian production and trade. The villages were the centres of economic activity. Land was the main private property, and was owned by a class of lords or vassals, and they often held the land as a marker of allegiance to a sovereign king. However, the vassals themselves would not labour on this land; this was done by the serfs, in return for a livelihood. The unequal relationship between the serfs and the lords were upheld by legal and political doctrines, which essentially allowed for the serf to be absolutely dominated over by the vassals.
- Capitalistic society: The industrial revolution saw production shifting from the countryside to the towns. Primary economic activity was no longer agrarian in nature, but rather it was industrial, marking the end of the feudal system. The serfs were thus forced to find work by selling their labour in factories for a wage. The capitalist society has a high level of division of labour. Means of production are machinery, tools, industries, etc., and ownership of these means determine the class position. The workers are forced to earn their living by selling the only means they own: their labour. Exploitation is high because the owners of the means of production try to maximise their profits by valuing the labour at the least possible amount, and paying minimum wages.

According to Marx, after the capitalist stage of economic production, there will be a revolution which overthrows all manners of economic exploitation. This class struggle will be seen in the last section of this chapter.

Dialectics and Material History

From the above discussions, we should be able to make a broad summary of the Marx's historical dialecticism. While Hegel's dialecticism

focused on a thesis-antithesis-synthesis approach in idealism, Marx's focus was on material realities. For Marx, Hegel's approach saw only ideas as ultimate realities.

Hegel was not the only influence in the dialectical approach. According to Engels, who himself had widely written about dialectics, Darwinian postulates of evolution also held lessons for the dialectical approach. The key principles of evolutionary thought-such as i, the fact that everything is interconnected through basic laws; ii, each stage of development emerges from the stage immediately before it, and iii, the new stage develops in relation to the previous stage and this connection can be seen- can also be seen in dialectical.

The key differences of Marx's dialectic with that of Hegel can be summed up as follows:

1. For Hegel, development was taking place in ideas, whereas for Marx, it was taking place in actual historical processes. Marx's materialism denotes a shift from the realm of the ideal to that of the material. Hegel's dialectics is noted by philosophical processes of affirmation, negation, and negation of the negation, whereas Marx's dialectics is grounded in economic reality.
2. The second difference was in the manifestation of the law of contradictions. For Hegel, any idea had to face a contradicting position for it to develop. For Marx, this was too mystical; the law of contradiction for him played out in the contradictory class relations, which were built on the dialectics of domination and subjugation.
3. The fourth difference is regarding the stages of development. For Hegel, the stages pertain to the vague and inexplicit to the nuances and the explicit. For Marx, the stages of development were based on the differences in economic relations, thus making the class structure the stages of development.
4. The final difference is regarding the doctrine of relations. Both Hegel and Marx understood the importance of considering something through the relations they hold to the larger picture, that is, the interconnectivity. Hegel used this understanding of the relations to look at both sides of the relationship, that of the subject and the object. For Marx, both sides of the relation had to be analysed together in totality to understand reality. He critiqued any theory that failed to analyse both sides of the relation in the understanding of material reality.

It must be mentioned that Engel's contribution to the understanding of dialectics is also substantial. However, we have not dealt with it here. The dialectic forms the foundation of all Marxian understanding, and it informs the Marxian worldview of social realities as one marked by contradictions. It is from the material dialectic that the shift from the ideal to the material comes to focus, and so also the Marxian call to action for social and economic change.

Exercise: Write an essay on how opposing forces (ideas, economic realities, etc.) have wrought history by looking at one specific historical event.

6.4 Alienation

Before any action is performed or any change in material reality vis-à-vis the economic exploitation of a capitalist society can be affected, Marx believed that an individual must realise their own humanity. This step is necessitated because of Marx's argument that in a capitalist society, the worker goes through *alienation*.

Once again, we see the influence of Hegel on Marx's ideas: the idea of alienation stemmed from Hegel's writings, followed by Feuerbach and Marx. According to Ken Morrison, alienation as first used in the 19th and 20th centuries to *describe a state of disruption and change taking place in the system of social relations as a result of the development of modern society*. Hegel considered that humans ought to *self-actualise*, which meant that they had follow the path to fulfil their full potentials. Hegel was perhaps the first philosopher to realise that humans could find themselves in situations, where they not experiencing their full 'self', and he associated this fragmentation and disassociation with the nature of modernity. This notion of alienation was critiqued, and in turn, developed by Ludwig Feuerbach, who was a contemporary of Marx. He was a staunch critic of the institution of religion, especially Christianity, and he claimed that humans attribute divine qualities to the point of perfection to an entity called god, and then take these qualities as rules or guides to live a life of self-denial, thus causing alienation. In the 19th century, such a criticism of Christianity was controversial indeed, but what Feuerbach had done was take Hegel's argument further by arguing that religion also had material origins, and attracted Marx to his work. Marx criticised Feuerbach's work in the sense that the latter had given religious and spiritual understanding to the conditions of human existence, when it was really social and economic

conditions that determined reality. For Marx, alienation stemmed not from abstractions of modernity nor from religion, but rather from economic and social developments.

Marx developed the theory of alienation to convey two main points: first, that human beings create society- society is supposed to make beings feel comfortable and at home; and secondly, modern society is organised in such a way that human beings feel that society is against them. It is this process of society moving something which was an extension, to something that becomes external that alienation explains.

For Marx, as we have seen above, what sets human beings apart from other creatures is the labouring capacity. The ability to labour is an essential feature of human existence. Labouring defines human beings in three aspects:

- i. It enables humans to exert control of nature
- ii. It enables the meeting of necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, etc.
- iii. It enables humans to feel in control of their circumstances.

Labour also makes human beings dependent on the productive capacity for survival. It helps human beings attain a sense of well-being. More importantly, it enables human beings to produce a product, which has a value, and which is directly the root of all economic activity. As capitalism becomes more and more entrenched in society, the worker who creates the value for the owners, is separated from the product that they create. All relations are dependent on the forces of production. According to Marx, *'Objectification is the practice of alienation. Just as man, so long as he is engrossed in religion, can only objectify his essence by an Alien and fantastic being, so under the sway of egoistic need, he can only affirm himself and produce objects in practice by subordinating his products and his own activity to the domination of an alien entity, and by attributing to them the significance of an alien entity, namely money... money is the alienated essence of man's work and existence; the essence dominates him and he worships it... religious alienation as such occurs only in the sphere of consciousness, in the inner life of man, but economic alienation is that of real life... it therefore affects both aspects (mind and action)'* (from Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

Marx's close association Fredrich Engels, who came from an industrialist family, made him acutely aware of the alienation that urban

industrial workers experienced. Marx argued that this alienation is felt in four ways:

1. Alienation from the product: In a feudal society, a worker, even though he works on the land of a lord, also farms said land for his own benefit. The final product that he derives from the land is used to meet his immediate needs also. Thus, there is a certain level of connection between the worker and the product. However, in a capitalist and industrialist society, the production process is based on an exchange (the market) of labour for wages. The capitalist pays a wage to the worker who sells his labour. The end product does not even belong to the worker, but rather to the capitalist. Since the means of production are owned by the capitalist class, the worker feels that he does not have a stake in the product he produces. When the worker is aware that it is his labour which converts something that exists in nature into its value, he relates to nature in two ways: the product directly helps in the workers' subsistence; and two, it is the worker's efforts which create this production. However, when the means of production are not owned by the worker, the end product also no longer belongs to him. Rather the worker is connected to the product only in two ways: the product gives him work, and the product enables his subsistence, not by its own virtue, but indirectly, by bringing him wages. In a feudal society, Marx says, *'labour is realised in its object of product... (the product of labour is the) summary of the activity of production'* (Morrison, 1995). In a market economy that capitalism builds, the workers do not use the product, and often cannot even afford the product they produce, thus accentuating the alienation.
2. Alienation from the production process: In addition to feeling alienated from the final product, the worker also feels alienated from the productive ability itself. In the production process in a capitalist and industrial society, the worker does not engage with the process to the fullest of his abilities. As Marx writes,

First...the labour is external to the workers, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when is

not working, and when he is working he is not home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that is does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. As a result, therefore, the worker no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions-eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. Certainly eating, drinking and procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But abstractly taken, separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions (from Morrison, 1995).

Labour is external to the worker because it belongs to the capitalist to whom it has been sold for wages. The worker does not feel that he has any genuine participation in the production process; in fact, he only feels himself when he is outside of work. Labour does not produce the immediate needs; what is produced immediately enters the market economy of exchange. Thus, labour only takes a toll on the body and mind without being satisfying. Since the process is determined and the worker himself supervised by the capitalists, the worker loses the connection he has to the production activity.

3. Alienation from the human species: For Marx, the difference between humans and animals are that while animals are physical in their work, humans tend to employ their consciousness too. However, in a capitalist economy, humans are not required to employ their consciousness, reducing them also the position of animals. The labour of humans is such that while it transforms nature, it also creates an inorganic nature for them to live in, by the creation of social institutions. However, once species alienation sets in, an individual is estranged from his species. The focus in a capitalist economy is not the creation of a nature for the entirety of

the species, but rather for the individual survival. By removing the social creation, individuals are not creating something unique, but rather labouring only for a living.

Some writers also interpret this as an alienation of the worker from himself. In a market economy, the worker does one repeated task as determined by the capitalist, and thus has no scope for developing other aspects of his personality. In Marx's own words, *'This is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something alien, not belonging to him, activity as suffering, strength as powerlessness, creation as emasculation, the personal physical and mental energy of the worker, his personal life... as an activity which is directed against himself, independent of him and not belonging to him'* (from Coser, 2011).

4. Alienation from others: In a capitalist society, all individuals are pitted in a relation of competition with each other. The social relationships are fundamentally economic in character. Individuals follow their activities for private benefit. This alienation is furthered by the fact that capitalism makes one class the beneficiary of the activities of everyone. Humans become individual beings, as opposed to collective beings.

Marx argued that once humans are alienated from their labour, objectification becomes the next step. Alienation is a concept that Marx used in his theory on *fetishism of commodities*. He writes that since the product in itself does not carry a value, it is the alienated labour enmeshed in a network of relationships that gives a product its value in a market economy. According to Marcuse, *'Through estranged, alienated labour the, the worker produces the relationship to this labour of a man alien to labour and standing outside it. The relationship of the worker to labour engenders the relation to it of the capitalist, or whatever, one chooses to call the master of the labour. Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labour, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself'* (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

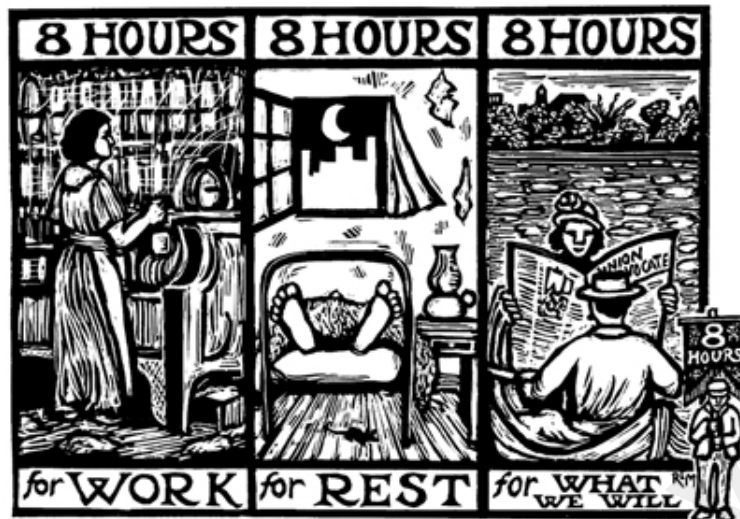


Figure 54: Poster showing Owens' slogan

The concept of alienation is crucial to Marx's understanding of the capitalistic society. One of the measures that Marxists argue for is the reclamation of the workers' self from the processes of production. Even in 1817, the Welsh reformer Robert Owen had demanded a *8-hour work, 8-hour recreation, 8-hour rest* day for textile workers, for a balanced life. Such a theme is seen in Marxian discourses today also, not only in the demands for a meaningful work for the labourers, but also in the demands for a dignified labour.

Exercise: Read *Wigan Pier* by George Orwell, or *The Stars Look Down* by AJ Cronin and analyse them using Marxian perspectives of class and alienation.

6.5 Class Struggle

Marx's vision of society did not end with analysis and observation of it. He also had a vision for how change could be effected, leading to society where class structure and inequality ceases to exist. The first chapter of Marx's most read work, *The Communist Manifesto* begins with the sentence, '*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.*'

Before we go into Marx's theory of class struggle, let us discuss a few concepts related to this.

Economic Base and Socio-political Superstructure

An overview of Marxian dialectics showed us the importance of economic realities in his thinking. Both Marx and Engels believed in the primacy of economic relations in all kinds of social relations. In a Marxian perspective, economic processes such as production, distribution, and the ownership of the means of production determine the general social structure. The economic system is the basis on which other systems such as legal and judicial systems rests. In the words of Engels, '*..the production of immediate material means of subsistence, and consequently, the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, the ideas on art, and even on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved*' (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009). In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx wrote about this idea. It can be summarised as such: very often, humans enter into economic relations, which may be against their will, and these relations correspond to material reality. The entirety of these relations form an economic structure on which the legal and political structures rest. The social realities of a person, in particular where they are in the class hierarchy determine the consciousness of a person, not the other way around. In fact, religious, legal and political realities are determined by these economic structures. When a drastic social change in the form of a revolution takes place, the economic relations are in upheaval, causing a change in the economic structure. This is naturally reflected as a change in the social and political structure as well. Thus, the contradictions that exist between the forces and the relations of production are reflected in the socio-political structures as well.

Marx attributed even subjects such as artistic development on the economic base. He firmly believed that understanding economics would lead to an understanding of human condition. This was something that would be seen in countries where politically Marxism was enforced. For example, in the USSR, when Josef Stalin was the ruler, art and music were expected to align with the proletarian movements and class, not the bourgeoisie. The USSR saw the emergence of many socialist artists. One musician, Dmitri Shostakovich was censured because one of his pieces was considered to be bourgeoisie in spirit.

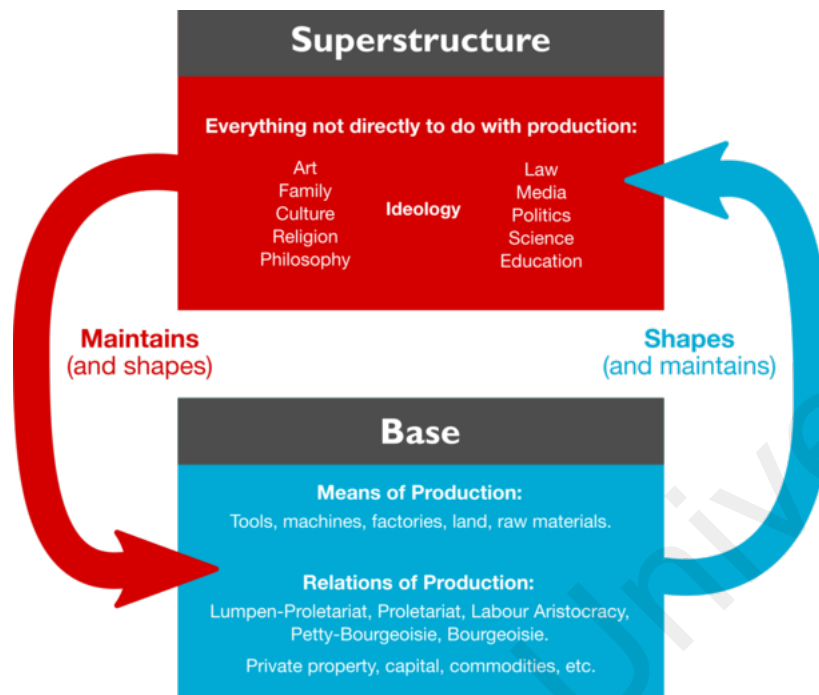


Figure 55: Pictorial depiction of base and superstructure

According to Marx, if one were to get rid of certain social and political conditions in society, then it was necessary to address the economic relations which gave rise to these situations.

Commodities, Capitalism, and Social Class

Primary to Marx's analysis of society is the concept of commodities. Commodities are *the products of labour intended primarily for exchange* (Ritzer, 2008). Commodities have *use value* and *exchange value*. When an individual produces a commodity to be used immediately or for subsistence, it has use value. However, in a capitalist society, commodities take on *exchange value*, that is, they are not produced for immediate consumption, but rather for exchange for other objects or money in the market. In use value, the commodity has a qualitative value, and thus cannot be compared with other commodities. For example, bread will be used only for satisfying hunger, and a sweater will be used for clothing. However, in exchange value, the value of the commodity is quantitative. The value of a piece of bread and a shirt can be measured, and they can be determined against each other. They can be exchanged with each other, in terms of this value (e.g., 10 pieces of bread for one shirt, etc.), or against the monetary value.

A related concept is that of *fetishism of commodities*. The exchange value of the commodities gives the commodities an independent existence. The markets function by their own mechanisms, as if they are a reality on to themselves, and this reality is then held up as having a life of its own. Everything takes on this life in capitalism, including labour, which is bought and sold like an object. Through processes that make these commodities a reality (as opposed to be processes which question this reality), they become reified.

Understanding how commodities function in a market economy gave rise to Marx's theory on class. Contradictory to the modern understanding of class, Marx believed that it is ownership over property that determined the class structure and where one belonged on it. According to Bendix and Lipset, '*a social class in Marx's terms is any aggregate of persons who perform the same function in the organisation of production.*' (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009). Marx broadly divided class into two sections: proletariat and bourgeoisie (there are other classes also in Marxian writing, as we will see in the section about class struggle; however, these two are the major classes). The proletariat are those who own only their labour, and thus have to sell it in order to survive. They earn wages by selling their labour, and with these wages, they buy the necessities, thus reducing them to mere consumers. The bourgeoisie in this case are the capitalists, who own the means of production, except labour. They buy the labour of the workers, thus reducing labour itself into a commodity. It is at this point that exploitation of the proletariat also sets in. The capitalist tries to maximise his *surplus value*, which is the difference between the selling value of a product, and the total value of all the factors that have gone into the product's making. The surplus value can be increased by the decreasing the wages given to the workers, which is what a lot of capitalists do. In what he calls the *general law of capitalist accumulation*, Marx argues that the capitalist will try to maximise his profit by giving as minimum as wages as possible to the workers: *the constant tendency of capital is to force the cost of labour back to zero* (in Ritzer, 2008). This tendency of the capitalists to increase their profits by decreasing wages puts both the classes in a position of conflict, *a class conflict*.

According to Bendix and Lipset, the features of the class system are:

1. There are conflicts between the various classes over the question of distribution of economic benefits

2. There is easy communication between the members of the same class
3. Growth of class consciousness among members of the same class regarding their privileges and disadvantages
4. Dissatisfaction among the lower classes regarding their lack of economic advantage
5. Political expression about the class condition, especially due to the enhances class consciousness.

We will see in detail about this in the next section.

Class Conflict and Class Struggle

The following are the main ingredients of the class conflict, as summarised by Abraham and Morgan (2009):

1. The proletariat class consciousness: The first step in the class struggle is that the proletariat unites among themselves. Even though they are in a competitive spirit with each other- a competition that capitalism enforces upon them- the workers are aware of the disadvantages of the wage structure. They resist by first forming a unity among themselves, as is seen in the creation of unions. A huge factor in bringing about this unity is the proximity to each other. The capitalist factory system brings workers into the same geographical area. Once they are there, the intensity of communication, will naturally increase. Once this unity comes into place, they are in competition with the capitalists, and not in competition amongst themselves. There is an arising of class consciousness, that is, the awareness of their common position. This is the prerequisite in the formation of the workers as a class unto themselves.
2. Property: As mentioned above, class, for Marx, is not based on income or the occupation, but rather on the relationship to property. In a capitalist society, the individual's class position is based on the work they perform, and especially on the basis of their ownership of lack thereof, of the means of production. The class divisions get solidified along these lines. This is also applicable historically, as we have seen in the ancient, feudal and modern societies. It is not merely an economic aspect. The concept of base and superstructure shows us that these economic relations of ownership also extends to the social, legal and political structures.

3. Economic power and political authority: It is a common cliché that those who wield economic power also hold political power. Those who have the ownership of the means of production also control the legal, political and judicial machinery. In the Marxian perspective, political power is that which is used by the economically powerful to continue the class hierarchy in the society and to maintain the oppressive practices against the working class population.
4. Polarization of the classes: Even though there exists in capitalist societies classes such as *lumpen proletariat* (those among the proletariat who sympathise with the bourgeoisie), and the *petit bourgeoisie* (a class of small traders, etc.), eventually the divisions on the basis of class are into two: proletariat and bourgeoisie. These two classes are antagonistic to each other, and soon enough, there is process that Aron called *proletarianization*, which is the depriving of the property of the lumpen proletariat and the petit bourgeoisie, which makes them recede into the ranks of the proletariat as well. Thus, at the time of the class conflict, only two classes- proletariat and bourgeoisie exist.
5. Surplus value: In an earlier section, we have already seen the meaning of surplus value. It is the difference between the final value of a product and the value of the labour taken to produce it. This decides the profit for the capitalist. In order to maximise the profit, and because he owns the means of production, the capitalist forces the worker to work longer to produce more and more surplus value, without increasing the wages for the worker.
6. Pauperisation: As the capitalist society grows, the proletariat becomes poorer and poorer, and the gap between the rich and the poor increases. The amount of wealth concentrating in one class becomes higher, and over a period of time, even those who had moderate ownership of means of production are reduced to poverty. The *petit bourgeoisie* drops down to the level of the proletariat. What exists then are just two classes: one which is ultra-rich, and can live a life of luxury, while the majority are the working classes and they have to work hard and in exploitative situations to earn a living. For Marx, poverty exists not because of scarcity of resources, but because of exploitative practices, which lead to unfavourable distribution of resources such as wealth and capital.

7. Alienation: We have already read about alienation in the previous section. In Marx's own words,

Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life into working-time and drag his wife and child under the wheels of Juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the accumulation of surplus value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payments high or low, must grow worse (as quoted in Abraham and Morgan, 2009).

What is to be noted in this passage is that Marx does not say that those at the higher-income level will not feel the sense of alienation that the workers feel. Rather, they too are only producing value for the capitalist, and do not have a stake in the capital, which leaves them also as being prone to alienation.

8. Class solidarity: Class consciousness solidifies because the workers become more and more aware of the inequality they face. The proletariat also becomes homogenised, and there is a crystallisation of the frictional relationship between them and the bourgeoisie. Due to mechanisation, workers start losing the nuances in their jobs, and are resorted to performing the same kind of jobs. The wages are also kept at a minimum. The general dissatisfaction leads to workers uniting among themselves, and forming unions, which give them a united voice. Even personal conflicts between members of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat takes on a class dimension, till finally a full-scale riot, leading to a revolution breaks out.

9. Revolution: The final stage of the class war is the breaking out of a revolution, when the means of production are seized by the majority population, that is, the proletariat. In Marx's words, *'Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands'* (in Abraham and Morgan, 2009). Just as there people such as the lumpen proletariat who had crossed over to the bourgeoisie in a capitalism, in the times of the revolution, there are members from within the bourgeoisie, who also takes on the ideals of the proletariat, and joins the revolution.
10. Dictatorship of the Proletariat: After the revolution, a transitional phase where the proletariat is the absolute ruler is established. For Marx, the revolution may be violent, but without mass killings. Once the property of the bourgeoisie has been seized from them, the bourgeoisie is also absorbed into the proletariat. The *social dictatorship* of the proletariat is established to bring about the structural changes that the revolution sought to bring about.

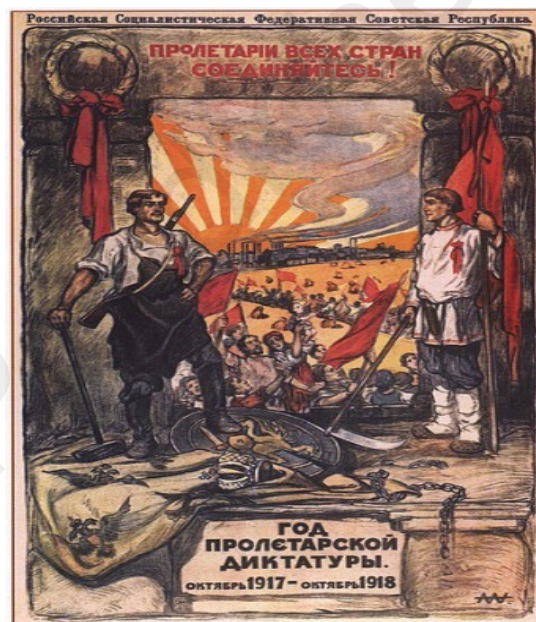


Figure 56: Soviet poster from 1918, which says Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a subject of contention among Marxists scholars, especially in the wake of dictatorships such as that of Stalin in the USSR. There has been much debate

on the possible meanings of this term. However, Marx himself was clear that his idea of a revolution was one in which the result was that abolishing of private property, and not one where there is the establishment of a prison state.

11. Inauguration of a communist society: Once private property is abolished, a classless society is inaugurated. The state has no function in a society where everyone owns everything, and each individual makes contribution to society according to their ability. At this point, Marx says, history will also end since there are no more contradictions in society.

One of the general responses to the Marxian idea of class struggle and conflict is that is too utopian. The idea of a socialist utopia is something that has been subject to much discussion and debates. Another point of discussion is how Marx failed to predict that rather than creating a polarisation of the classes, capitalism would evolve in such a way that the middle class would burgeon making them less willing than the proletariat in joining the revolution. However, in spite of the various criticisms, Marx's theory of class conflict showed the nature of exploitation and inequality in capitalism.

Exercise: Review a movie with social messages, and analyse how the class and other conflicts (caste, gender, etc.) are depicted.

6.6 Conclusion

Perhaps no one social thinker has influenced history in terms of his ideas as much as Karl Marx has. Even though his life was marked by tragedy, and his death itself was in poverty, his ideas resonated throughout history. In the 19th century sociological theory, apart from Weber, not many sociologists engaged with Marxian thinking, since the influence of Darwinian evolutionary theory was still strong in this period. However, from the mid-20th century, Marxian theory started to gain foothold as the dominant theory, informing conflict perspectives as it slowly replaced functionalism in social sciences.

Even though Marx's works were based on an economic analysis of society, his idea of conflict found a following in sociology as well. In the 1920s and '30s, the Frankfurt school thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, etc., were influenced by Marxian thinking in their analysis of 20th century society and politics, especially

on technology and capitalism. Thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, who have also been crucial in the political scenario drew their influences directly from Marxian writing.



Figure 57: Statue of Marx in Moscow, with the caption 'Proletarians of the World Unite'

The Communist Manifesto is one of the most widely-read books in the world. Marxian thought has directly influenced the political destinies of multiple countries in the world. The formation of USSR was in line with Lenin's reading of Marx; the leaders of the USSR such as Lenin and Stalin borrowed and interpreted Marx's writing. From Cuba to Chile to China, the spirit of a revolution against the exploitative practices of the wealthy were fermented by Marx's writing on conflict and revolutions.

The idea of conflict was extended to beyond class by any interpreters of Marxian theory. In the mid-20th century, many freedom fighters in the colonised countries saw in their anti-imperial struggles echoes of anti-class struggles. Many of the earliest leaders of newly independent countries valued communism, such as Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. Anti-colonial writers such as Frantz Fanon also engaged with Marxism. When it comes to gender also, Marxism was relevant- in fact, one of the various perspectives through which feminism is articulated is through Marxist feminism, which considers that women were exploited through capitalist and market-oriented economy. In the movement against racial policies also, leaders evoked Marxian principles. One of the early leaders of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky had advocated for the right to

self-determination of black people in South Africa. Martin Luther King, Jr., also advocated for the rights of the workers, and in his early years, could be said to be influenced by some Marxian ideas.

The failure of Marx's ideas seems to be that he did not predict new iterations of capitalism. One of these iterations is the rise in the middle-class populated by white-collar employees, as we discussed above. Marx also did not consider that in many cases, workers would be given ownership options on a small scale, thus making them have an interest in maintaining the *status-quo*. Further, labour groups and unions also do not seek to overthrow the existing structures entirely, but try to strike a balance between profit-making and protection of their interests. Similarly, Marx famously called the peasant class '*potatoes in a potato sack*', as he believed that the distance at which the farmers were located prevented an agrarian revolution from ever occurring on the lines of the industrial one. However, in many countries, an agrarian revolution did take place, and often times, they were in tandem with other industrial or nationalist movements.

No matter what the limitations of Marxian theory is, in sociology, the influence his works wield cannot be understated. Right from social thinkers such W.E.B. du Bois, Henri Lefebvre, Immanuel Wallerstein, Zygmunt Bauman, Michel Foucault, John Bellamy Foster, etc., the tools that Marx bequeathed to social analysis remain in use. In India specifically, Ramkrishna Mukherji, DN Dhanagare, etc., have used Marxian analysis in their teachings and writings. The subaltern school of thought also often borrows from Marxian ideas. The anti-caste movement also often engages in Marxian thought. Ambedkar, though not a Marxist, was an advocate of state socialism, and wrote about Marx too. Other writers such as George Orwell, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Vijay Prashad, etc., have also been influenced by Marxist ideas. Criticisms of Marx and Marxian ideas have driven political, social and economic thought ever since he first espoused his thought. Entire political movements and events have been maneuvered to prevent a scenario as Marx envisioned from being carried out.

As a concluding passage, perhaps there is no better words to quote than his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engel's statement, given at Marx's funeral:

Just as Darwin discovered the law of development or organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact,

hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat. Drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc...the discovery of surplus value suddenly threw light on the problem (of capitalist mode of production)...his real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society... and contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat...Marx was the best hated and most calumniated man of his time...His name will endure through the ages, and so also will his work.



Figure 58: Marx's tomb at Highgate Cemetery in London

Summary

- Karl Marx early life- education- life in Paris, Brussels, and London- meeting Fredrich Engels- *Communist Manifesto*- years in poverty- role in international workers' struggle- *Internationale*- death and final years- key bibliography
- Dialectical materialism- importance of Hegel- ideational dialecticism- and dialectical materialism-Marx's critique of Hegel- historical materialism- means, modes, and relations of production- modes of production throughout history- dialectics and material history
- Alienation- alienation from product- alienation from the production process- alienation from the self- alienation from others

- Class struggle: economic base and socio-political superstructure-commodities, capitalism and social class- fetishism of commodities- features of class system- elements of the class struggle

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. How did Marx's early life and education influence his later work?
2. Write about the manner in which meeting with Engels was one of the turning points in Marx's intellectual history.
3. What is Dialectical materialism?
4. How did Marx's dialecticism differ from that of Hegel?
5. Write about means, modes and relations of productions.
6. '*The history of mankind is a history of class struggle*' Describe how Marx elucidated this statement.
7. Write in detail about the idea of alienation. Do you think it is related to the idea of anomie of Durkheim? Elaborate on your answer.
8. How did Marx argue that socio-political realities were determined to a large extent by the economic realities?
9. What is the social class according to Marx?
10. What is the role of surplus value in capitalism?
11. Describe fetishism of commodities.
12. What are the various elements in a class struggle? Write in detail about the class struggle and the outcome.
13. What is the dictatorship of the proletariat? Examine how this term has become controversial due to 20th century political outcomes.
14. Write an essay on the influence of Marx on 20th century international politics.

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