

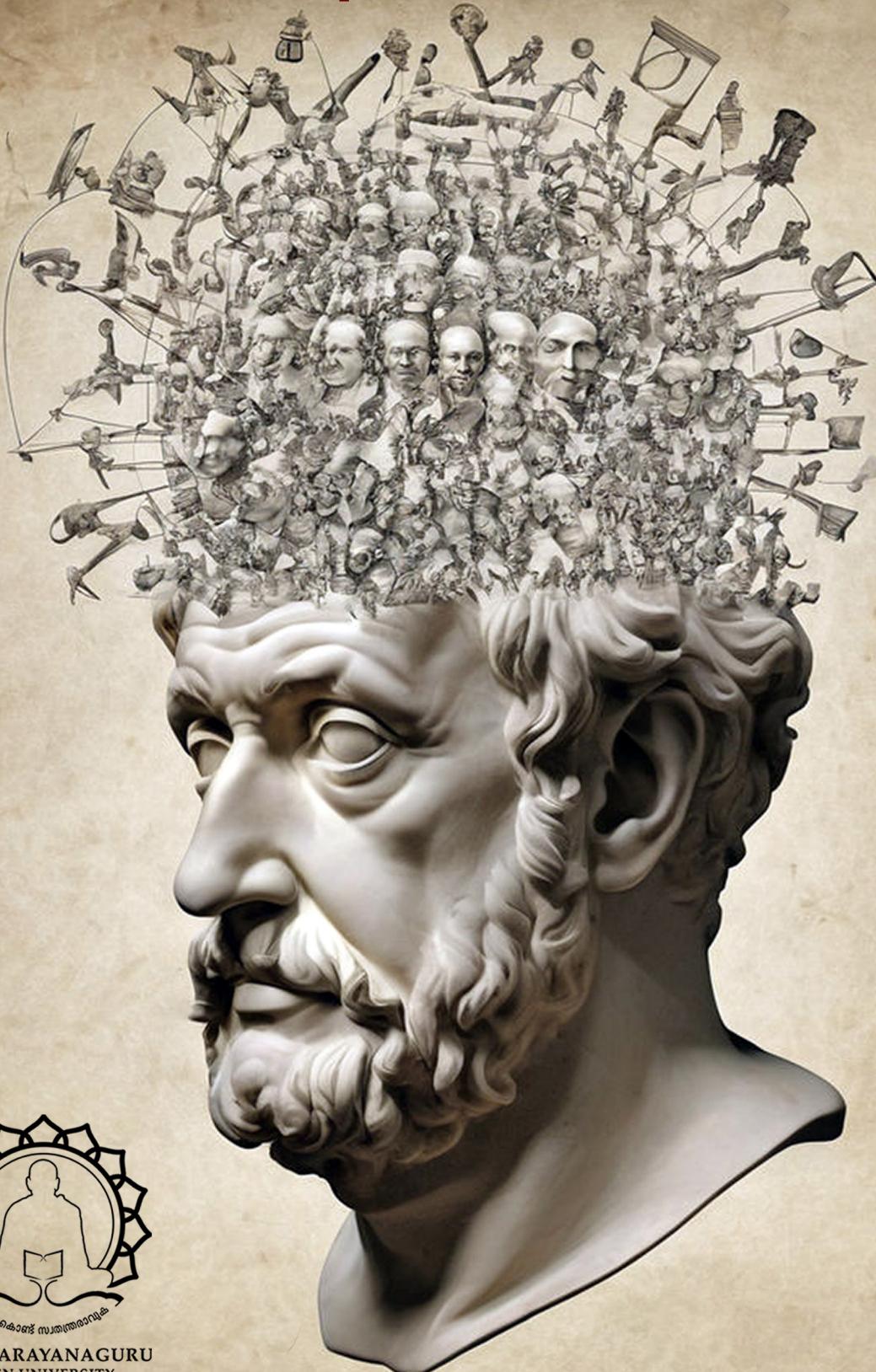
# **CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS**

**COURSE CODE: B21SO03DC**

**Undergraduate Programme in Sociology**

**Discipline Core Course**

**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**



**SREENARAYANAGURU  
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**SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY**

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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Access and Quality define Equity.

# **Classical Sociological Thinkers**

**Course Code: B21SO03DC**

**Semester - III**

## **Discipline Core Course Undergraduate Programme Sociology Self Learning Material**

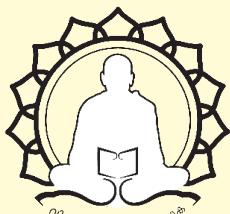


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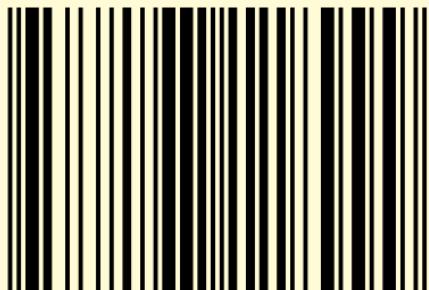


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[www.sgou.ac.in](http://www.sgou.ac.in)

ISBN 978-81-971189-9-9



9 788197 118999

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June 2024

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# MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The university aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The UG programme in Sociology is designed as a coherent set of academic learning modules that generate interest in dissecting the social engineering process. Both theory and practice are covered using the most advanced tools in sociological analysis. Care has been taken to ensure a chronological progression in understanding the discipline. The curriculum provides adequate space for a linear journey through the historical concepts in sociology, catering to the needs of aspirants for the competitive examination as well. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,  
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-06-2024

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**BLOCK**

# Diversity in Sociological Perspectives



# Social Theory: Meaning, Importance and Characteristics

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ comprehend the concept of social thought and the development of social theory
- ◆ understand the differentiation between concept and theory
- ◆ get familiar with the characteristics of social theory
- ◆ understand the importance of social theory in explaining social currents

### Prerequisites

Scholarship in the social and philosophical sciences has demonstrated a consistent interest in theories of human behavior throughout history, resulting in an abundance of written material. Despite the fact that the broad spectrum of social theories touches on all aspects of behavior, personality, social processes, and institutions, only a small and relatively recent portion of this literature are essentially sociological in both form and substance and the vast majority of social theories are based on empirical research. It is necessary to consider the various interpretations of sociological theory before attempting a precise meaning of the concept.

Social theories are analytical tools to study or interpret social phenomenon. Social scientists have employed theories to relate with historical dialectics to check the validity and reliability of various methodologies over the time such as positivism and neo-positivism and to validate structure-agency debates. Modernity

emanated out of the renaissance/enlightenment encouraged theorization of social phenomena pushing society towards progress through scientific knowledge and reasoning. Sociological thoughts evolved along with the renaissance period where the philosophers like Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Saint Simon presented humanistic life perspectives. They argued that human reasoning is enough to solve problems encountered by the society. The idea was extended by the later thinkers and this intellectual tradition brought about a systematic study of society which is called Sociology.

## Keywords

Concept, Theory, Social fact, Normative science, Interpretative science

## Discussion

### 1.1.1 Meaning and Importance of Social Theory

Different people have interpreted differently, what a theory is. Whether in popular speech, philosophical discourse, or scientific treatises, the term is frequently misused. Every theory has its own definition, which is determined by the proponent of the theory in question. Many people consider a theory to be an apparently intelligent statement about anything, including our tastes and distastes, our value orientations, our failures and accomplishments, our strategies and convictions, or even a wild hypothesis about life on a faraway planet or life after death. A theory sometimes is used to refer to a speculative statement that is not supported by evidence or even cannot be supported by evidence. Theory's scope can range from the entire universe to a single point in space and time. The term can be referred to the entire thinking process and the results and conclusions reached out of it. Its form can range from a complete conjecture to a solid confirmation, from an unarticulated

impression to a precisely defined prediction, among other things. Theory, as used in this text, will be defined as a conceptual scheme intended to explain observed regularities or relationships between two or more variables which may be defined as follows:

Abraham Kaplan defined theory as a way of making sense of a troubling situation in order to allow us to bring our repertoire of habits to bear most effectively and even more importantly, to modify habits or discard them entirely, replacing them with new ones as the situation necessitates. As a result, theory will appear in the reconstructed logic as a device for interpreting, criticizing, and unifying established laws, as well as for modifying them to fit data that were not anticipated at the time of their formulation, and as a guide for the endeavor of discovering new and stronger generalizations. Learning by experience is important, but thinking about what can be learned has to be answered first. To engage in theorizing is to think about what can be learned. Lower animals understand scientific laws, but they never reach the level



of scientific theory, to put it another way. They learn through experience rather than from it, because learning through experience necessitates the use of symbolic constructions that can provide vicarious experiences that have never been personally experienced.

Sociologists today use the term theory to refer to any or all of the following:

- ◆ Concept-conceptual ordering-construct-constructed type;
- ◆ Frame of reference-conceptual scheme-perspective;
- ◆ Intelligent hunch-hypothesis-theorem-postulate-systematized assumption;
- ◆ Proposition-axiom-law generalization;
- ◆ Model-logico-deductive scheme-mathematical formulations;
- ◆ Ideal type-paradigm-typology-continuum.

Alternatively, according to some sociologists, a theory is an explanation of the relationships between phenomena that is not as well-established as a law but is more than a simple hypothesis. In addition:

- ◆ Theories should be stated more formally.
- ◆ Theories should be testable; and predictive power should be the primary criterion for theories.
- ◆ Sociological theories, on the other hand, differ significantly in terms of characteristics such as verifiability, precision, scope, predictive power, and the radius of the explanatory shell, among other things.

Robert Merton is correct in asserting that six different types of work are frequently lumped together as comprising of sociological theory:

1. Methodology
2. General sociological orientations
3. Analysis of sociological concepts
4. Post factum sociological interpretations
5. Empirical generalizations in Sociology
6. Sociological theory.

Three of the most distinguished sociologists have provided definitions of sociological theory. Firstly, Talcott Parsons states that “A theoretical system in the present sense is a body of logically interdependent generalized concepts of empirical reference. Such a system tends, ideally, to become ‘logically closed’, to reach such a state of logical integration that every logical implication of any combination of propositions in the system is explicitly stated in some other propositions in the same system.”

Secondly, Robert K Merton states that “the term sociological theory refers to logically interconnected sets of propositions from which empirical uniformities can be derived.”

According to Homans, a third explanation is that “it consists, first, of a set of concepts or conceptual schemes. Some of the terms in the scheme, I call descriptive concepts, serving to show what the theory is about. Others, I call operative concepts or properties of nature. A theory consists, second, of a set of propositions, each stating a relationship between at least two of the properties and the propositions form a deductive system. Third, some of the propositions of a scientific theory must be contingent, in the sense that

experience is relevant to their truth or falsity or to that of propositions derived from them. The propositions in a deductive system need not always differ in generality, but often they do”.

Thomas Ward analyzed multiple definitions of sociological theory and synthesized their common ingredients to arrive at the following purposes of sociological theory. To Ward, “a theory is a logical, deductive-inductive system of concepts, definitions, and propositions that expresses a relationship between two or more selected aspects of phenomena and from which testable hypotheses can be derived”.

Concerning social theory, Zetterberg identifies two distinct interpretations in two distinct sociological traditions.

In the humanistic tradition of Sociology, social theory refers to two distinct concepts:

1. classic works or “all of the better sociological writings of the older vintage,” which could more appropriately be referred to as ‘Sociological classics’, that is, the great works of the founding fathers of Sociology.
2. social theory, which refers to the study of social phenomena and processes. The term sociological criticism refers to a commentary on sociological writings, usually from a historical perspective that traces the accumulation of knowledge through developments and reinterpretations.

In the scientific tradition of sociology, social theory refers to two different but related enterprises:

- a. a system of definitions based on an orderly schema of defining concepts and relationships in

the sociological vocabulary

- b. ‘systematically organized, law-like propositions about the society that can be supported by evidence’.

In sociological theory, the statement that empirically verifiable, law-like propositions alone constitute sociological theory is open to debate. Consider the following scenario: a textbook on sociological theory contains only propositions that resemble laws and how many propositions are there in sociology that correspond to laws? Should all theoretical propositions be backed up by empirical evidence?

Firstly, if we accept Zetterberg’s discussion on theory, we will not have a single full-fledged textbook in sociological theory to date. There are some exceptional works that are replete with empirical generalizations and mathematical models. It is because much of the accumulated literature in sociological theory consists primarily of sociological classics, sociological criticism, and sociological taxonomy. The available scholarship in sociological theory does not require that every social theory be empirically verifiable in the rigorous manner, as is the case in the physical sciences. Even though none of these theories can be verified in their entirety, social contract theory, social Darwinism, the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, Marx’s theory of class war, Sorokin’s theory of social and cultural dynamics, Parson’s theory of social action, and Emile Durkheim’s theory of religion have all been widely adopted as influential sociological theories over time.

The mainstream of social thought, as well as a large proportion of the current literature in contemporary sociological theory has been divided into three major realms:

1. The major currents in sociological



- thought, notably as exhibited in the works of leading figures such as Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Wilfred Pareto, George Simmel, Ferdinand Tonnies, and others;
2. General modes of sociological analysis such as evolutionary theories, structural-functionalism, conflict theory, and the system theory produce a slew of propositions regarding society as a whole.
  3. A large number of sociological theories and hypotheses in social science.

In social science, a theory is a plausible explanation for social phenomena or a class of social phenomena that are logically constructed and systematically organized and emphasizes the relationship between two well-defined variables. However, it is far from being an empirically supported social law. It is more of an educated guess or an exercise in speculation.

Theoretical arguments are contrasted with facts, laws, and practices. The difference between facts and theories is that facts are empirically verifiable, whereas theories are a systematic relationship between the facts they describe. Additionally, theories cannot be derived from empirical observations and generalizations, solely through rigorous inductive reasoning. A theory is a symbolic construction, and developing theories is a matter of creative accomplishment. Further it can be termed as an abstract conceptual scheme that reaches out beyond itself, transcending the observable realm of empirical reality into a higher level of abstraction through symbolic construction.

### 1.1.2 Characteristics of Social Theory

A survey of approximately one hundred popular texts in the social sciences published since 1950 was conducted by Thomas Ward, who also ran a content analysis of 27 definitions of sociological theory. Specifically, his findings regarding the characteristics of a theory are extremely instructive. It was discovered that a theory has a systematic structure in the vast majority of the definitions studied, 89 percent to be exact, and that it should be possible for a theory to generate hypotheses that are empirically verifiable rather than that the theory itself should be verifiable in 74 percent of the definitions. According to the findings, in 70% of the cases, the structure of the theory was defined as being logically connected. The term ‘proposition’ appeared in 59 percent of the definitions, and 44 percent of the definitions defined theory as a logical-deductive system of reasoning. Only in 19% of the defined terms were the words ‘laws’, ‘generalizations’, and ‘definitions’ mentioned. Postulates and axioms are even more infrequently mentioned, appearing in only 15% of the surveyed definitions. Ward’s analysis provides an excellent indication of what sociologists think about a theory.

Putting it another way, a theory is a collection of propositions that, in the ideal case, satisfy the following conditions:

- ◆ The propositions must be couched in terms of precisely defined concepts
- ◆ They must be consistent with one another
- ◆ They must be such that existing generalizations can be deduced from them; and

- ◆ They must be fruitful in that they point the way to additional observations.

Fundamental concepts and propositions, definitions, as well as hypotheses are the building blocks of a theoretical framework. In order to enter a theoretical scheme, social concepts must first be refined to the point where they provide an orderly schema for the classification and description of a class of social phenomena or of a specific aspect of some social reality. Not only does a theory refine the concepts that it employs, but a new theory may also generate entirely new concepts of its own. In a similar vein, the propositions or laws that form the basis of a theory must not only be clearly defined, but they must also be altered by being brought into systematic connection with one another, much as marriage brings together two people. Each law absorbs a portion of the substance of the others and incorporates it into its own body. Whether it's been generalized or reformulated, or at the very least reinterpreted.

The most fundamental question regarding the characteristics of a theory is whether it could be verifiable or not. Theorists believe that social theories are no more than speculative exercises unless they correspond to well-defined propositions or laws that can be empirically tested that are referred to as scientific laws, such as physics and biology. However, the reality is that this level of maturity is a long way off for the discipline of Sociology, which is still very young. Furthermore, since its inception, the development of Sociology has been characterized by a large number of conflicting theories and perspectives that have been developed. A single inductive procedure or mathematical model that sociologists could use to test their theories and validate them as being applicable to all groups and societies has not been developed.

Sociological theories are located in the middle of the spectrum between empirical law and purely theoretical argumentation. Some sociologists believe that even a simple hypothesis can be classified as a minor theory. On the other hand, every speculative ideal can be classified as a theory, provided that it generates at least one fruitful hypothesis based on sound logic. It is not intended to dismiss the importance of any type of verification. If no known fact or generalization appears to contradict a theory, it is considered and verified preliminarily.

It is necessary to reject, or at the very least modify, a tentative theory if there is a contradiction. A critical observation is required when conflicting theories appear to explain the same social phenomenon, as in the rise of capitalism, which is interpreted differently by Marx and Weber. In this situation, a theory supported by an overwhelming amount of evidence is deemed more fruitful.

Although important, the critical observation is by no means a conclusive test because conflicting theories impose conditions that can never be met because of the idealizations involved. Despite this, they will continue to be influential theories in the future. As a result, sociological theories do not have to be verified in the same way that physics theories are verified; instead, they must fit into a syndrome of facts that have an impact on the class of phenomena that are being theorized about. This is validation in the simple correspondence sense, not verification in the statistical sense, and sociological theories can aspire to this level of validation for the time being.

It becomes clear, as a result, that sociological theories are not always equivalent to social laws. Comparing the two types of laws, a scientific law is a proven summation of relationships between empirically observable phenomena, whereas a sociological theory



is predominantly a heuristic device. Laws are ‘discovered’ through the observation of patterned relationships; theories are ‘invented’ through creative ingenuity. To be sure, sociologists can formulate laws governing human behavior in society to a certain extent; however, the pursuit of such laws is not the discipline’s primary goal. The search for social laws as an end in itself, or even as the primary purpose of sociology, is to suffocate ‘sociological imagination’ in its infancy and reduce Sociology to sterile ‘abstracted empiricism,’ both of which are detrimental to the field. Sadly, a rigorous inductive procedure or a logical deductive format may fail to produce valuable sociological insights in Sociology. As an alternative, a theory may establish a systematic connection between isolated laws and transcend them to form an overall conceptual scheme that we can use to generate new empirical studies, theoretical laws, and frames of reference. In summary, a sociological theory could be defined as a logically constructed impressionistic generalization or an intuitive statement that falls somewhere between a law and a hypothesis in terms of the degree of verification. As Abel puts it, “All theories fall between the two extremes of a simple explanatory principle and a deductive system with an abstract relational structure formed by theoretical postulates.”

To summarize, we can identify the following characteristics of a sociological theory:

- ◆ A theory is expressed in terms of well-defined concepts and propositions that are logically interconnected with one another.
- ◆ In contrast to fact, the theory is a systematized symbolic construction that does not possess the inevitability of fact. Theory-building is a creative

accomplishment that necessitates a qualitative shift away from empirical evidence.

- ◆ A theory is inherently provisional in nature; it is always subject to revision in light of new insights and empirical evidence. It is neither necessary nor desirable for a sociological theory to be a final formulation in the traditional sense.
- ◆ It is verifiable in a preliminary manner, that is, the theory assumes consistency with the body of known facts and evidence that are currently available.
- ◆ It is a systematized formulation that attempts to reconcile the requirements of a humanistic tradition (speculative, creative, etc.) with the demands of a scientific tradition (measurement, rigorous induction, predictive power, etc.).

### 1.1.3 Types of Social Theory

Boskoff in his edited volume of *Modern Sociological Theory in Continuity and Change* distinguishes between two types of social theory: non-social; reductionist explanations of social phenomena with reference to environmental and physical factors as well as natural forces (e.g., geographic determinism), and ‘proto-Sociology,’ which was marked by ‘a growing emancipation from most of the concepts and orientations of the physical and biological sciences.

Homans distinguishes between two types of general theory:

- (1) Normative theory; and
- (2) Non-normative theory.

To put it another way, normative theories explain how men should behave in order to

achieve specific results, whereas non-normative theories explain how men actually behave in order to achieve those results. Normative theories can be divided into two categories: those that are one-sided and those that are two - or many-sided. In contrast to the former, which seeks to explain how a particular social actor or social group should behave in order to achieve specific goals, the latter is concerned with the interaction between two or more people who behave in a normative manner towards one another. In the first category, we have theories of applied sociology, and in the second category, we have games theory as an illustration.

According to Homans, non-normative theories can be divided into three categories: Structural, Functional, and Psychological theories. The existence of some element of social behavior can be explained by structural theories; however, the definition of an “element” can be defined by its relationships to other elements and the relationships of these elements to one another in some configuration, such as a social structure or a social system. The highest-order propositions in functional theories state that a society or other social unit will not survive, will not maintain equilibrium, and will not achieve its objectives unless a specific element or combination of elements of behavior occurs in the unit. In psychological theories, the highest-order propositions state that some variable in the behavior of men as members of a species rather than the behavior of societies or groups as a whole is a more or less specific function of some other variable in the behavior of individual men or of the physical environment, and that this variable is more or less specific.

Helmut Wagner divides sociological theory into three major categories, which are as follows:

- Positive sociological theories, whose authors consider Sociology to be a natural science, or who actually treat Sociology as such. This category includes theories such as neo-positivism, human ecology, structural functionalism, social behaviorism, and biopsychological theory of culture, among others.

- The authors of interpretative sociology consider or actually treat Sociology as a social science in contrast to the natural sciences. Interpretative Sociology of action and interaction, interpretative social psychology, and social phenomenology are examples of sociological theories belonging to this category.
- Social theories that are neither scientific nor evaluative in nature, and whose authors do not regard Sociology as a positive or interpretative science, nor do treat it as such. Social philosophical theory, ideological social theory, and humanitarian reform theory are all examples of such theories.

Boskoff, Homans, and Wagner have classified theories according to specific criteria; as a result, they have lumped together theories that are extremely disparate from one another under the same category. Furthermore, the usefulness of attempts to categorize sociological theories as reductionist or non-reductionist, or as evaluative or scientific, is highly debatable as well.

As a result, we'll use three general criteria to distinguish between three alternative classification schemes, each of which will be differentiated by one of the three criteria.

## Recap

- ◆ Theory refers to a speculative statement which is not supported by evidence.
- ◆ The scope of theory can range from the entire universe to a single point in space and time.
- ◆ Theory is a conceptual scheme intended to explain observed regularities or relationships between two or more variables.
- ◆ Predictive power should be the primary criterion for theories.
- ◆ The major currents in sociological thought are exhibited in the works of Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, Simmel, Tonnies, and others.
- ◆ Fundamental concepts and propositions, definitions, as well as hypothesis are the building blocks of a theoretical framework.
- ◆ A theory is expressed in terms of well-defined concepts and propositions that are logically interconnected with one another.
- ◆ According to Homans, non-normative theories can be divided into three categories: Structural, Functional, and Psychological theories.
- ◆ The existence of some element of social behavior can be explained by structural theories.
- ◆ Positive sociological theories consider Sociology to be a natural science.
- ◆ Homans classified social theory into two types of general theory - Normative theory and Non-normative theory.
- ◆ The authors of interpretative sociologies consider or actually treat Sociology as a social science in contrast to the natural sciences.
- ◆ Boskoff has distinguished social theory as non-social and proto-Sociology.

## Objective Questions

1. Which is the concept that refers to the philosophical and the intellectual ideas to a time or place regarding social problems?
2. Which is the concept that explains the scientific way of thinking about social life?
3. What are the two classifications of social theory by Boskoff?
4. What are the types of theories identified by Homans?
5. What are the three classifications of Non-normative theory by Homan?
6. Which is the concept that considers or treats Sociology as a natural science?
7. Which is the concept that considers Sociology as a social science?

## Answers

1. Social Thought
2. Social Theory
3. Non-Sociology and Proto Sociology
4. Normative & Non-Normative
5. Structural, Functional and Psychological
6. Positive sociological theory
7. Interpretative sociological theory



## Assignments

1. Elaborate in your own words your understanding about social theory.
2. Discuss various definitions of social theory.
3. Explain normative and non-normative theories.
4. What are the three types of social theory? Discuss.
5. Examine the characteristics of social theory.

## Suggested Readings

1. Abraham, F. (2009). *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction* (16th impression). New- Delhi: OUP.
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## UNIT

# Paradigms: Positivism, Interpretive Social Science, Critical Social Science

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the different paradigms in social science
- ◆ become acquainted with the positivist perspective
- ◆ have an understanding about the interpretive nature of social science
- ◆ differentiate critical thinking from other perspectives in social science

### Prerequisites

A way of looking at the world, a set of ideas that are used to understand or explain something, are often related to a specific theme. It is a way of framing what we know and how we can know it. To help you understand what a paradigm is, let us suppose there is a shade tree in the middle of the road. Some people find it a useful shade. At the same time, there is an opinion that it may cause harm if its branches were to fall off. If you have an opinion about this topic, you are pretty certain about the veracity of your perspective. Which of this do you think is correct? Each perspective operates under a set of assumptions about the way the world works, or at least should work. Perhaps your assumptions come from your particular perspective, which helps shape your views on a variety of social issues. Paradigms shape our stances on issues such as this one. Let us explore each paradigm and learn its significance in social science.



## Keywords

Empiricism, Objectivity, Emancipation, Theory, Realism

## Discussion

Thomas Kuhn popularized the term paradigm in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which he investigated the history of the natural sciences to uncover trends in activity that influence scientific advancement where various people may have diverse perspectives on a social reality, which may limit their ability to understand and reason about the observed event. The term paradigm is derived from the Greek word *paradeigma* which means pattern. Kuhn used the term to refer to the conceptual framework employed by the social scientists as a convenient model to examine the problems and find out solutions. Kuhn defines a paradigm as “an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables and problems attached with the corresponding methodologies, approaches and tools”. In fact, a paradigm serves not only as framework but a pattern, structure or system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions.

Contrary to the belief that a paradigm is, by its very nature, beyond description and comprehension by human intellect, it is thought that the intellect is, by its very nature, more comprehensive than any world perception on which it bases its current cognitive carriage. Since differences in epistemology, methodology, and supporting perspective are frequently founded on model supposition, it is likely and required to increase individual awareness in order to articulate any essential way that individual frame his reality.

In the words of Lather, our beliefs about

the world we live in and want to live in are reflected in the research paradigms inherently. Guba and Lincoln have classified the research paradigms into positivist, post-positivist and post-modernist where post-modernist and post-structural frameworks grouped into critical theory. Positivism and post-positivism both are objectivist in terms of nature and while realism is assumed in positivism, post-positivism aligned a reality of ‘imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable’. Guba and Lincoln viewed critical theory as “the investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked, with the values of the investigator inevitably influencing the inquiry”. Gephart divided research paradigms into three categories as positivism, interpretivism and critical postmodernism. These three paradigms are popular in the contemporary social, organizational and management research that include nature of knowledge, the worldview and the means of knowledge production and assessment.

There are multiple paradigms in social science, each having a distinctive ontological and epistemological stance. We'll examine some of the prevalent paradigms used in social science.

### 1.2.1 Positivism

Positivism is the predominant ideology in social science. Even until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, positivism, which was found in the writings of French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857), dominated

science. It advocates for limiting science and knowledge development to what can be seen and measured. Positivism frequently uses notions that can be empirically verified. Despite the fact that positivism was initially an attempt to distinguish between scientific inquiry and religious postulates (where the precepts could not be observed objectively), positivism eventually gave rise to empiricism, or a blind faith in observed data, and a rejection of any attempt to extend or reason beyond observable facts.

Positivist paradigm largely depends upon the philosophical ideas propounded by the French philosopher Auguste Comte. In his words, observation and reason are the best means to understand human behavior. Reality and truth can be verified using the scientific tools and frames as in the case of natural science. Therefore, true knowledge can be obtained through observation and experiment. Moreover, positivism is concerned with unlocking truth and explaining it by empirical means. According to this perspective, knowledge production and its assessment would be scientific if they are experienced by human senses and otherwise the scientific validity cannot be claimed.

Positivism, encompasses the tenets of objectivity, known ability, and logical reasoning. These serve as the foundations of positivism. Positivism is basically considered as the progression of empiricism. It is based on the premise that society can and should be investigated empirically and scientifically. In order to find an objective, scientific, and knowable truth, positivism also asks for a value-free Sociology. The study of Sociology was evolved as a science by the French philosopher Auguste Comte in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Positivist, interpretive, and critical sociology all have distinctive methods for monitoring and analyzing people's actions in social settings. Although Comte's positivist ideology

highly influenced the early development of academic and interpretive Sociology, critical sociology developed mostly as a response to positivism's exceedingly strict and unyielding norms. Emile Durkheim, who worked in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, created the idea of positivism in order to elevate the academic stature of sociology to that of a logical science, similar to physics or chemistry. As a result, positivist sociology seeks to comprehend social institutions by focusing on well-established and verifiable facts. While this contributed to a more formal understanding of how societies work, the study of social dynamics that cannot be observed or established through the gathering of evidence, rarely has been studied.

Positivist paradigm dominated the educational research for a long time until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where it was challenged by two alternative traditions: interpretive constructionism and critical postmodernism. Interpretive paradigm uncovered the lack of subjectivity in interpreting social reality and the critical paradigm argued for the replacement of objectivity with subjectivity.

### **1.2.1.1 Characteristics of Positivism**

1. Phenomenalism: Only knowledge that has been verified by science qualifies as phenomenalism.
2. Deductivism: The purpose of theory is to produce testable hypotheses that can establish or disprove laws.
3. Objectivity: Science must be carried out in a way that is devoid of personal bias.
4. Inductivism: Information is gathered through research that



serves as the foundation for laws.

Positivists hold that applying the scientific process can “reveal” or “find” information. A positivist approach to research lays a strong emphasis on experimentation, observation, control, measurement, reliability, and validity.

### 1.2.2 Interpretive Paradigm

According to interpretive paradigm, it is essential for investigators to understand the variations among people as social actors; how people interpret their social roles in interpersonal relationships and how they go on to give those positions meaning. The focus is on studying people rather than things when conducting research.

Max Weber, a German sociologist, and William Dilthey, a German philosopher, were major contributors to the development of interpretive social science. Weber aimed to create a social science that would place greater emphasis on comprehending subjective experience than on objective facts or observation. Understanding the meaning behind acts in a social context and from a particular point of view is the aim of interpretive social science. According to the German philosopher Dilthey, social science is used to teach us how to live in the world. Additionally, according to Weber, social science should investigate social behavior in order to understand human life.

According to Walshaw, there are no ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ theories in the interpretive tradition. Instead, researchers’ and other stakeholders’ interest and intimacy with the conceptual frameworks will dictate the matter. Since knowledge is an act of interpretation, Gephart has negated the role of objectivity (thinking and reasoning) in the interpretive paradigm. Observation and interpretation are the key factors in the interpretive paradigm. The paradigm attempts to understand phenomena through

meanings that people assign to them. As argued by Reeves and Hedberg, context is important in the interpretive paradigm. In this paradigm, the world is understood using the subjective experiences and the meaning oriented methodologies are employed for data collection and analysis such as interviewing and participant observation. It doesn’t require dependent or independent variables but aims at unveiling the subjective meaning behind the social action.

Interpretivism philosophically belongs to the hermeneutics and phenomenology schools of philosophy and intellect. Hermeneutics is a major branch of interpretive philosophy propounded by Gadamer and Ricoeur. According to Gadamer, Hermeneutics is an attempt to understand human beings in a social context and it is, “thus the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole”. Principally, it envisages that human understanding is achieved by iterating between considering the interdependent meanings of part and the whole. An object as a whole depends on the parts to exist but also exceeds the parts, the whole is greater than individual parts because it will bring out new qualities like in the instance of a clock, as individual parts, it can’t be used to tell time but put together it will be able to function on a different level. Parts on their own are whole but are required to put together everything as a whole.

The study using this paradigm underpinned the aspects of phenomenology which is primarily related with the research of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first person point of view. In phenomenology, ‘phenomena’ are studied by looking at their appearance, such as appearance of things or things as they appear in our experience or the ways we experience things.

Reasoning and interpretive social science

are related. It places a strong emphasis on carefully reading the text to gain a deeper, in-depth knowledge. Additionally, every reader contributes their own interpretations and personal experiences to the text. Interpretive paradigm considers how individuals relate to and understand one another. Interpretive paradigm is the thorough assessment of socially significant behavior by close, in-depth observation of individuals as they go about their daily lives. The goal of interpretive social science researchers is to better understand social life and find novel explanations for how people behave in everyday situations. They presumptuously believe that all human behavior must serve a purpose, and that this purpose must be socially related. According to this perspective, interpretive social researchers are interested in learning what people's activities mean to them. In the interpretive approach, the researcher stands as a participant observer not above the research or outside but by engaging in the activities and meanings of the actions expressed within the special social contexts.

### 1.2.3 Critical Social Science

Critical social science seeks to approach social study critically in an effort to identify insights that might have slipped through the net. The Frankfurt School, which created the notion of critical theory, based it on the philosophical and political thought of Marx, Kant, Hegel and Max Weber. It used both the social sciences and the humanities to consider views about society and culture. Critical theory is fundamentally adhered to the tenets of postmodernism, a scholarship emerged out of the works and thoughts of French intellectuals such as Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault.

Critical thinkers believe that social reality is historically constructed and it is produced and reproduced by people over the time.

Critical scholarship try to deconstruct the taken-for-granted beliefs, values and social structures by producing self-conscious criticism and constructing emancipatory consciousness in scholars. In the words of Gephart, critical postmodernism may be viewed as an intellectual movement of social transformation by displacing the existing power structure and social domination through facilitating spaces and opportunities for the marginalized and socially excluded categories.

The critical paradigm's key themes are power, inequality, and social transformation. The critical paradigm contends that social science can never be wholly objective or value-free, in contrast to the positivist paradigm. This paradigm operates on the viewpoint that scientific research should be done specifically to try to bring about social change.

Positive science was criticized by critical social science for being limited, anti-democratic, and non-humanist in its laws of logic. Additionally, interpretive social science criticized positive social science for ignoring social context, being anti-humanist, and failing to address the meanings of real people and their potential for feeling and thinking. Additionally, research's purpose, according to critical social science, is to empower.

Interpretive social science, on the other hand, focuses mostly on human behavior and what we interpret as reality based on our personal experiences, cultural assumptions, and interpersonal interactions. Critical social science, in contrast, embraces a critical realism, ontology that sees reality as being made up of several layers, including the empirical, the real, and the actual. Critical social science presupposes that we can directly perceive structures at the real level and that we can use our senses to observe empirical reality.



But our perceptions of and interactions with the empirical reality are not unbiased and unmediated. According to critical social science, theory or concept dependencies are a constant part of our experiences of empirical

reality. Critical social science accepts that humans make decisions using reason and are influenced by social institutions, creative beings, and constant meaning.

## Recap

- ◆ Kuhn defines a paradigm as “an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables and problems attached with the corresponding methodologies approaches and tools”.
- ◆ Guba and Lincoln have classified the research paradigms into positivist, post-positivist and post-modernist where post-modernist and post-structural frameworks grouped into critical theory.
- ◆ Gephart have divided research paradigms into three categories as positivism, interpretivism and critical postmodernism.
- ◆ Positivism is a sociological theory that is grounded in empirical data.
- ◆ Experience is considered a reliable source of knowledge by positivism.
- ◆ Positivism frequently only uses notions that can be empirically verified.
- ◆ Key principles of positivism are phenomenism, nominalism, objectivity, and inductivism
- ◆ An interpretive approach to social research would be significantly more qualitative.
- ◆ Interpretive social science holds that ordinary people use common sense to guide them in daily life.
- ◆ The critical paradigm’s key themes are power, inequality, and social transformation.
- ◆ Max Weber, a German sociologist, and William Dilthey, a German philosopher, were major contributors to the development of interpretive social science.
- ◆ Hermeneutics is a major branch of interpretive philosophy propounded by Gadamer and Ricoeur.
- ◆ According to Gadamer, Hermeneutics is an attempt to understand

human beings in a social context and it “is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole”.

- ◆ The Frankfurt School created the notion of critical theory, based on the philosophical and political thought of Marx, Kant, Hegel and Max Weber.

## Objective Questions

1. Who used the term paradigm for the first time?
2. Who wrote the book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*?
3. What is the basic notion of positivist social science?
4. Which sociologist was the major contributor of interpretive social sciences?
5. Which philosopher defined ‘social science as being used to teach how to live in the world’?
6. Which school of thought created the notion of critical social science?
7. Who classified research paradigms into positivist, post-positivist and post-modernism?
8. What is the meaning of paradigm?
9. Which term is paradigm derived off?

## Answers

1. Thomas Kuhn
2. Thomas Kuhn
3. Empiricism



4. Max Weber
5. William Dilthey
6. Frankfurt
7. Guba and Lincoln
8. Pattern
9. Paradeigma

## Assignments

1. Describe in your own words the three important types of research paradigms in social science.
2. Discuss positivist perspective in social science.
3. Explain the two major aspects of interpretive paradigm.
4. Discuss the contributions of Frankfurt school in the growth of critical theory.
5. Compare interpretive and positivist perspectives in terms of objectivity and subjectivity
6. Distinguish the major characteristics of positive and interpretive paradigms.

## Suggested Readings

1. Giddens, A., Duneier, M., Appelbaum, R. P., & Carr, D. S. (1991). *Introduction to Sociology*. New York: Norton.
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1. Willis, W.J. (2007). *Foundations of Qualitative Research; Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. US: Sage Publications.
2. Burrel, G. & Morgan, G. (2017). *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis; Elements of the Sociology of Corporate life*. US: Taylor & Francis.





BLOCK

## Positivism and Social Darwinism of Early Years



# Auguste Comte: Positivist Philosophy and Law of three Stages

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ outline the biographical details of Auguste Comte and his theoretical contributions
- ◆ examine socio-political and intellectual transformation of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe
- ◆ describe the growth and development of Sociology as a discipline
- ◆ explain Positivism, scientific study of the society and the tools introduced by Comte

### Prerequisites

Humans, as you may know, have long been fascinated about the origins of their own behavior. You must have thought about society's weird ways at one point or another. You may be wondering why we must act in this manner? Why do we live in such a society? Why is the society of others so different? These are the questions that are bothering us right now. These questions have been addressed by both men and women. However, in the past, their attempts to comprehend themselves and society relied on religiously stated patterns of thinking passed down from generation to generation.

The scientific study of human behavior and society is a relatively new concept that may be traced back to late-eighteenth-century European society. The succession of dramatic transformations connected with the Enlightenment, the

French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution provided the backdrop for the new perspective. Traditional patterns of living were shattered, prompting those researching human behavior to generate fresh perspectives on both the social and natural worlds.

## Keywords

Enlightenment, Static, Dynamic, Positivism, Hierarchy, French revolution, Metaphysical

## Discussion

Auguste Comte is considered the Father of Sociology. He is the first one to have named the discipline with the term “Sociology”. “The word sociology is derived from the Latin word ‘socius’, which means society and the Greek word ‘logos’ which means study or science; hence Sociology is the scientific study about society. In 1814, he was accepted into the Ecole Poly-technique, one of the France’s most elite educational institutions at that time. The majority of the professors were mathematics and physics experts. They were uninterested in societal research. Auguste Comte, on the other hand, was deeply engaged in human affairs and the study of society because he was sensitive to the kind of social chaos that France was experiencing as a result of the Revolution. Comprehending Auguste Comte’s beliefs, one must appreciate how deeply he cared about the problems that plagued people and society at the time.

In 1824, he became a student and secretary to Saint-Simon an aristocrat by birth but a utopian socialist by conviction. Saint-Simon, who sparked his interest in economics, became a close friend. Consequently, Auguste Comte developed a general concept

of a science of society, which he dubbed Sociology, during this time.

Auguste Comte’s goal was to reorganize human society politically. Such reorganization, he believes, will be contingent on society’s spiritual and moral cohesion. As a result, he created numerous key concepts with Saint-Simon. Their partnership, however, was short-lived, and they eventually fell out. Later, in the *Course of Positive Philosophy*, Auguste Comte released part of his teaching notes. He created his concept of a ‘science of society’ and wrote about the law of three stages in this work. He discovered the notion of ‘cerebral hygiene’ while working on this book. This meant that he ceased reading other people’s works in order to keep his mind clean.

He authored a dissertation called ‘*System of Positive Polity*’ between 1851 and 1854. (4 Vols.). In this book, he used the insights of theoretical sociology to solve the social problems. During this time, he met Clotilde de Vaux, who would later become his close friend. His thoughts in *System of Positive Polity* went away from positivism toward the construction of a religion of humanity. As a result of this shift in philosophy, he

lost many of his intellectual friends and disciples, including J.S. Mill of England. He was so concerned about his role as a prophet of social regeneration that he even gave a document outlining ideas for reorganizing society to the Russian King.

## Biographical Sketch of Auguste Comte



*Auguste Comte 1798 - 1857*

Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte was born to Catholic royalist parents in Montpellier of Southern France on January 19, 1798, in the midst of the French Revolution, a massive series of events that heralded the dawn of the modern world. The following are a few of his intellectual contribution to the field of Sociology:

1. The Course of Positive Philosophy (1830–1842, six volumes, translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau as the *Positive Philosophy* of Auguste Comte.)
2. *System of Positive Polity, or Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity*, (1851–1854, four volumes)
3. *The Early Writings* (1820–1829), where one can see the influence of Saint-Simon, for whom Comte

served as secretary from 1817 to 1824.

Auguste Comte's works, however, were not recognized in France until his death. Only after his death in 1857 did he gain popularity in England, France, and Germany. The intellectual climate in France in the early nineteenth century was conducive to the emergence of fresh, critical, and rational ideas. The use and application of methods had produced a new confidence, and achievements in natural sciences and mathematics were a source of pride.

The French Revolution had resulted in a condition of perplexity subsequently. It led to a new order of society which required new order of feeling, cognition and action. However a solid foundation of knowledge was required for this rebuilding. Auguste Comte addressed the question, "What would this corpus of knowledge be constructed upon?" And Comte's response was that people must take initiative and discover a science that will present them with an alternate world perspective. Gods, religion, metaphysical forces, and conventional forms of belief and conduct could no longer be relied upon. People were now in charge of their own fate. They will have to create their own society. You might wonder, "How?" and it was in response to this question that Comte developed his core sociological principles.

Before moving on to the study of Comte's major concepts, let us discuss the influence of Saint-Simon on Auguste Comte. It is crucial to understand Saint-Simon (1760-1825) because many of Comte's theories were influenced by Saint-Simon's works. In fact, the two collaborated on scientificity of social science.

## Saint-Simon and his Influence

Saint-Simon was a French aristocrat and he was one of the first utopian socialists

(those who believe in a perfect society where everyone gets along and everyone has an equal share of resources and opportunity). He believed that the greatest way to tackle his society's problems was to reorganize production. Owners will be cut off from their means of production, and hence the capitalist class will be deprived of its property.

The feudal French society was divided into three estates, the first being the clergy, the second the nobles, and the third, the commoners. Among them, the top two estates possessed the majority of the landed property, as well as money and status. Saint-Simon wished to reform this social and economic framework.

Saint-Simon and Comte wrote about the law of three stages, which each branch of knowledge must travel through, in their joint work '*Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for the Reorganization of Society*' (1822). They claimed that the goal of social physics, or positive social science, subsequently renamed 'sociology', is to discover the natural and unchangeable rules of progress. These laws are just as significant to the social sciences as Newton's laws of gravity are to the natural sciences. The intellectual union between Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte was short-lived and ended in a furious feud.

### 2.1.1 Positive Philosophy

Auguste Comte not only spoke of Sociology as a social science, but also argued that it should be used to reorganize society. He aspired to create a naturalistic social science. This science would be able to explain humanity's historical growth as well as forecast its future events. Human society, he believes, should be researched in the same scientific manner as the natural world.

Auguste Comte believed that instead

of relying on tradition, the new science of society should focus on reasoning and observation. Then only it can be termed scientific. However, every scientific theory must be based on facts that have been seen. As a result, Comte's social science, sociology, was to be modeled after the natural sciences. He argued that natural scientific methods of investigation, such as observation, experimentation, and comparison can be used in social science. He did, however, introduce the historical technique in addition to the natural science methods mentioned above. This historical method (which differed from historians') was a positive step in sociology. The historical method compares cultures over time to see how they have changed and since sociology is cornered with historical evolution, it is placed as the heart of sociological investigation. Using the historical method, Comte hoped to discover social laws which he found necessary to restructure society. As a result, he believed that once the principles of human evolution is established, social action beneficial to humans becomes possible. According to Auguste Comte, these laws provide the foundation for social order.

### 2.1.2 Law of Three Stages

The evolution of the human mind, according to Auguste Comte, occurred simultaneously with the evolution of the individual mind. In other words, he believes that, just as each individual grows from a devout believer in childhood to a critical metaphysician (one who questions abstract notions of existence) in adolescence to a natural philosopher in adulthood, humans and their systems of thought have progressed through three major stages. According to Comte, "The law is this: that each of our leading conceptions, each branch of our knowledge, passes successively through three different theoretical conditions, the theological or fictitious; the metaphysical

or abstract; and the positive or scientific.”

These three stages of the evolution of human thought are:

1. The theological stage
2. The metaphysical stage
3. The positive stage

### **1. Theological Stage**

The mind explains occurrences in the theological stage by attributing them to creatures or forces that are akin to human beings. Human beings strive to discover the first and end causes (the origin and purpose) of all consequences at this stage. As a result, at this level, the human mind believes that all phenomena are caused by supernatural creatures acting in real time. Some tribes, for example, believed that diseases like smallpox and polio were manifestations of God’s wrath. Fetishism grew cumbersome as primitive man’s intellect became more ordered, and having too many fetishes caused confusion. As a result, they began to believe in multiple Gods and Goddesses, resulting in polytheism. Consequently, due to conceptual inconsistencies, the Gods were placed in a hierarchy. Finally, they came up with the concept of a single God, or monotheism. They began to believe in only one God’s incredible power. Feelings and imagination began to give way to reason and logic over time. Monotheism is the culmination of theological thought. This way of thinking worked well in a military society.

There were three sub stages to the theological stage.

- ◆ Fetishism – in this sub-stage, the life force is experienced in every object and thus there is absolute trust in magic and miracles.
- ◆ Polytheism – in the second sub

stage the human mind is better organized resulting in faith in numerous Gods and Goddesses representing different aspects of life.

- ◆ Monotheism – Due to numerous Gods and Goddesses the confusion continues thus man stops their devotion towards many Gods and Goddesses and devotes themselves to one God. Here the belief is that behind every action is the act of a single God.

### **2. Metaphysical Stage**

The mind explains phenomena in the metaphysical stage by invoking abstract entities such as ‘nature.’ These abstract creatures have taken on a life of their own. Human beings seek to understand and explain the universe in terms of ‘essences,’ ‘ideals,’ and ‘forms,’ i.e., in terms of some ultimate reality, such as God. During this time, rationalism began to take precedence over imagination. According to rationalism, God isn’t directly responsible for every occurrence. God, according to pure logic, is an abstract being. Reasoning aided man in discovering some sort of order in the natural world. Some principles were blamed for the natural order’s consistency and regularity. As a result, principles and ideas surpassed feelings and speculation. The metaphysical period began around 1300 A.D. and lasted only a few years.

### **3. Positive Stage**

The positive stage, in which observation triumphs over imagination, began at the turn of the nineteenth century. Anything that is affirmative is referred to as positive. It is, according to Comte, the final stage of mental evolution. The search for “original sources” about the existence of humans comes to an end here. Humans, on the other hand, begin to observe phenomena and establish regular



connections between them. As a result, in the positive stage, people look for social laws that connect facts and govern social life. The scientific method of thinking corresponds to the positive stage. He urged that sociologists adopt observation and experimentation-based research tools that are created by natural sciences. He claimed that techniques of physics may be used for the study of society. Positivism is a popular term for this approach. It is a scientific approach of investigation that rejects speculative analysis of social problem. Sociology can generate positive information by adopting a three-step process backed up by historical analysis.

- ◆ Observation- which must be guided by a theory of social phenomena
- ◆ Experimentation- which meant controlled observation in sociology
- ◆ Comparison- which included human to animal, society to society, like to dislike, and so on.

The historical approach must be used in conjunction with the traditional scientific procedures of observation, experimentation, and comparison. For Comte, the sociological method ensured that sociology was scientifically sound. The golden age of positivism, according to Comte, was the culminating stage of evolution, a new civilization marked by the uniformity of beliefs and emotions, allowing the greatest expression of human genius and activity but still being tempered by education and moral training.

In terms of human history, the theological stage of human thought was dominated by priests and ruled by military men in connection to political dominance. The Church men and lawyers dominated the metaphysical period, which closely corresponded to the

Middle Ages and Renaissance. Military ideals dominated theological and metaphysical stages, yet the former is characterized by conquest and the latter by defense. Industrial administrators and scientific moral advisors will dominate the positive period.

In terms of social unit, the theological stage had family as its most important unit, the metaphysical stage had state as its most important unit, and the positive stage had the entire human race as its most important unit. According to Auguste Comte, each stage in the evolution of human thought was inextricably linked to the one before it. The next stage emerges only when the old one has run its course. He also connected the three stages of human thought to the evolution of social organization, forms of social order, social unit types, and societal material conditions. He felt that social existence progressed in lockstep with successive shifts in human thought.

Auguste Comte considered that the most significant premise of his account of human progress was intellectual evolution, or the evolution of human thought. He did not, however, rule out the possibility of other causes. For example, he viewed human population expansion to be a primary determinant of the rate of social advancement. The more the population, the greater the division of labor. The greater the division of labor in a society, the more advanced it becomes. As a result, he saw division of labor as a major force in the social evolution process. Emile Durkheim developed his theory of social division of labor, which you will learn about in Block 3 of this course, following in his footsteps.

### 2.1.3 Hierarchy of the Sciences

A survey of the several established disciplines, according to Auguste Comte, revealed not only that human thoughts have progressed through the three stages

indicated before, but also that each subject has progressed in the same way. That is, each subject has progressed from a basic level to a complex level. He put forth a hierarchical arrangement of the sciences in a way which coincided with

- ◆ The order of their historical emergence and development
- ◆ The order of dependence upon each other
- ◆ Their decreasing degree of generality and the increasing degree of complexity of their subject matter
- ◆ The increasing degree of modifiability of the facts which they study.

In terms of varying degrees of complexity, generality and interdependency, Comte has classified the sciences. Mathematics is the simplest and less complex science placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, followed by astronomy. They are followed by physics, chemistry, biology, and lastly sociology. According to Comte, Sociology is considered as the most complex and dependent science.

Originally, Comte meant that the new science of sociology was the study of the entirety of human intellect and its ensuing social behavior over time in his positive philosophy. The new discipline brought together mind, society, and history. Sociology, in Comte's opinion, was not so much a study of the intellect as it was a study of the cumulative effects of human mind activity. Sociology arose as a result of humans recognizing a new set of objective facts about their society that they couldn't explain but needed to explain in order to deal with effectively, such as social problems, urban development, institutions, and so on. Auguste Comte was referring to the general unifying aspect of knowledge when he described Sociology as the "crowning edifice" of the hierarchy of sciences. He initially referred to it as social physics, but eventually changed it to sociology. He was making no claim to sociology's superiority.

#### **2.1.4 Social Statics and Social Dynamics**

Auguste Comte split sociology into two categories: static and dynamic sociology. The idea for this divide comes from biology, which fits perfectly with his ideas about

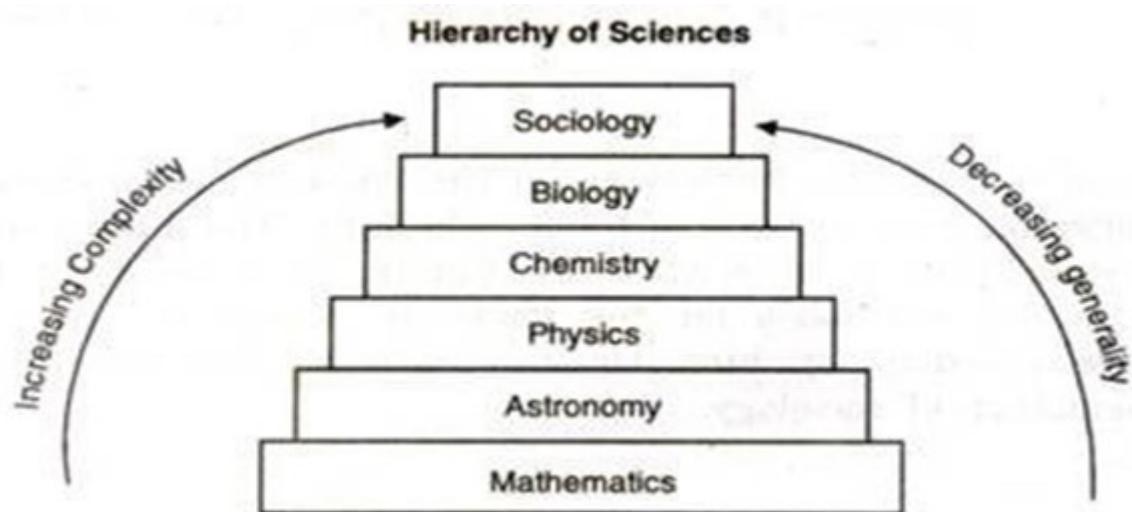


Fig 2.1.1 Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences

science hierarchy. Biology is a science that came before sociology and hence has a lot in common with it. Relationships between social institutions are referred to as social statics. Parts of society, according to Comte, are interwoven in a harmonic manner, much like the parts of a biological body. He was fascinated by the study of social dynamics, or the changing process. The study of social dynamics, according to Auguste Comte, could lead to societal improvements.

### **Social statics**

Social statics is a notion of order or harmony between the conditions of man's life in society. Social statics deals with the social order, stability and integration of the society. Comte rejected the study of people in this context, arguing that sociology is the study of social systems made up of homogeneous elements. He claimed that the family is the most fundamental social unit. The study of the structure of societies as well as the study of individual aspects was known as social statics. Static sociology studies the conditions of society's existence. It is especially good at helping people grasp the nature of social order.

Dynamic sociology investigates the continuous movement or laws of the succession of particular stages in society and examines social changes or progress in societies. According to Comte, dynamic sociology is a theory of social progress. It is a science which tries to discover the laws and principles underlying social change and progress.

Human development and social progress must be the starting point for the study of social dynamics, which must be subjected to social statics. The two causal corollaries of progress for Comte were population growth and the expansion of human mental capacity. He reasoned that progress may be seen in all parts of society—physical, moral, intellectual,

and political.

**The concept of Static can be logically divided into two parts:**

- ◆ The study of the structure of human nature
- ◆ The study of the structure of social nature

**The concept of Dynamics involves:**

- ◆ The theory of progress
- ◆ The law of three stages
- ◆ The inevitable evolutionary development of order

In a nutshell, social statics investigates the laws of coexistence, while social dynamics studies the laws of succession. Since societies are far more complicated and cannot be explained by simple conceptions of order and progress, Comte's differentiation between statics and dynamics, both related with the idea of order and progress, is no longer acceptable today. The ethos of the enlightenment age, in which these concepts developed, inspired Auguste Comte's viewpoint and these notions are not shared by modern sociologists. However, his essential sociological divisions of social structure and social evolution remain significant in contemporary sociology.

In Auguste Comte's idea of future society, sociologists were entrusted with a considerable deal of power and duty. The sociologist must form an academy of secular priests endowed with the new positive religion's spiritual force. These scientific sociologist-priests would serve as moral leaders, communal hubs, and educational directors. 'Live for others' will be the highest commandment in humanity's religion, with love as its fundamental premise, order as its foundation, and progress as its goal.

To summarize, Auguste Comte was not only a remarkable social scientist but a social philosopher in his day. He proposed principles such as the law of three stages, hierarchy of sciences, social statics and dynamics,

and positivism, as well as coined the term Sociology. His academic contributions formed the basis in founding Sociology as an academic discipline and he is regarded as the founding father of Sociology.

## Recap

- ◆ The word sociology is derived from the Latin word ‘socius’ and the Greek word ‘Logos’.
- ◆ Auguste Comte is the Father of Sociology.
- ◆ Saint-Simon believed that the greatest way to tackle his society’s problems was through reorganization of economic production.
- ◆ Saint-Simon claimed that the goal of social physics, renamed ‘sociology,’ is to discover the natural and unchangeable rules of progress.
- ◆ Positivism is a scientific approach of investigation that rejects speculative analysis of social problem.
- ◆ Auguste Comte split sociology into two categories: static and dynamic sociology.
- ◆ Social statics, is a notion of order or harmony between the conditions of man’s life in society.
- ◆ There are three sub stages to the theological stage; they are Fetishism, Polytheism, and Monotheism.
- ◆ In terms of varying degrees of complexity, generality and interdependency, Comte has classified the sciences.
- ◆ Mathematics is the simplest and less complex science placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, followed by Astronomy.



## Objective Questions

1. Who is associated with the work Law of Three Stages?
2. Scientific stage is also known as what?
3. Who is considered as the Father of Sociology?
4. What was the old name given to Sociology by Auguste Comte?
5. Which term refers to belief in one God?
6. What are the three important processes in Sociology to generate positive information?
7. What do you mean by the study of social order, stability and integration of the society?
8. Which is the concept that investigates the continuous movement or laws of succession of particular stages in society and examines social changes or progress in societies?

## Answers

1. Auguste Comte
2. Positive Stage
3. Auguste Comte
4. Social Physics
5. Monotheism
6. Experimentation, Comparison and Observation
7. Social Statics
8. Dynamic Sociology

## Assignments

1. Explain the growth and development of Sociology as an academic discipline.
2. Examine the influence of Saint-Simon upon Comte's positive philosophy.
3. Describe Comte's Law of Three Stages.
4. What is meant by the hierarchy of sciences, discuss with an illustration.
5. Differentiate between social statics and social dynamics.
6. Describe in your own words Comte's contributions in developing Sociology as a scientific discipline.

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## Herbert Spencer: Organic Analogy, Stages of Social Evolution

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the contributions of Herbert Spencer in Sociology
- ◆ explain the relevance of theoretical contributions of Spencer to contemporary Sociology
- ◆ comprehend organic analogy and social darwinism in explaining society

### Prerequisites

Every organ in the human body has an inevitable part in maintaining life. When all parts of a human/organism remain active and working, only then can we say it's functional. Here, all parts of human body as well as other organisms contribute to the wholesome function of the entity. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) an Englishman and Auguste Comte's contemporary, argued that Sociology has a unique association with Biology in the sense that society is like an organism in terms of its parts which contributes to the functioning of the whole. Spencer had come upon Comte's theories, but he didn't agree with them. Instead, he believed in the evolutionary theory of Darwin and founded his Sociology upon social darwinism and organic analogy. Let us further explore in detail the contributions of Herbert Spencer.

## Keywords

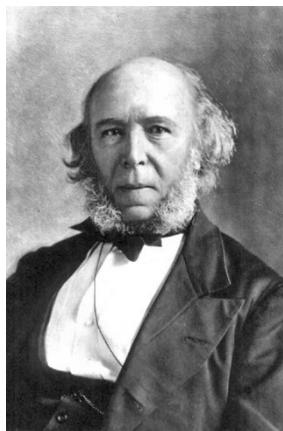
Biology, Function, Integration, Compound societies, Social darwinism, Evolution

## Discussion

Despite the fact that Spencer produced multiple works on Sociology, he never provided a precise description of the field. According to him, since the social process is

unique, Sociology as a science must explain the current state of society by understanding the earlier phases of development and applying evolutionary laws to them. As a

### Biographical Sketch of Herbert Spencer



Herbert Spencer 1820 - 1903

Herbert Spencer was born on April 27, 1820 in England. He was frail and unwell as a child. He never went to a conventional school but received his education at home. He was well-versed in mathematics and natural sciences by the age of 16. His first book, *Social Statics*, was released in 1850 and was favorably regarded by the intellectual community. He outlined the basic concepts of his sociological theory in this work. Some critics accused Spencer of plagiarizing Comte's concepts by using the term social statics. However, Spencer clarified that the terminology was his own, as he had only heard Comte's name and not his concepts. In 1862, another book titled *First Principles* was published. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species*. Spencer assimilated the new Darwinian concept which led to the publication of *Principles of Biology* (1867), the multi-volume work *Principles of Psychology* (1872), and the multi-volume work *Principles of Sociology* (1896). He had written an eight-volume study *Descriptive Sociology* (1873 to 1894) where he supported the laissez-faire or free market philosophy, which was popularized by English economists at the time. When he visited the United States of America in 1882, he achieved the pinnacle of his fame. However, he died as an unhappy man at the end of his life, believing that his life's work had not accomplished as much as he had hoped.

result, the evolutionary idea is at the heart of his argument.

We will clarify the meaning and importance of organic analogy after explaining this idea. You'll also learn about Spencer's classification of societies based on their evolutionary stage.

Spencer, like Comte, believed in and fought for evidence of a society, which was feasible because society was a system of cohabitation and progress. The components of that order may constitute the substance of science when there is order. This social science -sociology- is based on the super organic, or social evolution, as Spencer called it. All things in the universe were categorized into three groups by him: inorganic, organic, and super organic. According to him, Sociology was concerned with super organic or socio-cultural phenomena.

Though Sociology was a positive science for both Comte and Spencer, there were differences of opinion between them on the function of the new indicators of a society in the contemporary state. Unlike Comte, who intended Sociology to help men develop a better society in which to live, Spencer believed that the new science should not interfere with society's natural processes. All-natural phenomena have a tendency to better themselves, and civilization is no exception. Spencer, like Comte, saw history as having a significant part in the new science of society. What genuinely interests us to know, in Spencer's words, is society's natural history. According to him, history is what is known as descriptive sociology and fundamentally, sociology is a detailed description of social phenomena in evolution.

Now we shall discuss the major contributions of Spencer to the growth and development of Sociology.

## 2.2.1 Organic Analogy

Spencer extensively explained the organic analogy, which is the identification of a society with a biological organism, in great detail. Spencer noted several similarities between biological and social organisms, which are as follows:

- ◆ During the majority of their lives, both society and organisms are separated from inorganic matter by apparent growth.
- ◆ As society and organisms grow in size, their structures become more complicated.
- ◆ In both societies and organisms, progressive structural differentiation is accompanied by progressive functional differentiation.
- ◆ Evolution establishes distinctions in structure and function that allow societies and organisms to coexist.
- ◆ The life of a society and an organism is significantly greater than the life of any of its constituent components or elements.

Just as a living organism may be regarded as a nation of units that live individually, so a nation of human beings may be regarded as an organism.

Spencer went on to explain the contrasts between society and organism after describing the analogy.

- ◆ The parts of an organism come together to form a tangible whole. However, in a society, the parts are more or less free and dispersed.



- ◆ In comparison to the entire system, the components of society are not stationary and fixed in their positions.
- ◆ Unlike organisms, societies have no specific external form, such as a physical body with limbs or face.
- ◆ Consciousness is concentrated in a small part of the aggregates in an organism, yet it is diffused in a society.
- ◆ The elements of an organism exist to benefit the whole. In a society, the entire structure exists solely to benefit the individual.

The parts of an animal, he claims, make a concrete whole, but the parts of society form a discrete whole. The living units that make up the organism are in close contact, whereas the living units that make up the society are free, not in contact, and more or less widely separated. Spencer continued to use the organic analogy as a scientific foundation for his evolution theory.

Following this, Spencer came to believe that a society was more than just a label for a group of people. That is more than just a collection of people; it is a separate entity. The sum of its components is more than the sum of its parts. As a result, a house is more than just a pile of bricks, wood, and stone. It entails a specific part arrangement.

## 2.2.2 Theory of Evolution

Spencer's first and main concern was the evolution of social structures and institutions. He claimed that the evolution of human civilization is nothing more than a special case of universally applicable natural law, and that it is not unlike any other evolutionary event. In the end, the natural rule of development governs all universal events, both inorganic

and super organic. In the words of Spencer “evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to definite, coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation”.

Spencer constructed his three basic rules and four supplementary propositions within this framework of universal evolution, each building on the other and all based on the idea of evolution. The three basic laws are:

- ◆ The law of persistence of force
- ◆ The law of the indestructibility of matter
- ◆ The law of continuity of motion.

### **The four secondary propositions are:**

- ◆ Persistence of the relationship between the forces
- ◆ Transformation and equivalence of forces
- ◆ The tendency of everything to move along the line of least resistance and greatest attraction
- ◆ The principle of the alteration or rhythm of motion.

### **Spencer's philosophy recognized only two basic types: -**

- a. The unknowable or the absolute or unconditioned
- b. The knowable or the finite or conditioned.

Material aggregates make up the known cosmos. These material aggregates are in a state of evolution, which means they are always changing. Spencer developed the law of continuous redistribution of matter and

motion to explain this process, which asserts that every object undergoes some state of change from one moment to the next. When material aggregates are unaffected or just slightly impacted by external, disturbing factors, evolution is straightforward; it is compounded when the concentration of matter is significantly affected, changing the rate and course of its progression. He underlined how material aggregates have a universal propensity to migrate away from stability. In this context, he expounded the law of the instability of the homogeneous which states that the homogeneous is inherently unstable and bound to change.

### 2.2.3 Stages of Social Evolution

For better understanding, there are two distinct and interrelated aspects of Spencer's theory of evolution:

#### 1. The movement from simple societies to various levels of compound societies:

Spencer identified four types of societies based on their evolutionary stages:

Simple, compound, doubly compound, and trebly compound, with each differentiated by the degree of complexity of their social structures and functions. The uniform has a natural inclination to become multiform, and the homogeneous has a natural tendency to become heterogeneous. Compound societies, for example, arose from the aggregation of simple communities made up of families. Doubly compound societies emerge from the further aggregation of compound societies, which are made up of families united into clans. Tribes are structured into nation states that are trebly compound as a result of the aggregation of doubly compound societies, which consist of clans combined into tribes. Increased diversification of social structures into specialized functional systems is the

dominant trend in this universal evolution process, which eventually leads to improved integration and adaptation to the environment.

#### 2. The change from Militant to Industrial society

This classification system is based on the type of internal regulation that exists inside societies and its social structure with other societal relationships. A distinct form of evolution is envisioned from military to industrial society. For the better analysis, we shall take a look at it one by one.

##### a. The Militant Society

Militant societies are those whose primary means of organization are offensive and defensive military action. The following are the characteristics of such a society:

- ◆ Compulsory cooperation of human connections in such societies.
- ◆ There is a highly centralized power and social control pattern.
- ◆ The hierarchical nature of society is reaffirmed by a series of myths and beliefs.
- ◆ Life is characterized by strict discipline and a strong bond between public and private life.
- ◆ A tight stratification structure, economic autonomy, and state dominance over all social organizations.

##### b. Industrial Society

Military activities and organization are on the periphery in an industrial society. The majority of society is concerned with production and human welfare. Characteristics of an industrial society are as follows:



- ◆ Free trade and open system of stratification.
- ◆ Based on voluntary cooperation.
- ◆ Increase in the number of free associations and institutions.
- ◆ Decentralized government and strong acknowledgment of people's personal rights.

Individuals exist for the advantage of the state in a military society, but the state exists for the sake of individuals in an industrial society.

#### **2.2.4 Social Darwinism and Evolution**

Spencer did not believe that advancement is always the result of evolution. W.G. Sumner and Herbert Spencer were two of sociology's most ardent proponents of Social Darwinism.

Under the influence of Darwin, Herbert Spencer believed in the concept of "survival of the fittest." Like Darwin, he believed that nature had the ability to eliminate the weak and unfit. The healthiest and most intelligent people are the fittest. The state, in his opinion, was a "joint-stock business for the mutual protection of individuals." He believes that nature is cleverer than humans, and that the government should thus refrain from interfering with the evolution process. Claiming that the state intervention will bring harmful effects to the people's self help mentality, he requested that the government prohibit operations such as education, sanitary measures, harbor improvement, and so on.

For Spencer, the apex of all societies was laissez faire, i.e. a free market type society (with no government intervention—that is the principle of non-interference). As a result, we can say that Spencer's Social Darwinism was based on two key principles:

1. The survival of the fittest
2. The principle of non-interference.

According to Spencer, societies do not have to go through the same stages of development or become similar to one another. He stated that there were differences between different societies as a result of mental unease that caused evolution's straight line to be interrupted. Spencer believed in humanity's unilinear progression. He thought that the evolutionary process will ultimately lead to advancement. He stated that change, specifically the transition from homogeneous to heterogeneous, is reflected in civilization's progress.

Herbert Spencer also underlined the importance of taking a holistic picture of society. Sociology, he claims, encompasses the subjects of family, politics, religion, social control, division of labor, and social stratification. He placed a greater emphasis on the study of the whole rather than the study of the components. There are important ties between the various institutions. It is only through studying these interrelationships that one can hope to gain a better understanding of society. He stated that the many parts' interdependence was functional, meaning that each portion performs different functions, which is required for society's overall development.

## Recap

- ◆ Herbert Spencer is widely regarded as the second founding father of Sociology.
- ◆ The sociological ideas he contributed to the discipline of Sociology have left an indelible imprint on the academic world.
- ◆ Herbert Spencer believed in the concept of “survival of the fittest.”
- ◆ Like Darwin, he believed that nature had the ability to eliminate the weak and unfit.
- ◆ He explained society’s social evolution from simple to compound.
- ◆ Spencer through sociology considered that humans should not tamper with society’s natural processes.
- ◆ Spencer believed in the fundamental yearning for freedom and believed that any interference with it was detrimental.

## Objective Questions

1. Who is associated with the concept 'organic analogy'?
2. Who propounded the concept ‘Survival of the Fittest’?
3. Which theory explains the origin of society?
4. Who made the comparison between society and a living body?
5. Who coined the phrase “Social Darwinism”?
6. Which is the concept that explains the identification of society with biological organism?
7. Which is the final stage of society’s evolution by Spencer?
8. Who believed that ‘nature has the ability to eliminate the weak and unfit’?



## Answers

1. Herbert Spencer
2. Charles Darwin
3. Evolutionary
4. Herbert Spencer
5. Herbert Spencer
6. Organic Analogy
7. Trebly compound Society
8. Charles Darwin

## Assignments

1. Discuss organic analogy and emphasize its characteristics.
2. Describe the stages of social evolution.
3. Explain the basic laws of evolution theory.
4. Examine the secondary prepositions of evolution theory.
5. Spencer believed that ‘nature is cleverer than humans, and that the government should thus refrain from interfering with the evolution process’ Justify.

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**BLOCK**

**Georg Simmel**



# Formal Sociology, Sociation and Group Formation, Size of Group: Monad, Dyad and Triad

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand George Simmel's contributions to social theory
- ◆ have an overview of Simmel's approach to the study of society and his development of formal sociology
- ◆ narrate the insights of micro-sociology, interaction and social groups in society

### Prerequisites

Have you ever thought about group dynamics? How does social contact happen in a group? There are various components that interact with one another and produce various results. The number of people, distance, speed and time determines one's social contact. Does a social group have a specific objective? What happens if the population of a social group grows? The interaction of the group's members is significantly influenced by the group's size. Here, Simmel explains the background and features of social interaction required to form different social groups.

Georg Simmel was a 19<sup>th</sup> century German sociologist, philosopher and critic who was more concerned with the form rather than the content of social interaction. He makes it clear that Sociology is a subject that transcends the physical world and is not governed by natural principles. He developed the idea of seeing society as a network of structured interactions and said that Sociology's main goal is to understand how these interactions take place. He believed that in order to analyse social reality, sociology should concentrate on the patterns of human relationships.

## Keywords

Social interaction, Association, Sociation, Monad, Dyad, Triad, Formal Sociology

## Discussion

### Biographical Sketch of Georg Simmel



*Georg Simmel 1858 - 1918*

Georg Simmel was a German philosopher and early sociologist born in Berlin, he is renowned for his role as an idea innovator, a spectacular lecturer. He is also well known as a structural theorist who made great contributions to urban life and the metropolis. He had his studies at the University of Berlin and received his doctorate in Philosophy in 1881, which centers on the study of Immanuel Kant's theories pertaining to Philosophy. From an early age onwards as a student itself, his interest led his talent to spread across the disciplines of History, Philosophy, Psychology and Social Sciences. At the University of Berlin, he studied History and Philosophy. At the time, the scope of Sociology as a discipline had not fully emerged and was just beginning to take its place in academia.

After his degree, he began to teach Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology courses. Simmel began his academic career as professor at the University of Strassburg,

where he gained acclaim for his public lectures which had an international following. Despite his growth as a public sociologist, he was an excellent academician with a large student audience as well as public intellectuals; his style became well popular in academic circles. His popular writing, publishing articles in numerous newspapers and magazines, made him respected across various states.

Though Simmel's ground-breaking approaches rise alongside his contemporaries Marx, Durkheim and Weber, he was recognized for fostering his apprehension to break the then- accepted scientific methodology to understand the society. Thus, he was famous for producing social theories to study society that broke with the scientific method to examine the natural world. Simmel was greatly influenced by intellectual figures like Hegel, Kant, Spencer, and Comte. He was regarded as the founding father of formal sociology for pioneering the introduction of a new analytical approach to Sociology.

With the exception of his contribution to macroscopic conflict theory, he is well known as a micro-sociologist who played a great role in the development of small-group research. He is thus interested in studying the primary forms and types of social interaction that give him an advantage over the other pioneers. Later on, Simmel's contribution had a tremendous shift from micro- sociology towards a more precise general sociological theory. Nevertheless, his dialectical thinking

illustrates multi-causal, multi-directional concerns dealing with different realms of psychological, interactional, structural and institutional levels, ultimately focusing on the metaphysics of life.

He adds to his credit a number of books and hundreds of scholarly and popular articles, which have been influential in American sociological theory for time immemorial. It was Simmel's intellectual development and writing that shaped many other social theorists to move ahead in laying their theoretical foundations and in general, to the development of Sociology as a discipline.

### 3.1.1 Formal Sociology

Simmel was more interested in the structure of social interaction than its actual content. Simmel contends that there are many occurrences, deeds, relationships and other things that make up the real world. According to Simmel, the goal of the sociologist is to do exactly what the layperson does, namely impose a finite number of forms on social reality, and particularly on interaction, in order to better analyse it. This approach typically entails identifying commonalities that appear in a variety of specific interactions. In many different contexts, such as in "the state as well as in a religious community, in a gang of conspirators as in an economic partnership, in art school as in a family", the superordination and subordination types of interaction is found. Simmel's concept of social forms and his concept of social types were complementary to each other. A person's social type develops as a result of his or her interactions with others who place him or her in a specific position and have certain expectations of him or her. As a result, the social type's attributes are regarded as the qualities of social structures.

Simmel clearly constructs a 'Social Geometry' for deeply comprehending social relations in his formal sociology.

He stated that there are many ties in daily life, including various sorts of interactions with one another, rather than focusing on the analysis of economic and political linkages. Simmel argues that Sociology differs from other specialized disciplines in that it addresses the same topics from a different perspective – from the stand point of various social interactions. Numerous areas of social life such as the economic, political, religious, moral and artistic ones, exhibit competition, subordination, division of labour, and other social ties; nevertheless, Sociology dissociates different forms of social relationships and analyses them in abstraction. In fact, Simmel claims that Sociology is a particular social science that categorizes, analyzes and defines the various forms of social relationships.

At the individual level, Simmel focused on forms of association and paid relatively little attention to the issue of individual consciousness. Simmel clearly operated with a sense that human beings possess creative consciousness. The basis of social life to Simmel were 'conscious individuals or groups of individuals who interact with one another for a variety of motives, purposes and interests. This interest in creativity manifests in Simmel's discussion of the diverse forms of interaction, the ability of actors to create social structures, as well as the disastrous effects those structures have on the creativity of individuals. All of Simmel's discussion of the forms of interaction imply that actors must be consciously oriented to one another. Thus, for example, interaction in a stratified system requires superordinates and subordinates orient themselves to each other. The interaction would cease and the stratification system would collapse if a process of mutual orientation did not exist. The same is true of all other forms of interaction. Simmel believed that social structures come to have a life of their own; he realized that people must conceptualize



such structures in order for them to have an effect on the people. Simmel also had a sense of individual conscience and of the fact that the norms and values of society become internalized in individual consciousness.

As noted above, Simmel's formal Sociology explains about social geometry in which the two geometric coefficients that interested him are numbers and distance. In other words, Simmel is trying to prove how there is a common pattern in most simple interactions primarily based on numbers and distance. In fact, there is a logic behind every social grouping or interaction in general. It starts first of all with numbers, moving on to distance, speed and time.

**a. Numbers:** Mostly it constitutes how many people are involved in interaction. Definitely, the number of people that are involved in interaction has a sociological dimension or effect. Simmel, therefore, states that the number of different people involved in interactions has different effects. He divides this concept into dyads and triads, which you will see in detail in the subsequent sections.

**b. Distance:** Distance also creates and affects social interaction. It mainly stipulates the relationship between people and other people or between people and things. It determines the perception of an insider and an outsider.

Similarly, Simmel's concept of 'Stranger' is a great understanding of the phenomena of distance. Who is a stranger, according to you? In simple terms, we can say that it is someone who comes today and leaves tomorrow. Those with whom we are not close or familiar with. Do you agree? To your understanding you can perceive that if someone is too close, nobody considers them as strangers. On the other hand, if someone is not so close to you but too far, then you consider him a stranger. These groups of people don't know you and do

not keep close contact with the group any more. Therefore, distance is more important in Simmel's work.

**c. Speed and Time:** Same as that of numbers and distance, time also shapes the interaction type. Time mainly focuses on efficiency or competence. You are also well aware that the way people interact with one another can change over time. You can imagine if time is limited within an interaction, how it pushes people under pressure to interact with each other. It moves at a faster pace, and is less valued. Likewise, speed is also another form of time that forms an undesirable attitude.

### 3.1.2 Sociation

Simmel coined the term "sociation" which he considered to be the most important topic of study for society. In Simmel's words, "Sociation is the form in which individuals grow together into units that satisfy their interests. These interests, whether they are sensuous or ideal, momentary or lasting, conscious or unconscious, causal or teleological, form the basis of human societies". The term "sociation" refers to the specific patterns and ways in which humans interact and relate to one another. He believes that society is nothing more than the individuals that make it up. However, he has also highlighted the fact that people in groups of varying sizes—dyads, i.e., two people, triads, i.e., three people, or groups of more than three people—interact in different ways. With a rise in the number of people in a group, there is a qualitative change in terms of organization.

**Forms of Sociability:** - Society exists when a group of people engage in interaction (interaction is Simmel's key to everything), which originates on the basis of particular desires or for the sake of specific goals. In the empirical sense, unity (or sociation) refers to the interplay of elements (i.e., Individuals

in the case of society). Individuals are the centers of all historical reality, but elements of life are not social unless they encourage interaction. This is because only this sociation has the ability to shift from a collection of isolated individuals into distinct forms of being with and for one another.

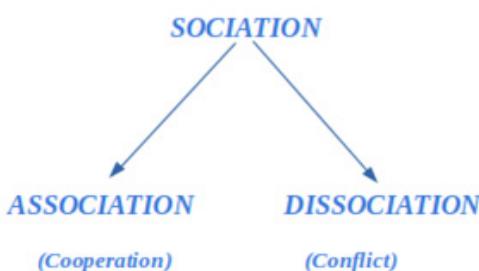


Fig.3.1.1 Georg Simmel's Sociation

Any social phenomenon is made up of two aspects that are, in actuality, inseparable, according to Simmel's famous form/content dichotomy (distinction is only analytical).

**a. Content:** The phenomena or interactions of interest, purpose, or motive.

**b. Social Form:** The mode of individual interaction through/in the shape of which specific content achieves social actuality. Furthermore, the existence of society necessitates reciprocal interaction among its individual units; mere aggregation of parts spatially or temporally is insufficient.

The task of Sociology, according to Simmel, is to separate these forms of connection or association from their contents analytically and to bring them together under a consistent scientific worldview. The two ideas underpin form/content analysis include:

1. The same form of sociation is observed in disparate contents and in relation to disparate purposes
2. Content is represented through

an alternative of distinct forms of sociation.

Simmel views sociology as the science of social forms. The urge for sociability embodies both the form and substance of social life, which are both seen as associative processes that provide value and enjoyment. The types of social interactions depend on the individual's wide range of personality attributes. It is crucial that the people do not overtly express their uniqueness. Therefore, it is necessary to remove from sociability the rudest and intimate personal traits. As it is said that there's an upper and lower sociability barrier for each and every individual, one should remove the objective aspects of their personality but restrain from exhibiting totally subjective and internal aspects of their personality.

### 3.1.3 Group Formation and Size of Group

Simmel is most known in modern sociology for his contributions to our understanding of forms of social interaction patterns. Simmel also made it clear that he was interested in a variety of relationships, some of which could seem unimportant at times but are crucial to others, and that one of his key concerns was conscious actor connection. According to Simmel, the goal of the sociologist is to impose a small number of forms on social reality and draw commonalities from a wide variety of specific encounters.

Simmel believes that the size of a group influences certain aspects of social life. For example, larger groups are associated with a higher level of structural differentiation (specific organs enhance and sustain the group's interests) and less personal connection. Simmel has classified social groups on the basis of the size of the group. The size of a group can have an impact on its dynamics and interactions. Simply, monad

refers to a single unit or one number, a dyad includes those formed by only two people and those formed by three people is a triad.

Social groupings come in a variety of sizes and shapes. You can visualize, for example, the family or your friend's circles that you belong to. Some of you might have a small family and much closer friend circle, while surely others have a large family and enormous circle of friends. As in this example, there are differences between various sorts of social groups. Similarly, each type of group influences group dynamics and relationships. However, to Simmel, the size of the group also has a considerable effect on these features of a group.

Georg Simmel wrote extensively on the distinction between a dyad and a triad. A small group, such as a nuclear family, a dyad, or a triad, is defined as a collection of people small enough that all members of the group know each other and share simultaneous interaction. In the first, if one person leaves, the group ceases to exist. Let us look at the interesting features of 'Group

Size' as shown in Figure 3.1.2.

Suppose you planned to attend a party and you arrived at the party as the first person, you can observe some fascinating group dynamics over there. After a while two or three persons joined. Now, commonly you share a single conversation with everyone. Little later, more people joined the party. What will you observe now? You can see that as more people arrived, the group divides into two or more smaller groups or clusters. Hence, what can you understand from this observation? Number matters and plays an important role. It is clear that size plays a crucial role in how group members interact.

In each group, increasing the number of people at a time magnifies the number of relationships than ever before. This paves way for every individual to interact with everyone already there. Thus, as Figure 3.1.2. shows, five people produce ten relationships whereas by the time, six people join one conversation, it connects 15 channels. As an adverse situation, this leaves too many people unable to speak; hence the group

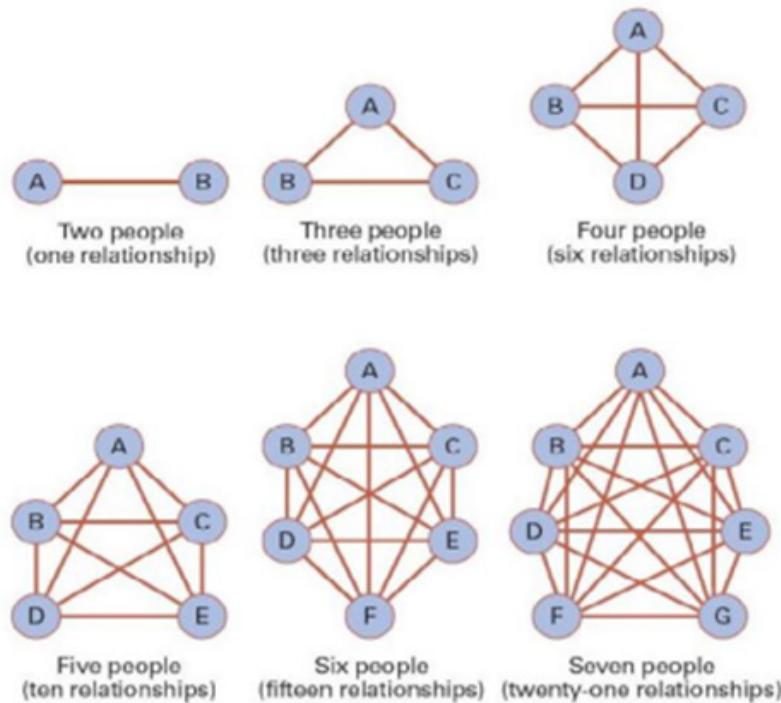


Fig. 3.1.2 Group Size and Relationships

usually divides at this point.

### 3.1.3.1 Monad

The term monad means a single unit or the concept of one as its essence. One to one conversation or the ego or self is a monad. It is considered as a microcosm or unit that reflects interpersonal relationships. The self's unique identity is patterned by the society and society's unity is maintained by its members' self- identities.

### 3.1.3.2 Dyad

A dyad is the most basic and fundamental sort of social group, consisting of merely two people. Dyads are the forms of interaction between two persons. These are also known as the most intense form of sociation. Throughout the world, romantic engagements or love affairs, familial ties through marriages, the closest friendships at schools or job places and other factors can all contribute to dyadic relationship. Let's consider another example, such that of a divorce. What happens in such relationships? It effectively terminates the "group" of married couple or two close persons.

What, therefore, makes the dyad a special relationship? As you notice from your personal experiences, what are the common peculiarities of the relationship between two people? What kind of relationships can commonly take place between two people when they are interlinked within a relationship? First, Simmel explained, social interaction in a dyad is typically more intense than in larger groups. Therefore, dyads are considered the most meaningful social bonds that we ever experience.

On the contrary, Simmel explained, dyads have another characteristic of instability. The connections can either be extremely intense or, at the same time, they can also be unstable and just temporary. There is

no independent group beyond the dyad themselves. Hence, one can see that when they disperse, the interaction disperses. It is highly essential that both members of a dyad should equally and actively help to sustain the relationship. What happens if one of them withdraws? The group may collapse. Hence, throughout our discussions, you can see that it also proves that for each dyad to work, both members of the group must work together and cooperate. The group will break apart if one person refuses to cooperate. Dyad retains high individuality with no sense of belonging.

### 3.1.3.3 Triad

A social group with three members is a triad, according to Simmel. Even if one individual leaves, the group continues to function. When there are three people in a group, two-against-one dynamics can emerge, and a majority opinion on any matter can be reached. A triad has a unique set of connections. In simple terms, if we add another person to a dyad, then it becomes a triad. A triad is thus said to be a social group made up of three individuals. The addition of a single new member to a group can dramatically alter the group interactions and dynamics.

A triad is more stable than a dyad because even if the relationship between any two members becomes stressed, the third can act as a mediator to reestablish the group's activity. Triads are said to be the foundations of all complexities, such as it involves competition, coalitions, or mediations or negotiations in any group that you see around you. For instance, in politics, in different parties you may see one join the other party or groups due to personal or political negotiations. Even it is visible in your friend's groups, one of them becomes the focal point of attraction for the other two. Also, you can notice that one may



take control over the other, much like the concept of Monopoly. It is necessary that if social structures are to be created, one dominates the other. For example, you can see it in the widely witnessed form where the majority tends to suppress the minority in most parts of the world. In spite of this, we can recognize that as groups grow beyond three members, they become more and more stable. You may also notice at the same time that, unlike small groups, an increase in group size typically reduces the intensity of personal interactions. Larger groups are thus based on fewer personal attachments and more on formal rules and regulations. Henceforth, larger groups, even keep on going over time.

### 3.1.3.4 Small Groups

“A small group is a system made up of three or more number of people who get together and interact with each other to achieve a shared goal.” This definition, defines the number of persons who make up this tiny group. Is it a restricted group, defined just by the number of individuals who make it up? Here are some characteristics of restricted groupings.

- ◆ The members of the group are all acquainted with one another
- ◆ They have a close relationship
- ◆ A member can, for example, name each of the other members and explain their everyday lives; the group prioritizes specific goals, and the members of the group work together to attain those goals
- ◆ Members form cordial bonds with one another; members grow dependent on one another even when they are not gathered together. In the group, several roles are formed. As a result, each member serves a distinct function.

Some members may serve as leaders, while others may serve as recruiters, laborers, or observers. In the group, unique norms or regulations arise. For instance, to retain membership status, an organization could require each member to attend weekly meetings. The group develops its own identity. It can, in fact, develop its own system of beliefs, practices, and culture through time. The small number of participants, face-to-face contacts, interpersonal growth, sense of belonging, formation of organizing processes, and systems of norms are the most often distinguishing feature of small groups. To have a thorough understanding, let us look at a few examples of small groups:

- ◆ Socialism: - You've certainly heard of socialism, but do you really know what it means? Only works in small, homogeneous groups, where each individual may directly experience the group's efforts and the benefits of socialism. It is any system in which a group of people share responsibility for the production and distribution of commodities and services.
- ◆ Aristocracies: - It is characterised by a very small size i.e., power in the hands of a few people. Beyond the absolute size limit an aristocracy cannot exist. Each of the particular members must know each other personally. The practice of primogeniture (hereditary rule or succession), as well as blood and marital ties, prevents the group from expanding. In the small group, the aristocratic class consciousness is often realized as against in a larger group.
- ◆ Religious Sects: The sense of belonging stems from the

recognition that they are a small group of a larger whole. They are a small group which is tied together by solidarity. The larger group serves as a background against which these sects can recognize their own unique character. A sect is a religious group that opposes another clerical group. Before being approved as a member of the sect, potential members must actively engage or participate in it. In a sect the members mingle freely with the group. Those who join the groups validate the rules and norms. They are not enforced through power structures by a set of leaders.

Small groups are known for their internal cohesion and sense of belonging. On the other hand they face a barrier to achieve larger goals. When they are up against larger groups, they may find it difficult to be heard or to be a force for change. In a sense, they are easy to overlook. A triad's relationships can be just as intense as that of a dyad's, but the group is usually more permanent and stable. When two persons in a triad disagree, the third person in the group can act as a mediator to help them to an understanding. That paves way to compromise even. If it fails, one individual can quit a triad and the group will still exist, unlike the one person

who remains after a dyad is broken. Another notable difference between dyads and triads is the division of responsibilities.

### 3.1.3.5 Larger Social Groups

There are a number of trends that arise as the membership of a group grows beyond three members. It's hard to define when a small group expands into a large one. It could happen when there are too many persons participating in a discussion at the same time. Alternatively, a group may join with other groups as part of a larger movement.

As the group grows larger, the intimacy and loyalty of the members decreases. Members of the group feel less committed and responsible because their ties are less intimate. In a large group, each member's contribution is less than it would be in a small group. Because of the difference of ideas and perspectives, a larger group is also less likely to form a compromise. From another perspective, large groups have more stability because the group can continue to exist even if several members leave the group. The bigger the group, the more attention it may get and the more pressure members can place on each other to achieve whatever goal they want. Simultaneously, the larger the group, the greater the possibility of division and lack of unity.



## Recap

- ◆ Society is nothing more than the individuals who compose it.
- ◆ A group is a state of cohesion where its members are linked to one another and to the group as a whole.
- ◆ Individuals in groups are connected to each other by social relationships.
- ◆ Two or more persons interact with one another, share similar characteristics, and have a sense of unity defines a social group.
- ◆ Simmel explains both the connection and tensions between the individual and society.
- ◆ The task of sociology is to study the particular forms of human interaction at an individual and small group level.
- ◆ To Simmel, size within the group forms the major group characteristics
- ◆ Social groups derive from innumerable sizes and ways.
- ◆ Particular patterns and forms in which human beings relate to each other and interact are termed *sociation*.
- ◆ The system of behaviors or processes occurring within or between social groups is referred to as *group dynamics*.
- ◆ People belonging to groups of different sizes interact differently from each other.
- ◆ Dyads and Triads form the smallest social groups.
- ◆ A group of two people is called a dyad.
- ◆ A group of three people is known as Triad.
- ◆ The interaction in a dyadic relationship is more intense.
- ◆ A triad exists to be more stable than a dyad.
- ◆ Smaller groups have strong internal cohesiveness and strong connection.
- ◆ In larger groups individuals become separated, distant and impersonal.

## Objective Questions

1. Who defined society as the complex web of patterned multiple relations between individuals in constant interaction?
2. Who coined the term ‘Sociation’?
3. Which term according to Simmel is defined as the specific pattern and ways in which humans interact and relate to one another?
4. Which term is defined by the use of the analogy of geometry as the study of forms such as a dyad – triad principle?
5. Who was one of the first sociologists to study the ‘size of a group and interactions’ among its members?
6. Who has given the classification of groups as ‘monad’, ‘dyad’ and ‘triad’?
7. Which factor was based on George Simmel’s classification of group as monad, dyad and triad?
8. Which is believed to be the least stable category of groups?
9. Could you give an example of a dyad?
10. Which relationship is considered relatively straight-forward that maintains an individual’s identity?
11. In which relations do the strategies of competition, alliances, and mediation take place?

## Answers

1. Georg Simmel
2. Georg Simmel
3. Sociation
4. Social geometry



5. Georg Simmel
6. Georg Simmel
7. Size of the group
8. Dyad
9. Marriage
10. Dyad
11. Triad

## Assignments

1. Explain Georg Simmel's approach of Formal Sociology to understand society.
2. Briefly discuss about 'Social geometry' to understand the patterns of human interactions.
3. Discuss Sociation.
4. Examine the formation of different size of groups with relevant examples.
5. Examine the major differences between smaller and larger groups.

## Suggested Readings

1. Ritzer, G. & Stepnisky, J. (2018). *Classical Sociological Theory 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. California: Sage Publication Inc.
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1. Timasheff, N.S. (1967). *Sociological Theory: Its Nature and Growth*. Third Edition New York: Random House.
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## Philosophy of Money, Fashion

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ familiarize Simmel's views on money and the economy
- ◆ expose the details of the book 'Philosophy of Money'
- ◆ identify the undesirable aspects of money in human interactions
- ◆ understand the perspectives of fashion as a concrete connection to social relations

### Prerequisites

What is the value of a pen? May be ten or fifteen rupees, right? Now, just think about the value of the first pen gifted to you by your dear one, it may be your father, mother, lover or others. How do you measure the value of that pen, now?

The value imposed on the pen is much beyond ten or fifteen rupees and the calculations of money. Thus, the philosophy of money becomes relevant and it is subjected to dynamic intellectual inquiry. The essence of money does not just lay in the regularities of market, commerce and profit. As money is the product of human civilization and the interactions, it should act as an instrument of better social interaction and human embracement. Money needs a philosophical explanation. So, 19th century German sociologist, Georg Simmel analyzed the changes in the status of money in social systems. Even today, sociologists and theoreticians discuss Simmel's philosophy of money because he theorized the overshadowing effects of money on the subjective elements of individual agency.

Do you have any idea why people copy or imitate the behaviors or styles of others? Why is it so? You might have also noticed that we copy people who are superior to us in some way. What is the major reason behind this? Do we copy or follow those we admire or envy because we think they're better than us? Furthermore, does every fashion, in its uniqueness, show concern for the people from whom we are distinguishing ourselves? To put it another way, does fashion indicate a connection between social jealousy and disrepute?

Simmel sees 'Fashion' as a prominent thought that needs to be overlooked from a different perspective to the study of concrete connections of social relations.

## Keywords

Economic exchange, Social interaction, Reification, Rationalization, Imitation, Dualism

## Discussion

### 3.2.1 Philosophy of Money

*Philosophy of Money* is a renowned book written by Georg Simmel in 1900 in Germany. This book is principally related to economic sociology. Kant, Marx, and Weber inspired his thoughts. The *Philosophy of Money* is a hybrid work of philosophy and sociology, perhaps a "philosophical anthropology". It is not an economic work; he focuses on the psychological and sociological effects of money as a cultural determinant.

As a theorist who follows structuralism Georg Simmel, proposes that money is a sociological phenomenon. It has a social nature. Money could be also considered as a social institution as it enables the exchange between people. When money is used as just a tool of exchange and when it is considered as the ultimate aim, it generates alienating effects.

Georg Simmel has a reflective view on

power and meaning of money in our society, more from the psychological, philosophical and sociological standpoints. He therefore views money as a metaphor and reason for human's social existence. He analyses the broader issue of money and value. At another level of his interest, he viewed money from a wider perspective that had profound impact on modern society as well as linked it with various other components of human life such as ownership, exchange, selfishness, skepticism, individual freedom, life style, personality, culture etc. His final argument therefore centers on the idea of seeing money as a specific component of life that supports us to understand the totality of life.

Let us examine the important traits of Simmel's theory:

#### a. Money as a means of social interaction

To Simmel, economic exchange is understood as a kind of social interaction.



Let's look at this with an example. In society, there are banks that stand as economic institutions. We depend on these monetary systems in need of money for availing educational loans, loans for construction of houses, for purchasing cars and many other necessities in life. Economic transactions carried out through banks more or less forms a structured pattern. It follows definite arrangements including rules and regulations. On the other hand, within your family also, your parents lend money to friends or neighbors out of personal relations. It is a kind of economic exchange. When the economic exchange takes place between individuals, it fixes the personal ties among one another. This strengthens the social interaction between individuals. Hence, money as an economic exchange becomes a kind of social interaction.

### **b. Money also causes impersonal interactions and manipulations**

Do you experience or feel how money replaces personal ties? Money has become the link that connects people. For instance, a person starts a business with the small capital available in his hand, the rest of the money he availed through other means such as banks, his personal links etc. Since, the personal connections become much wider among banks, government organizations, retail shops and peoples who had helped the person in his initiation of the business. Here you can notice that on one side there are economic relations and on the other personal ties develop conspicuously. Simmel, thus argues that personal ties get replaced through economic relations.

You may be familiar with the earlier well-known type of exchange that existed within the 'Jajmani-system' of the past societies. As the earlier known types of monetary transactions of the barter system were replaced, it paved way for new forms of exchange. To his concern "Money is subject

to precise division and manipulation". It becomes impersonal in the sense that it promotes human's rational calculation. As money becomes the predominant link connecting people, it substitutes personal ties between people

### **c. Money as a major means of exchange**

The modern world saw money as a major means of exchange. In the modern world, values have lesser roles and money is viewed as a means of exchange. The exchange of money results in economic and social growth of the economy. It is much beyond a standard value that embodies calculability, rationality and impersonality. Beyond its economic functions money maximizes individual differences.

Simmel clearly accounts the problems created by the money economy as money has a profound effect on the nature of human relationships. Within all spheres, its extensive use creates an account of calculability and rationality. This, in turn paved way to the decline of genuine human relations and alters social relationships to greater extend. He profoundly equates this with the attitude people commonly have around small towns and in cities. Even when small towns are typified by strong bonds and emotionality, modern city matches with narrow intellectuality that had reflective effect on calculability, division of labor and specialization. At this juncture, Simmel's general argument relates to the ever-widening nature of objective culture as against the decline in individual culture. It is money that leads to the supremacy of objective culture with a corresponding devaluation in individual culture. Thus, it is difficult to maintain individuality to this critical juncture. Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* commences with the discussion of money and the value it has created. Later the argument moves to the impact of money with regard to the 'inner world' of individuals and on

culture in specific.

#### d. Money and value

Simmel propounded general principles on money and value. He came out with an intriguing question ‘what makes things valuable’? This laid strong grounds for his work in analysis of his concept of money. The imperative point he accords is that the value of anything is determined normally by its distance from the actors. Rather than perceiving the importance of money, Simmel makes it clear that the impact of it on a wide range of phenomena receives much recognition, especially on the objective culture and “inner world” of the actors. Thus, Simmel’s argument greatly concerns that things are not valuable if it is easier or too close to obtain or if it is same as in the case if it is too difficult or distant to obtain. He therefore accords, objects are most valuable only when it took greater effort to attain it. What therefore then determines value to objects? He found it was time, scarcity, sacrifice and difficulties that provides value in getting objects. That is, greater the difficulty in obtaining an object the greater is its value. Simmel illustrates this with an example of the pre-modern and modern era with the existence of the exchange of goods and services under barter system that took place in terms of the value attached to land, honor, food etc. Later on, the monetary cost was purely determined with the advent of currency. Hence, money forms a single quantifiable metric in society though it has no intrinsic value of its own.

Although Simmel’s initial concerns on the principle of value of things stands high in terms of its difficulty in obtaining an object, however this difficulty of attainment has a “lower as well as an upper limit” in general. On the contrary, some endeavors are required to consider something as valuable. Though generally, things that are too close, easily attained and things that are too far, moreover

too hard or nearly impossible to acquire are also not considered valuable. According to Simmel, that admires or confronts most are valuable to us irrespective of our efforts to obtain them. Hence, he argues those things that are of greatest value are neither distant nor much closer. The common principle centers that value of things generally derives from the ability of people to distance themselves properly from objects. The factors such as the time that it takes one to obtain the things, its scarceness, the difficulties intricate in attaining it as well as the want to give up other things so as to acquire it are involved in determining the distance of an object from the actors. Hence, people often place themselves at a proper distance from the objects.

It is in this context of value, Simmel, conferred the economic value of money. In the modern economy, the value of money is attached to the objects which creates both distance from us and provides the means to overcome it. The universal fact therefore remains as that we cannot obtain them without having money of our own. More, the difficulty in obtaining money to obtain the objects therefore makes them valuable to us. In common parlance, once we attain abundant money, we can easily overcome the distance between ourselves and the objects. Finally, money plays an interesting purpose in creating distance between people and objects and provides the means to overcome that distance in particular.

The major arguments that influence Simmel’s discussion on money is based up on the following thoughts:

- ◆ Money can be regarded as the structural metaphor of human existence.
- ◆ The word ‘value’ is related to money and value has dual nature.
- ◆ Physicalization, universalization



and commodification of value happens.

- ◆ Valuation and commensurability happens in human relations, through money.

With these important subject matters, Simmel then moves on to examine how money accomplishes value and becomes a crucial category in individual's life. Ultimately, he argues that value is not something that is assigned inherently but a human creation. He makes the idea clear by stating the relationship between the universal and the particular. Nevertheless, money is well-known to us, in the way in which we see it, feel or count but yet a concrete existence that lacks profound "cognition". Here Simmel's idea comes close to the Kantian arguments about how values commonly affect our cognition about the world. As money had a far-reaching impact and form the necessary foundation of everything, it ultimately helps in synthesizing values that are diverse and incommensurable.

For example, usually, humans assign values to many things in their lifetime to food, pet animals, sexual relationships, bond of friendships, but in various circumstances and distinct cultures, these values are roughly comparable since it is less quantifiable and exchanged. Therefore, the values are not assigned to us by nature, nevertheless it is human-generated in the most chaotic manner. Hence, it is not natural existence that inferred value to objects, thoughts or events and moreover the values diverge widely from the natural settings due to the commencement of money. Simmel accords that it is this intrinsically valueless currency (referred as money) that makes immeasurable systems of value measurable. People thus simply relates their values in accordance to quantified monetary figures. And in terms, they built an exchange based on the two value systems.

The economic value forms the basic aspect of all known existence, interdependence and interaction of everything in society. Henceforth, the indispensable role and quality of money becomes more coherent. For which the value of things is taken-for-granted in terms of their economic interaction, all of which had embodied in the single and purest expression of money. Thus, money in its purest concept has accomplished the final stage. It is regarded nothing other than its pure form of exchangeability. It exemplifies that the value of meaning of things by virtue of which ought to become economic, which finally comprehends to the totality of money itself.

#### e. Money and freedom

We had discussed money's central role in creating value systems and seen its quantifiable nature within every element in the system. You can see that in the first part Simmel covers *The Philosophy of Money* with more of an analytical approach and therefore he now expands his ideas and moves into larger ideas of economy and modernity. From the very title "Individual freedom" Simmel points out that though money made possible universal exchanges and specialization in society through monetary benefits, individuals face greater freedom of individualization or self-identification.

In *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel enunciated the fundamental fact that money signifies personal freedom. Economic obligations limit freedom. The same example that we look at earlier related with the barter system can also be well explained in terms of money and personal freedom. The peasants were tied to the land of their feudal lords and dedicated to giving a part of their cultivated products in return to the lord. Thus, they exchange cattle, wheat or maize in return for their service with greater loss or troubles. On the other hand, when it comes

to economic obligations, the peasants were free to cultivate the crops that they intend and involve themselves in any other activities as they indulge to pay the tax. Therefore, in an economic system, money sanctioned relationships become more impersonal and insignificant. Thus, money is advantageous to freedom. In effect, it encourages individuals to experience independence and self-sufficiency. Simmel accorded that there occurs strong inter-relationship between money, economy, rationality and individualism. Here the term, rationality means the act of justifying one's own beliefs with one's own reasons and actions, that is regarded as the state of having sound judgment and consistent logic. Whereas individualism have been associated with one's own interests and individual characteristics which rely on individual's freedom and self-realization.

The essence of his thought on money creates the notion that man becomes a calculating machine as money permits rational calculations. It has significantly become “the most frightful leveler that replaces human personalities with impersonal relationships. Moreover, he saw the money economy transforming man to become a calculating machine that destroys all the human sentiments, emotions and symbolism.

### **3.2.1.1 Money, Reification and Rationalization**

In the earlier sections we explored about the process of creating value by money. Now, let us look at two prominent concepts associated with money such as ‘Reification’ and ‘Rationalization’. In any economy, money creates value by allowing a wide range of calculations, long-term credits and large-scale enterprises. It paves way for the modern economy, development of markets and capitalist society. We may notice that it stands quite different from that of the earlier systems of barter or trade. Money

is thus the product of the reified world that has developed absolute freedom from everything personal. To Simmel, the process of reification began to exert a control over the individuals. Besides, money not only creates a reified social world but it also contributes to increasing the rationalization of the social world. Simmel saw money as an economic emphasis on quantitative aspects rather than qualitative factors. It would be easy to illustrate the categorization of quantity over that of quality with examples.

There are a multitude of examples that would illustrate the example of quantity over the term quality. We can simply attribute quantity as the amount or number of something. To put it in another way, we can just say how many items or things you have. Rather quality is of value of the items or things that you possess or have. Here, in this case, Simmel saw that in the case of money, volume matters more than value. Mostly, humans in their lives tend to believe that having a vast number of products is preferable to having a few high-quality ones.

### **3.2.1.2 Social Effects of Money**

Simmel’s perspective, while pessimistic, is not entirely negative. Individual independence decreases as money and transactions increase, as he or she is drawn into a holistic network of exchange governed by quantifiable monetary value. Surprisingly, this results in greater individual potential freedom of choice, as money can be spent on any possible goal, even if most people’s lack of money keeps that potential low most of the time. Money’s unifying nature promotes greater liberty and equality.

Simmel’s work on *The Philosophy of Money* greatly deals with his apprehension of money and its social meaning. This major work is concerned with the effects of money



on people and society. Simmel sketches money as a social phenomenon.

Simmel evaluates the impact of the money economy on the inner world of actors and the objective culture as a whole in *The Philosophy of Money*. Money, according to Simmel, is linked to social phenomena such as trading, ownership, greed, luxury, cynicism, individual liberty, lifestyle, culture, and the value of one's self. He claimed that individuals create value by creating items, distancing themselves from those objects, and then attempting to overcome distance, hurdles, and challenges. Money is used to establish distance between objects as well as to provide the means to overcome that distance. Money offers the means for the market, economy, and, eventually, society to take on a life of their own that is independent of and coercive of the actor. As money transactions became a more vital aspect of society, Simmel observed the importance of the individual diminishing. A society in which money becomes an end in itself can cause individuals to become increasingly cynical (distrustful) and to have an indifferent attitude.

Personal identification becomes a problem at the same time, the growth of the money form has both positive and negative implications. Individual freedom is greatly increased, yet alienation, fragmentation, and identity construction remain as major issues.

### 3.2.2 Fashion

Although much has been written about fashion in the twentieth century, coherent and broad theories of fashion are scarce. Perhaps, the only true attempt at a broad fashion theory and the finest is still one of the beginnings of Georg Simmel's approach.

Simmel considers fashion as evolving in the city. "Because it intensifies a diversity of social interactions, accelerates the pace

of social mobility, and allows individuals from lower strata to become conscious of the styles and trends of upper classes". Are you conscious of fashion? What fashion best describes you? What are your favorite fashion trends? Which fashion do you opt to follow in your dressing style or behavior-traditional or the modern, western or ethnic ones? Are you a fashionable person? We all make a particular form or have a manner of doing things. Am I right? Please say a few opinions on your fashion imagination? Fashion is nothing other than the 'style'. You all observe and follow the popular and latest style whether in your clothing, hair styling, eating habits or behaviors etc. We keep our own individuality in selecting our fashions. These are all things that you see on an everyday basis that best defines you.

According to Simmel, Fashion (non-cumulative change in cultural elements), arises from a fundamental conflict unique to the human social context or condition. On the one hand, we all have a propensity to copy others. On the other hand, we have a strong desire to set ourselves apart from others. Without any doubt, some of us have a tendency for imitating (and therefore to rely upon conformism), while others have a tendency for distinctiveness (and thus to irregularity and disobedience), but anyhow to add, fashion's flux requires both of these opposing qualities to function. Simmel claims, in summary, that we must imagine or assume two radical principles that he relates to human nature.

Two instincts (among others) drive Humans: one that pushes them to imitate or mimic their neighbors, and the other that pushes them to differentiate apart. On the one side, people tend to mimic those they admire. But on the other end, they tend to distinguish themselves from those with whom they are indifferent or who they dislike.

For example, in his work on fashion,

Simmel states that fashion is a type of social relationship that allows those who want to conform to do so while simultaneously establishing a standard from which unique people can deviate. People take on a range of social roles as part of the fashion process, which are influenced by the decisions and actions of others. People are influenced by both objective culture (what people make) and individual culture (individuals' ability to produce, absorb, and manage elements of objective culture) on a more general level.

Simmel shares Spencer and Veblen's viewpoints of fashion and observes that fashion is a kind of social harmonization or balancing and imitation, but that, paradoxically, by always changing, it distinguishes one time from another and one social strata from another. Fashion would have no relevance or be irrelevant in a traditional and small circle environment. Because modern people are often cut off from traditional forms of social support. Besides, fashion helps them to convey or express their own identity, values or beliefs. Fashion, according to Simmel, is the greatest arena for people who lack autonomy and require help, but whose self-awareness necessitates that they be acknowledged as different and unique kind of persons.

Simmel sees fashion reflects nothing more than one of the numerous forms of human life through which we endeavor to integrate the drive toward social equality (i.e., equal opportunity) with the need for individual differences and change in uniform realms of activities. Let us now look into the more detailed explanations for the concept of fashion, perceived by the theorist. There are two forces at work in every social relationship: one that pushes us to imitate others, and another that pushes us to distinguish ourselves from others. However, social life evolves in the sense that the balance between the socializing

and de-socializing forces is not always stable. It tends to be inherently unstable and temporary. Fashion is an illustration of how real social life always comprises its totally opposite forms. Therefore, we can say that, the dynamics of these two opposites produces fashion. However, fashion exists only to the extent that neither of the two extremes finally wins.

In essence, we can finally come to an idea that fashion is the result of a constantly unstable balance between the two poles or opposites. Fashion is thus an example of how real social life always contains its polar opposite, asocial life, in some way.

In the following sections we are going to describe the peculiarities of fashion and the impact of it on contemporary society. From the above-mentioned dialogues and discussions you may be able to catch up the fascination of fashion being explained. As fashion expands, it eventually dies out. The peculiarities that the fashion had in the earlier stages of a set of fashion gets eroded as the fashion spreads. At the same time, you may also notice that as these elements fade or decline, the fashion is likely to disappear.

- ◆ Fashion satisfies the desire for social adaptation by imitation.
- ◆ Fashion takes the individual to a path that creates a general state, at the same time reduces everyone's behavior to a single condition.
- ◆ It satisfies the desire for differentiation, the propensity towards dissimilarity, the desire for change and in addition a newer trend (of fashion)
- ◆ To observe in detail, fashion differs between the various classes of the society as fashions of the upper and lower strata of society are never alike in nature.



### **3.2.2.1 Essential Tendencies of Fashion**

Let us take an example, the impulse to imitate - and thus to undergo, to unify or to equalize directs towards our fashion. You were crazy in following the fashion of a film actor or actresses or at times you may go blindly following a popular fashion, whether it be western or foreign, or you observe the latest trends of your colleagues, educators or those whom you give special preference, considering as role models etc. By knowingly or un-knowingly you are imitating them in some or the other.

‘Imitation’ represents the essential tendencies of fashion. You may have noticed that a child’s mimic or imitates the sounds, actions or behaviors of others (elders, sounds of birds or animals etc.). Therefore, imitation is defined as the act of copying of something. According to Simmel, fashion is derived from a basic tension, specific to the social condition of the human being. Primarily, every individual has the tendency to imitate others, we also have a tendency to distinguish ourselves from others.

### **3.2.3 Criticisms**

Simmel is criticized for his work’s fragmented nature. He didn’t come up with a systematic sociology as Marx, Durkheim, or Weber did. Simmel is blamed by Marxists for failing to identify a way out of the cultural tragedy, which is an analytic analogue of Marx’s concept of alienation. In some ways, Simmel’s sociology resembles those of the other great writers, but he had less to say about social structure and dynamics than Marx, Weber, or Durkheim. He did speak about objective culture, and his writings on money are similar to Weber’s reasoning. His perspective of society, focus on social interaction, and studies on the city are important contributions to current sociology.

Thus, to conclude, Simmel observes Money as the base and metaphor of human social existence. Simmel, as a sociologist, was shocked and overwhelmed by the absolute power and meaning of money in society. He wanted to seriously acknowledge the range of danger, injustice and inhumanity that is happening in the economic circles. He was also vigilant about the effects of Metropolis and modernization in everyday lives. By observance, “Fashion is a product of class distinction too”, according to Simmel’s principle. For fashion to exist, society must be stratified, with certain people regarded as inferior or superior - or simply as worthy or unworthy of imitation. You had learned about the basic concepts in sociology such as social stratification, social mobility and class in earlier modules. Similarly, when it comes to fashion, Simmel argues that it is always the ‘inferior’ one who imitates their ‘superiors’ and it never happens vice versa. Thus, fashion - i.e., the newest one in social forms, dress, aesthetic judgement, and the entire style of human expression influences simply the upper classes.

Simmel also discusses the need for fashion to differentiate classes and social standings. We wouldn’t need fashion if we didn’t have this demand for social difference. Simmel adds, the major ideas that describes fashion as; imitation are either following a trend or completely rejecting it. Though imitations of certain group tend to follow, however the complete rejection also satisfies individuals demands to be distinct and different. Simmel actually explains a number of aspects of how fashion relates to people’s inner and outside problems. The most significant is the effort to find a balance between fitting in with and stepping out. Fashion, therefore either benefits or hinders this struggle, and it is centered on itself. There would be no fashion if both desires were not satisfied.

## Recap

- ◆ Simmel's major work centers on the social meaning of money.
- ◆ The *Philosophy of Money* was Georg Simmel's magnum opus.
- ◆ Money as a symbol influenced people and society and is a unique social object.
- ◆ Money is nothing, but it flows everywhere and mediates everything in the world.
- ◆ Modern society concerns money as an impersonal or objectified measure of value.
- ◆ Money allows greater flexibility for individuals in society.
- ◆ Alienation, fragmentation and identity construction are its negative effects.
- ◆ Fashion is merely a product of social demands.
- ◆ Fashion comes about because of social needs and wants.
- ◆ Fashion is a particular form of social relationship that allows those who wish to conform towards it to do.
- ◆ Fashion attempts to a need for continuity, unity and similarity.
- ◆ Fashion has the desire for change, specialization and uniqueness.
- ◆ Fashion is a form of imitation and of social equalization.
- ◆ Fashion provides the rule for individuals to both imitate and differentiate.
- ◆ Fashion relates to the inner and outer struggles that individuals have.
- ◆ The struggles either balance to fit in or stand out.
- ◆ Fashion is a product of class distinction too.
- ◆ The dual function of fashion also promotes the desire to unionize and for isolation.
- ◆ There would be no fashion, without the need to satisfy both the desires.



## Objective Questions

1. In which way is Simmel best known to sociology?
2. Who authored the famous work ‘The Philosophy of Money’?
3. What is Simmel’s basic approach to studying society?
4. According to Simmel, which concept is defined as “the principle that everything interacts in some way with everything else”?
5. According to Simmel, which term is defined as the study of the essence of money as a social phenomenon and its impact on the world of things, the world of people, and the individual’s inner world, according to Simmel?
6. According to Simmel, which aspect of life helps us understand the whole?
7. Which concept of Simmel is defined as a particular form of social relationship that allows those who wish to conform to it to do so and also to deviate from it?
8. According to Simmel, fashion is a product of what?
9. On what basis does fashion come about?
10. What term is called for is a way for people to pass the responsibility of creativity off, according to Simmel?
11. Which are the major dividing lines between social strata in fashion?
12. What does fashion suggest that everyone needs to possess?

## Answers

1. Micro Sociologist
2. George Simmel

3. Methodological Relationism
4. Methodological Relationism
5. Philosophy of Money
6. Money
7. Fashion
8. Social Demands
9. Social needs
10. Imitation
11. Mimic and differentiate
12. Dualism

## Assignments

1. Briefly discuss about Simmel's perspectives on economic exchange as a kind of social interaction.
2. Examine the statement 'what make things valuable'?
3. Explain the relationship between money and freedom.
4. Briefly discuss about the social effects of Money in the contemporary society.
5. Critically evaluate the role of fashion as a product of class distinction.



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**BLOCK**

**Karl Marx**



# Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ familiarize Karl Marx's biographical sketch and its influence in developing Marxian perspectives.
- ◆ acquaint with Karl Marx's revolutionary ideas.
- ◆ comprehend Hegel's and Karl Marx's approaches to analyse social circumstances.

### Prerequisites

Did you think about how social changes happen? What forces are behind social development? For centuries, it's been a matter of debate among philosophers and social thinkers. For Hegel, the German philosopher, ideas are the sources of change and truths can be found in ideas. Hegel's intellectual tradition is known as dialectical idealism. To reveal historical realities, Hegel applied 'dialectical idealism' and interpreted it accordingly. Karl Marx, the classical sociologist and the revolutionary social thinker accepted the dialectical aspects of Hegelian philosophy but opposed it in terms of its idealism. For Marx, not ideas but matter or material aspects of human life operate as the sources of change.

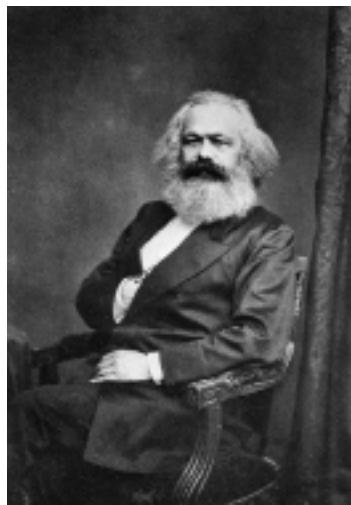
Marx's theory of historical materialism encapsulates his general ideas about society. His sociological thought is based on materialism because material conditions or economic factors influence the structure and development of society. Material conditions, according to his theory, primarily consist of technological means of production, and human society is shaped by the forces and relations of production. Materialism simply means that the basis for any change is a matter or material reality. In this unit, we will discuss the origin and development of Marxian concepts of dialectical materialism and historical materialism.

## Keywords

Dialectics, Idealism, Materialism, Economic determinism, Class struggle.

## Discussion

### Karl Marx-Biographical Sketch



Karl Marx was born in May, 1818 to Henrietta Marx and Heinrich Marx. Heinrich Marx was a lawyer and the head of the bar in Trier, Germany, where he was born and raised. The revolutionary disciple was raised in a wealthy bourgeois family by a highly educated lawyer who was a disciple of the Enlightenment. When he moved to Berlin in 1835, he enrolled at the University of Bonn to study law, where he quickly became enamored with Hegelian philosophy.

When Karl Marx was twenty-three, he received a doctorate in philosophy from Jena's University of Science and Technology. After finishing his studies, he began writing for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a radical, left-wing publication in Cologne, and eventually became its editor in 1842. The years 1843-1845 in Paris were pivotal in Marx's intellectual development, comparable

to his German years. He wrote a lot about "alienation," "estrangement," and "loss of being," which are all Hegelian themes. These *Paris Manuscripts* were destined to be important papers in his posthumous legacy to Western culture. Marx married Jenny von Westphalen, a childhood girlfriend from a higher social class, prompting her family and friends to criticize and despise him.

### Intellectual Influence of Marx

Many philosophers influenced Karl Marx during his formative years as a student at the University of Berlin through their thoughts and work. The foundational among them is the philosophy of Hegel, precisely a theory of self-fulfillment, of the culmination of 'our perfection.' However, Marx found the philosophy of Hegel intriguing and inclined his ideas against the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Shortly after arriving in Berlin, he became an iconoclast (a person who attacks settled beliefs or institutions) and bohemian (a person such as a writer or an artist living an unconventional life usually in a colony with others) and part of intellectual group (later known as the Young Hegelians) and began studying philosophy. After completing his studies in 1841, he worked as a journalist for, and subsequently as the editor of, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a radical bourgeois daily known for its radicalism. Unfortunately for Marx, Tsar Nicholas I of Russia happened to read an attack on himself that Marx had written. He was able to persuade the Prussian

government to shut the newspaper.

However, some of the unknown people he met were more influential in his personal development than others, mainly the socialist artisans and Friedrich Engels, the heir of a German industrialist. According to Marx, his discovery of socialism and Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and James Mill distinctly distinguished himself from his Young Hegelian mentors. They set the groundwork for his theoretical system. But, unfortunately, only two of the three manuscripts he wrote in this period were published: *The Holy Family* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

Marx's ideas about private property remain undeveloped in the Manuscripts, which rest on the concept of alienation. Conversely, he is more interested in explaining what he perceives as the consequences of people's loss of control, along with the resulting worldwide need for revolution.

#### 4.1.1 Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism

Let us move into the intellectual contributions of Karl Marx. Did you hear about dialectical materialism and historical materialism? What do they mean for you? To understand Marx's work, we need a prior understanding of the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. The idea of a dialectical philosophy had been around for centuries. Its basic idea is the centrality of contradiction. While most philosophies, and indeed common sense, treat contradictions as mistakes, dialectical philosophy believes that contradictions exist in reality and that the most appropriate way to understand reality is to study the development of those contradictions. Hegel used the idea of contradictions to understand historical change. According to Hegel, historical change has been driven by the contradictory understandings that are the essence of reality,

by our attempts to resolve the contradictions, and by the new contradictions that develop.

Marx also accepted the centrality of contradictions to historical change. Unlike Hegel, Marx did not believe that these contradictions could be worked out in our understanding, that is in our minds, instead, these are real existing contradictions. For example, one of the contradictions within capitalism is the relationship between the workers and the capitalists who own the factories and other means of production with which the work is done. The capitalist must exploit the workers to make a profit from the workers' labor. The workers, in contradiction to the capitalists, want to keep at least some of the profit for themselves. Marx believed that this contradiction was at the heart of capitalism and that it would grow worse as capitalists drove more and more people to become workers by forcing small firms out of business. Moreover, the competition among the capitalists forced them to further exploit the workers to make more profit. As capitalism expands, the number of workers exploited, as well as the degree of exploitation increases. This contradiction can be resolved not through philosophy but only through social change. The tendency for the level of exploitation to escalate leads to more and more resistance by the workers. Resistance begets more exploitation and oppression, and the likely result is a confrontation between the two classes.

#### Hegel and Marx

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was a German philosopher who reigned supreme over the entire intellectual horizon of his generation. Marx's time in Berlin transformed him into a Young Hegelian as a result of the influence of Hegel's philosophy on the Berlin University community. In Hegel's philosophy, the idealist tradition that began with Kant was brought to a close;

it held that the essence of reality is reason, but that the spirit of reason manifests itself only gradually, revealing ever-increasing facets of itself over time. The significance of historical interpretation, historiography, and historicism had a significant impact on not only Marxist perception, but virtually every other system that emerged from early nineteenth-century German philosophy as well. ‘History is the development of Reason into the consciousness of itself,’ Hegel argued persuasively, and the constitutional-legalistic state represents the culmination of history. The adoption and adaptation of Hegel’s “dialectics” by Marx, however, was the most significant development in the history of Marxist ideology.

In contrast to Hegel’s idealism, which believed that truths could be found in ideas, Marx believed that ideas were not the realm of truth, but rather that matter was. Hegel’s system could be described as “dialectical idealism,” whereas Marx dedicated his life to the development of what came to be known as “dialectical materialism,” which was coined not by Marx but by his followers. Marx, like Hegel, was interested in the inquiry into the nature and meaning of history, and also the truth of history; however, unlike Hegel, Marx believed that a “materialistic” analysis of history, rather than an “idealist” approach to history, would reveal the truth of history. Often used to illustrate the Marxian corrective to Hegelian idealism, the image of “turning Hegel upside down” or “standing Hegel on his head” is a popular one.

Marx’s passionate response to Hegel’s idealistic interpretation of history, which attributed a major determining role to the progressive evolution of ideas, appears to be this materialistic emphasis. Marx would not attribute an independent, determinate cause to anything. For them to be believed, ideas or philosophical conceptions must play a role. Changes in social and material life

were reflected, not caused. In this context, two points must be emphasized. First, Marx had no issue with Hegel’s dialectical logic; what he objected to was Hegel’s philosophy’s “idealistic trammel.” Second, while Marx opposed Hegelian idealism by emphasizing the importance of material conditions, he did not ignore the truth of subjective consciousness or its relevance in social change.

Marx believed that the motivating factor in human existence was not ideas about religion and society, but a materialistic realism concerned with survival, as a result of his adaptation of Hegelian idealism to historical materialism and acceptance of British economic theory. Survival, or the need to produce the means of subsistence, was essential to human life and community and social action. It was a universal truth that underpinned all human interaction.

Marx believed that the dialectical materialism process, in which men compete for survival, would come to an end when the world’s working people (the proletariat) became sufficiently powerful and politically aware that capitalism would be overthrown and socialism installed. This final state would be a classless society with no private property and no distinction between controllers and controlled. War and insurgency would vanish. “Therein,” Timasheff observes, “may be seen that the innate concept of historical progress and utopianism in Marx’s thought, for human history is viewed as an inexorable succession of stages culminating in the best possible social order.”

### ***Origin of the Concepts***

In their writings, Marx and Engels never used the term “dialectical materialism.” Joseph Dietzgen, a socialist who corresponded with Marx during and after the failed 1848 German Revolution, coined the term in 1887. The term

“dialectical materialism” is also mentioned in passing in philosopher Karl Kautsky’s biography of Friedrich Engels, published the same year. Marx himself had spoken of a “materialist conception of history,” which Engels later dubbed “historical materialism.” In his *Dialectics of Nature*, published in 1883, Engels expanded on the “materialist dialectic.” The term “dialectical materialism” was first used in 1891 by Georgi Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, in his writings on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Marx.

#### 4.1.2 Historical Materialism

The concept of ‘Historical Materialism,’ formulated by Marx, acknowledges the fundamentally social nature of existence. Its core principles can be summarized as follows:

- ◆ ‘Materialism’ asserts that societal conditions shape individuals’ perceptions.
- ◆ Humans naturally engage in collective action within society to ensure their physical and social needs are met.
- ◆ Physical and social sustainability rely on one another.
- ◆ Throughout their existence, societies evolve unique systems of cooperation and competition, termed modes of production, as they reproduce and develop.
- ◆ Once societies surpass a basic subsistence threshold, they bifurcate into conflicting classes.

The term ‘Historical’ introduces further concepts:

- ◆ There exists a trend for society’s productive capacities to expand gradually.

- ◆ Humans shape their historical trajectory within predefined social contexts.
- ◆ Societies foster internal contradictions that are resolved through either revolutionary change or internal collapse.

Marx’s theory of historical materialism encapsulates his general ideas about society. Marx’s sociological thought is based on materialism, because material conditions or economic factors influence the structure and development of society. Material conditions, according to his theory, primarily consist of technological means of production, and human society is shaped by the forces and relations of production. Why Marx’s social theory, i.e., historical materialism, is historical? Marx has traced the evolution of human societies from one stage to the next, so it is historical. It is called materialistic because Marx interpreted society’s evolution in terms of its material or economic foundations. Materialism simply means that the basis for any change is a matter or material reality. Hegel’s earlier viewpoint was that ideas were the source of change. Marx disagreed with this viewpoint, claiming that ideas are the result of objective reality, i.e. matter, rather than the other way around.

He has not limited himself to studying the structure of human societies at a specific point in time in his quest to understand the society in its entirety. He explained the societies in terms of humanity’s future. It isn’t enough for him to simply describe the world. He has a strategy for reversing the situation. As a result, his sociological thinking is primarily concerned with change mechanisms. He has derived the phases of social change from Hegel’s philosophical ideas in order to comprehend it. To return to Marx’s theory of historical materialism, consider it as part of Marx’s general theory of society, which mostly engages thoroughly

with the contradictions that plagued capitalist societies at the time period. Marx believed that Friedrich Engels was the one who had independently conceived the materialist formulation of history, despite the fact that Engels claimed that Karl Marx had discovered historical materialism. For the purposes of this discussion, we will say that to quote Marx, both of them used this theory as the “guiding thread” through all of their works.

According to Engels, the theory of historical materialism takes a unique perspective

on the course of history. As per this point of view, Engels is on the lookout for the ultimate cause and the underlying spirit of historical events. Both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels emphasize the scientific nature of their respective historical perspectives. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels assert in *The German Ideology (1845-6)* that their historical views are based on observation and an accurate description of actual conditions. In order to discuss all aspects of this theory, you will need to understand the historical context that has served as a framework for his ideas about society.

## Recap

- ◆ Karl Marx is one of the profound doyens of German thinkers.
- ◆ Karl Marx was the originator of revolutionary communism and a pioneer in the sociology of historical materialism.
- ◆ The theoretical niche carved out by Karl Marx is categorically referred to as classical sociology.
- ◆ Marx lived in the 19th century, was born in 1818, and died in 1883.
- ◆ For Karl Marx, the cardinal principle calls for the convergence of ‘welfare of humanity’ and ‘our perfection.’
- ◆ Marx found the philosophy of Hegel intriguing and inclined his ideas against the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte.
- ◆ Marx owed the most to Feuerbach, the so-called “Young Hegelian.”
- ◆ Marx’s critique of his ideas came to have far-reaching implications beyond Marx’s theoretical system.
- ◆ Marx himself had spoken of a “materialist conception of history,”
- ◆ The term “dialectical materialism” was first used in 1891 by Georgi Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism.
- ◆ Marx has traced the evolution of human societies from one stage to the next; historically.

- ◆ Marx interpreted society's evolution in terms of its material or economic foundations.
- ◆ Materialism simply means that the basis for any change is matter or material reality.
- ◆ To Marx, political system, social systems are super structures of the capitalist society.
- ◆ Marx believed that, human society is shaped by the forces and relations of production.

## Objective Questions

1. Who coined the term “dialectical materialism”?
2. In which year Engel’s work “Dialectics of Nature” was published?
3. Who first used the term dialectical materialism?
4. In which name Marxian social thought was popularised?
5. According to Marx, which term is defined as “material forces”?
6. Who first used the term “materialism” in pre-revolutionary French works?
7. Who authored the biography of Friedrich Engels?
8. In which daily Marx was appointed as editor?
9. In which discipline Marx received a doctorate from Jena’s University of Science and Technology?
10. Who authored the work of ‘the Holy Family’?

## Answers

1. Joseph Dietzgen
2. 1883
3. Georgi Plekhanov
4. Historical materialism
5. Economic Power
6. Holbach's
7. Karl Kautsky
8. Rheinische Zeitung
9. Philosophy
10. Karl Marx

## Assignments

1. Briefly explain the intellectual influence of Marx towards his contributions to understand society.
2. Examine the ideas of Dialectical philosophy to analyse the existence of social reality.
3. Discuss about the role of Hegel and Marx to explain the relevance of social change in society.
4. Explain the origin of the concept 'Dialectical Materialism'.
5. Why Marx's dialectical materialism is known as historical materialism? Substantiate.



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## Modes of Production, Class Conflict and Alienation

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ familiarize with the theory of modes of production.
- ◆ comprehend the concepts of class and class conflict from Marx's perspective.
- ◆ experience with the theory of alienation and its role in social change.

### Prerequisites

Did you notice the timeline of human history? What are the important stages? Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, etc. Human life evolved from one stage to the other inclining towards physical requirements. Now try to imagine how ancient people produced their basic needs. What kind of tools were used for production? Looking at the forces of production and the subsequent relationships they maintained, Karl Marx has divided human history into various stages: Primitive Communism, Slave Society, Feudalism, Capitalism, and Communism.

People's relationships with the physical environment and their social relationships are inextricably linked. People must consume to survive, but to consume, they must produce, and in producing, they must inevitably come into relationships that exist beyond their control. Marx formulated the theory of the mode of production: "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life." Let us now discuss the modes of production, forces of production, and social transformations brought about by class conflict in society.

## Keywords

Primitive communism, Feudalism, Capitalism, Proletariat, Class conflict, Class consciousness

## Discussion

Let us start our discussion by asking what is mode of production? In Marxian perspective, mode of production is defined as the manner in which a society is organized in order to produce goods and services. It has two major components: the forces of production and the relations of production, both of which are interconnected. In production, the forces of production are composed of all of the elements that are brought together, from land, raw materials, and fuel to human skill and labor, as well as machinery, tools, and manufacturing facilities. The relations of production include relationships among people as well as relationships between people and the forces of production, and it is through these relationships that decisions are made about what to do with the results of production.

Historically, the Marxist theory of production used the concept of the mode of production to illustrate the historical differences between different societies' economies, with Marx commenting on the Neolithic, Asiatic, Slavery, Feudal, and Capitalist periods of history. Hunter-gatherers, according to Marx and fellow German philosopher Friedrich Engels, were the first manifestation of what they called "primitive communism." Until the advent of agriculture and other technological advancements, possessions were generally held by the tribe.

As a result, the Asian mode of production emerged, which represented the first manifestation of a class society. Forced labor is extracted from a larger group by a

smaller group. Writing, standardized weights, irrigation, and mathematics are examples of technological advancements that make this mode possible.

Following that, slavery or an ancient mode of production emerged, which was frequently exemplified in the Greek and Roman city-state. Coinage, readily available iron tools, and the invention of the alphabet all contributed to the establishment of this division of labor. Workers were enslaved by an aristocratic class who used them to manage their businesses while they lived lives of leisure. During the development of the feudal mode of production that followed, the old Roman Empire had fallen, and authority had become more localized. During this time period, a merchant class developed, though serfs, who were enslaved to a piece of property through servitude, were essentially enslaved because they had no means of subsistence and no opportunity for upward mobility.

Capitalism emerged as a result. As far as Marx was concerned, man now demanded a wage for the labor for which he had previously provided his services for free. Nonetheless, according to Marx's '*Das Kapital*', things and people exist only to the extent that they are profitable to the capitalist system. The ultimate goal of Marx's economic theory was the formation of a post-class society based on socialist or communist principles. In either case, the concept of mode of production was critical in understanding the means by which this goal could be accomplished. By employing this

theory, Marx was able to distinguish between various economic systems throughout history, thereby documenting what Marx called the “dialectical stages of development” of historical materialism. Marx, on the other hand, was unable to maintain consistency in his invented terminology, resulting in a vast number of synonyms, subsets, and related terms that were used to describe the various systems.

Every one of these designations, of course, was based on the means by which communities obtained and provided necessary goods and services to one another. As a result, the relationships that developed between these individuals became the inspiration for their given names. Such as the case with communal, independent peasant, state, and slave societies, whereas others, such as capitalist, socialist, and communist societies, operated from a more universal or national standpoint.

Theoretically, Marx continued, capitalism is inherently doomed to failure because of this very reason: workers will eventually perceive themselves as oppressed by the capitalist and will launch a social movement in order to change the system to one that is more communist or socialist in nature. The proletariat would only succeed in challenging and overthrowing the capitalists’ dominance, he cautioned, if they organized successfully.

#### **4.2.1 Mode of Production-The Conceptualization**

Building on the four-stage theory of human development of the Scottish Enlightenment – Hunting- Gatherers, Pastoral, Agricultural, Trading or Mercantile or Commercial Societies, each with its own socio-cultural character traits - Marx formulated the theory of mode of production: “The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life”.

Marx believed that people’s relationships with the physical environment and their social relationships are inextricably linked: “men manufacture cloth, linen, silk also produce the social connections amid which they prepare cloth and linen.” People must consume in order to survive, but in order to consume, they must produce, and in producing, they must inevitably come into relationships that exist beyond their control.

According to Marx, the entire secret of why/how a social order exists, as well as the reasons for social change, must be discovered in a society’s distinctive mode of production. He went on to say that the method of production has a significant impact on the character of the modes of distribution, circulation, and consumption, all of which make up the economic realm. It was vital to comprehend the conditions under which wealth was produced in order to comprehend how it was dispersed and consumed.

For Marx, a mode of production is historically different because it is a component of an organic whole capable of perpetually re-creating its beginning conditions and hence perpetuating itself in more or less stable ways for centuries, if not millennia. The working classes perpetually reproduce the basis of the social order by undertaking social surplus labor in a specific system of property relations. The state regulates the mode of production, which in turn affects the method of distribution, circulation, and consumption.

In the current mode of production, the introduction of new productive forces will produce conflict. When conflict emerges, production modes can either develop within the current system or completely collapse. The method by which social and economic systems change is predicated on the assumption that technology is constantly improving. Specific to this, as technology advances, existing kinds of social relations

become increasingly insufficient for fully using the capabilities of the technology at hand. This results in internal inefficiencies within the broader socioeconomic system, most notably in the form of class conflict, which is a major source of social strife. Old social arrangements obstruct further social progress while creating increasingly severe contradictions between the level of technology (production forces) and social structure (social relations, conventions, and organization of production), which develop to the point where the system can no longer sustain itself and is overthrown through an internal social revolution that allows for the emergence of a new system of production and production organization.

Production methods are classified as follows:

#### **4.2.1.1 Asiatic Mode of Production**

Primitive communism was a term used frequently by Marx and Engels to describe the “initial” phase of production. According to the Marxian theory, the first two modes of production were those of the tribal band or horde and those of the Neolithic kinship group. Hunting and gathering tribes were the only type of existence that was feasible for the vast majority of human history. The Stone Age was characterized by modest technological advancement, minimal social stratification (as seen by the lack of personal goods and the use of communal hunting grounds), and myth, ritual, and magic as the primary cultural forms, according to historians.

In Asiatic society, land was owned communally and private property was hardly found. Social organization was based on the kinship ties. Agriculture was introduced at the outset of the Neolithic period, and technological advances in pottery, brewing,

baking, and weaving resulted in a modest increase in social stratification and the birth of class, with private property being held in hierarchical kinship groups or clans, as evidenced by the adoption of agriculture and accompanying technological advances. Animism was replaced by a renewed emphasis on fertility gods, and a shift from matriarchy to patriarchy (at least in theory) occurred at the same period as this shift.

Asiatic mode of production is considered to be the first kind of class society, in which a tiny clique obtains social surplus by violence against settled or unsettled band and village groups throughout a domain. In part, it was made feasible by technological advancements in data-processing – such as the writing, cataloging, and archiving of information – as well as connected advancements in weights and measures standardization, arithmetic, calendar-making, and irrigation.

During a slow phase of the year, exploited labor is extracted through forced corvee labor (allowing for monumental construction such as the pyramids, ziggurats, and ancient Indian communal baths). Labor is also extracted in the form of things that are directly confiscated from the exploited communities, which is known as extortion. These societies are ruled by a semi-theocratic nobility that purports to be the physical manifestations of gods on earth. The basic agricultural practices, large-scale construction, irrigation, and storage of goods for the benefit of society are all related to this society’s production forces, which include granaries.

#### **4.2.1.2 Ancient Mode of Production**

The Ancient Mode of Production denotes the economic structures predating capitalist production, where slavery often serves as the cornerstone. The master-slave relationship is considered fundamental within this system,

where the master asserts ownership over the slave and appropriates the fruits of their labor. Slaves are typically forbidden from reproducing, particularly in agricultural slavery setups, where they toil on the master's land in exchange for basic sustenance. The master's profit arises from the surplus produced by the slaves beyond what they consume.

However, overlooked is the fact that slaves are deprived of their own means of reproduction. The perpetuation of slavery hinges on acquiring new slaves, a process distinct from the demographic reproduction of the enslaving population. The accumulation of wealth depends on acquiring more slaves rather than their productivity directly. Slaves remain perpetual outsiders, denied the right to offsprings, ensuring a continual supply of replacements is necessary for the system's sustainability. This creates an inherent link between exploiting foreign populations and the exploitation within the slave-master dynamic, essential for the system's perpetuation and growth

The polis, or city-state, represented an alternative route out of neolithic self-sufficiency and was sometimes referred to as "slave society." Classical Greek and Roman societies serve as the most illustrative instances of ancient antiquity in terms of manufacturing. It differed from the Asian model in that property forms included the direct possession of individual human beings (slavery); for example, Plato's ideal city-state of Magnesia envisaged for the leisured ruling class of citizens that "their farms have been entrusted to slaves, who provide them with sufficient production of the land to keep them in modest comfort."

The slavery mode of production, as referenced by Marx, was prevalent in Italy during the formation of the Roman Empire. By around 200 AD, this empire had expanded to encompass vast regions including western

Asia, the entirety of northern Africa from Egypt to Morocco, and most of Europe, even reaching Britain. With a territory spanning approximately one million seventy-five thousand square miles and a population of roughly sixty million, it comprised diverse societies with varying modes of production. In Roman Italy, agricultural slavery notably became paramount, unlike any previous instances. Additionally, in certain city-states such as Athens, slavery emerged as the dominant mode of production, with the ruling classes amassing wealth through slave labor.

#### **4.2.1.3 Feudal Mode of Production**

Following the fall of the Western Roman Empire, most of Western Europe was reduced to subsistence agriculture, with ghost towns and abandoned trade routes dotting the landscape. In a world with bad roads and challenging farming circumstances, authority was also decentralized. By the ninth century, a new social form had arisen in place of traditional bonds of family or clan, holy theocracy, or legal citizenship: a relationship based on the personal tie of the vassal to the lord, which was reinforced by a link to landholding in the form of the fief. In this case, it was the feudal mode of production, that dominated the systems of production in Europe between the end of the classical world and the beginning of the industrial revolution (similar systems existing in most of the world as well) This period also witnessed the decentralization of ancient empires, which resulted in the formation of the world's first nation-states.

Just as capitalists exploited the working class, known as the 'proletariat,' feudal lords similarly exploited their tenants, referred to as 'serfs.' Capitalists extracted surplus value, while feudal lords claimed land rent from their serfs. Serfs, lacking legal freedom,



were devoid of property rights, although they could utilize the lord's land. They were compelled to provide their labor or its produce beyond what was necessary for family sustenance and the basic upkeep of the peasant household economy. Serfs, or the producers, were obligated to meet the economic demands of their overlords, which could manifest as various forms of required services or payments, either in money or goods. These levies were imposed on the peasants' family holdings, constituting a significant aspect of the feudal mode of production.

Feudal lords exerted control over serfs through military might, reinforced by legal authority. In this system, serfdom entailed a direct relationship between rulers and subjects. The means of production in feudalism were rudimentary and inexpensive. Marx and Engels viewed feudal society as an intermediary phase, situated between the slave societies of antiquity and the capitalist systems with their accompanying proletarian class in the modern era.

During this time period, a merchant class emerges and grows in strength, driven by the profit motive but hindered from making further profits by the nature of feudal society, which, for example, restricts the ability of serfs to become industrial workers and wage earners because they are tied to the land. Finally, a period of social revolution (for example, the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the French Revolution of 1789, and others) occurs, in which the social and political organization of feudal society is overthrown by the bourgeoisie in its infancy.

#### **4.2.1.4 Capitalist Mode of Production**

Capitalism denotes an economic system wherein capital holds primary sway over

the means of production. Capital assumes diverse manifestations, ranging from money or credit used to acquire labor and production materials to funds allocated for the purchase of physical machinery. In the capitalist mode of production, various forms of capital are privately owned by a class of capitalists, excluding the majority of the population from ownership. This exclusivity of ownership by capitalists stands as a central tenet defining capitalism as a mode of production.

Capitalism, as a mode of production, is characterized by the following elements:

- ◆ Goods are manufactured primarily for sale rather than personal consumption.
- ◆ Labour power, or the ability to perform work, is traded in a market where workers exchange their labor for money wages, either based on time worked (time rate) or specific tasks completed (piece rate). Unlike in ancient modes of production where laborers were compelled to work, in capitalism, laborers engage in contractual agreements with employers.
- ◆ Money serves as the primary medium of exchange, leading to a significant role for banks and financial intermediaries.

**Additionally:**

- ◆ The production process is overseen by capitalists or their appointed managers.
- ◆ Financial decisions are made by capitalist entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Individual capitalists compete for control over labor and financial resources.

As a mode of production, Capitalism initially emerged in Europe, with the industrial revolution beginning in England and spreading to other regions, witnessing rapid technological advancement and the corresponding ascendance of capitalist economies. Marx envisioned capitalism as a transitional historical phase ultimately supplanted by socialism.

According to Marx, the ruling class consists of the bourgeoisie, or capitalists who own the means of production and exploit the proletariat for surplus value, whereas the proletariat consists solely of their own labor power, which they must sell in order to maintain their living standards. Among the most important factors in the production of goods and services under capitalism is the entire system of modern production with its supporting structures of bureaucracy, bourgeois democracy, and, above all, financial capital.

### ***Production in Socialist Society***

Once the forces of production have outgrown the confines of the capitalist framework, Marx believed that socialism will be the mode of production that will eventually succeed capitalism, which in turn will be succeeded by communism - the terms socialism and communism both predate Marx and have many definitions other than those that he used.

Socialism, according to the Marxist definition, is a mode of production in which the primary criterion for production is use-value, and as a result, the law of value no longer drives the course of economic activity. According to Marxist economic theory, production for human consumption is coordinated by conscious industrial planning, and the distribution of economic output is based on the principle of "to each according to his contribution." Among the distinctive

characteristics of socialism are that it is characterized by the working class effectively owning both the means of production and the means of subsistence, whether through one or a mix of cooperative companies, common ownership or worker's self-management.

### ***Production in Communist Society***

Communism is the final form of production, one that is expected to emerge inexorably from socialism as a result of historical causes, as previously stated. Marx did not go into great depth about the nature of a communist society, which he would refer to as both socialism and communism interchangeably throughout his writings and speeches. However, in his Critique of the Gotha Programme, he made a brief mention of the full release of productive forces in "the highest phase of communist society, society will be able to inscribe on its banner: 'From each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs'."

Different modes of production may originate and coexist alongside one another in any given community or country, and they may be economically tied to one another through trade and mutual obligations as well. Different socioeconomic classes and strata in the population correspond to the various types of transportation. If urban capitalist industry exists alongside rural peasant production for subsistence and simple exchange, as well as tribal hunting and gathering, this is known as coexistence. It is possible that old and new types of production will come together to produce a hybrid economy.

Marx, on the other hand, believed that the expansion of capitalist markets had the tendency to dissolve and displace previous modes of production over time. Capitalist societies were those in which the capitalist



mode of production had risen to become the dominant form of production.

### 4.2.2 Class Conflict

Marx believed that human society progresses through various stages. Every society has evolved as a result of the conflict. How do disputes start? There are various classes in society, and each class tends to be hostile to the others and create radical polarization. In general, class conflict has always involved an oppressor and the oppressed. The means of production are used to categorize classes in a capitalist society.

Capitalist society is based on the concentration of means of production and the distribution of ownership of those means of production. In Marx's analysis of capitalism, he identified the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the two main classes. Marx referred to the bourgeoisie as capitalists and the proletariat as the working class. In a capitalist society, the bourgeoisie owns the means of production and use the state as a tool of economic exploitation for their own self-interest. On the other hand, proletarians are those who do not own the means of production and are exploited by the capitalists or bourgeoisie. Inherent, in capitalist society is a tendency towards class consciousness and the polarization of classes into two antagonistic classes. Marx believed that a class could only really exist when people recognized their antagonistic relationships to other classes. They only make up what Marx called a class in itself without this consciousness. They become a true class, a class for itself, when they become conscious of the conflict.

In a capitalist system, the producers, known as the proletariat, enjoy legal freedom as they are not bound to the land or any specific factory. They have the liberty to seek employment from any capitalist entity.

However, they remain under the dominion of the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class as a whole. Lacking ownership of means of production, they are compelled to sell their labor power and consequently fall prey to exploitation.

This exploitation fosters a growing awareness of their class interests among the relatively liberated laborers, prompting them to organize themselves into a working-class movement. Economic exploitation and inhuman working conditions lead to poverty and alienation of mankind. The poor become poorer. It gradually tends to form class consciousness among the working class. Workers unite and begin to fight for their rights. Initially, this movement focused on negotiating for improved wages and working conditions. However, it evolves into a more intense class struggle aimed at challenging and ultimately overthrowing the capitalist system. This bloody revolution terminates capitalist society and leads to the social dictatorship of the proletariat. As a result, the power of the bourgeoisie ceased, and all the power was transformed into the hands of the proletariat. As a result of the social dictatorship of the proletariat, everybody owns everything and nobody owns anything. In a society without classes, the state will eventually disappear as it becomes irrelevant.

Marx argues that the establishment of social classes does not need the organization of production. Masses of people must be physically gathered together, communicate easily, engage in frequent disputes over material incentives, and develop a sense of class consciousness. Marx created the theory of class conflict, which has the following key components.

***The development of the proletariat:*** The capitalist economic system made the vast majority of people into workers, gave them a shared environment, and instilled in them a sense of shared interests. The economic

conditions of capitalism brought the masses together and formed them into a class for themselves through the emergence of class consciousness.

**The importance of property:** According to Marx, a society's form of property and a person's relationship to property are the two main factors that determine how they will behave. The relationship between a person and the means of production is used to categorise people into classes. Class barriers were strengthened by the growth of class awareness and disputes over the distribution of financial rewards.

**The identification of economic, political power and authority:** Although classes are founded on the forces and relations of production, they become socially significant only in the political sphere. Political power becomes the method by which the ruling class continues its dominance and exploitation of the masses. The capitalists who hold the monopoly of effective private property take control of the political machinery, and their interests converge in the political and ideological spheres.

**Polarisation of classes:** A radical polarisation of classes is a trend that is inherent in capitalist society. The working class, who own nothing other than their own labour, and capitalists who control the means of production and distribution.

Marx repeatedly referred to the small capitalists, the petite bourgeoisie. But on the maturation of class consciousness and at the height of the conflict, the petite bourgeoisie and small capitalists will be deprived of their property and drawn into the ranks of the proletariat.

**Theory of surplus value:** Capitalists accumulate profit through the exploitation of labour. The value of any commodity is determined by the amount of labour it takes to produce it. The employers have the

monopoly on the instruments of production, they can force workers to do extra hours of work, and profits tend to accumulate with increasing exploitation of labour.

**Pauperisation:** Poverty of the proletariat grows with increasing exploitation of labor. One capitalist kills many others and the wealth of the bourgeoisie is swelled by large profits with a corresponding increase of exploitation, of the proletariats.

**Alienation:** The economic exploitation and inhuman working conditions lead to increasing alienation of the working class.

**Class solidarity and antagonism:** With the growth of class consciousness, the crystallisation of social relations into two groups becomes streamlined and the classes tend to become internally homogeneous, and the class struggle more intensified.

#### 4.2.3 Alienation

Marx claimed that “productive labor is what separates human beings from the lower members of the animal kingdom”. People used to be completely engrossed in their work throughout the medieval guild era and before. They used or consumed the finished products they manufactured from raw ingredients. Owner, producer, merchant and consumer were all the same individual. The labor acts as a middleman between the producer and the consumer, and eventually, money rather than the commodities is transacted. Then especially, during capitalist industrialisation, there was a separation between owner and worker in the production process. This is the completion of self-estrangement or alienation.

Alienation, in its literal sense, denotes “separation from.” While this term finds frequent usage in literature, Marx imbued it with a sociological significance. Marx conceptualized alienation as a phenomenon inherent to societies where the laborer is



estranged from the means of production, and where “dead labor” (capital) holds dominion over “living labor” (the worker). Consider a shoemaker in a factory as an example. Although the shoemaker crafts shoes, they cannot use them personally. Consequently, their creation becomes an entity distinct from themselves, detached from its creator. The act of shoemaking isn’t solely driven by the shoemaker’s innate desire to work and create; rather, it is primarily a means of earning a livelihood. For the worker, this sense of “objectification” intensifies, particularly within the regimented production processes of a factory, where tasks are subdivided, and the worker’s role may be limited to a small fraction of the overall process. As a result, their work becomes mechanized, leading to a loss of creativity and autonomy.

Under capitalism, alienation takes four different manifestations for people. They are cut off from their labour, their end product, mankind, the human species, other people and themselves. The other two have a clear meaning: the worker is externalised because they do not own or control the means of production or the finished goods. The third type alienation is the separation from the essence of what make us human, which is a meaningful activity. Because we do not labour alongside other people but rather compete with them, the otherness or externality of the labour also causes a separation from them.

Marx argues that both the owners of the capitalist system and the workers are alienated. First of all, capitalists only see the products that workers create as items to sell and ways to make money. Capitalists don’t care who makes or purchases these goods, who uses them, or how the labourers who produce them feel about the results of the labour. The production, purchase and payment of goods are the only things that matter to capitalists.

Marx believed that there was a natural

connection between workers and human nature. He thought that capitalism had distorted this relationship. By utilizing the idea of alienation, Marx demonstrates the damaging effect of capitalist production on people and society. Significantly, workers are required to sell their labor time to capitalists in the two-class system, where capitalists own the means of production as well as the finished goods and employees. The sociological basis of alienation is given by these structures, especially the division of labor.

1. In a capitalist society, workers are separated from their productive activities. They don’t create things based on their own concepts or to primarily meet their own demands. Instead, they work for capitalists who provide them with a minimum living wage in return for the right to employ them however they see necessary. We can say that workers are alienated from that activity since productive activity belongs to capitalists, and they control what should be done with it.
2. In a capitalist society, the product the end result of creative activities as well as the workers themselves are alienated. The result of their labor belongs to the capitalists, not to the workers, and since it is their private property, they are free to use it wherever they see it necessary.
3. In capitalist society, people are isolated from one another. Marx made the essential assumption that people desire and need to work together to appropriate from nature what they need for survival. However, in capitalism,

this cooperation is broken up and people, often strangers, are made to work together for the benefit of the capitalist.

4. In capitalist society, workers are blocked off from their own potential. The workplace is where

we feel least human, least ourselves, rather than being a place of transformation and fulfilment of our human nature. As people are forced to operate like machines at work, they behave less and less like human beings.

## Recap

- ◆ Mode of production means the way of producing.
- ◆ The mode of production illustrates the historical differences between different societies' economies.
- ◆ The two major components of the modes of production are forces of production and the relations of production.
- ◆ Productive forces are made up of human labour power and means of production, among other things.
- ◆ The property, power, and control relationships that govern society's productive assets are social and technical relations of production.
- ◆ Primitive communism was the "initial" phase of production.
- ◆ Asian modes of production are considered to be the first kind of class society.
- ◆ The polis, or city-state, represented an alternative route out of neolithic self-sufficiency and was sometimes referred to as "slave society."
- ◆ Capitalists own the means of production and exploit the proletariat for surplus value.
- ◆ The proletariat consists solely of their own labour power, which they must sell in order to maintain their living standards.
- ◆ Marx's "first phase" of communism is typically equated with what people commonly conceive of as socialism.
- ◆ Communism is the final form of production.

## Objective Questions

1. Which society is called a “classless society”?
2. Which stage was characterized by modest technological advancement and minimal social stratification?
3. Which stage was described as the “initial” phase of production?
4. According to Marx, what did he call the ruling class in capitalist society?
5. Which society characterised by the polis, or city-state, represented an alternative route out of neolithic self-sufficiency?
6. Which classes in capitalist society own the means of production?
7. Who is being exploited by capitalist society?
8. What is dead labour?
9. The landholding form in the feudal system is known as .....
10. Who authored ‘Das Kapital’?

## Answers

1. Primitive society
2. Stone Age
3. Primitive communism
4. Bourgeoisie
5. Slave society
6. Ruling class
7. Proletariat

8. Capital
9. Fief
10. Karl Marx

## Assignments

1. Discuss the Asiatic mode of production and analyse major characteristics of primitive community.
2. Examine modes of production as discussed by Karl Marx and elaborate on forces of production and relations of production.
3. Analyse ancient mode of production and identify the class relations during slavery.
4. Who are serfs? What is meant by fief? Discuss major features of a feudal society.
5. Explain the emergence of class consciousness and illustrate the process of class conflict.
6. Define alienation and examine how the production process generates alienation and subsequently leads to social change.

## Suggested Readings

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**BLOCK**

**Max Weber**



# Verstehen, Social Action

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ comprehend the methodological approach of Weber in conceptualising Sociology as a mode of inquiry distinct from the natural sciences.
- ◆ explain the philosophical background of Verstehen approach employed in Weber's writings.
- ◆ familiarise with interpretive understanding of social phenomena as discussed by Max Weber.

### Prerequisites

Suppose, when you meet your friends what do you do? You will greet them! You will shake their hands or hug them. Isn't it? Shaking hands or hugging are forms of social interaction and they are not mere actions but social actions. For Weber, social realities are constituted of social actions. The central aspect of social action theory, which he proposed, was that people act based on their understanding (Verstehen), which reflects their judgments and evaluations. Weber's main goal was to find a way to explain how these judgments manifested themselves in people's social acts without resorting to a "psychology" of the act.

How do you understand social realities? Do you think that everyone's perceptions would be similar? No, Not at all. Weber argues that social reality should be understood using Verstehen approach ie. Interpretivism. Social realities can be decoded using interpretive understanding from the point of the actor. Now, We'll look at Max Weber's contributions to the development of classical sociological

theory. In this unit, we'll talk about Weber's central theme of *Verstehen* and social action, which he developed as part of his methodological investigation in the study of society.

## Keywords

Social reality, Social action, *Verstehen*, Interpretive understanding, Rationality

## Discussion

Max Weber carried out extensive research on the history of the world's religions between 1905 and 1918, comparing the religions of the Western world with those of China and India. In 1910, Weber co-founded the German Sociological Association along with Ferdinand Tonnies and Georg Simmel.

In addition to his academic career, Weber also participated in German political life. During the beginning of the First World War, he was appointed as a director of nine army hospitals in the Heidelberg area and those experiences gave him first-hand experience of bureaucracy. After the war, he served as a consultant on the committee which prepared a memorandum on German war guilt, which was submitted to the Paris Peace Conference. After assisting in the drafting of the new Weimer Constitution and in the founding of the German Democratic Party he resumed teaching at the University of Vienna and Munich. In June of 1920, Weber died at the age of 56, leaving many of his works in an unpublished state.

Weber's thinking about sociology was profoundly shaped by a series of intellectual debates that were rampant in Germany during his time. Weber became embroiled in a methodological debate over the distinction

between the social and natural sciences. He rejected the idea of searching for a single causal agent throughout history and he considered social science to be an empirical science of concrete reality. He brought together various traditions of social theory and formed a unique theoretical perspective based on history, economics, philosophy, law, and comparative historical analysis. For his contributions, Weber is regarded as one of the founding thinkers of sociology, along with Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim.

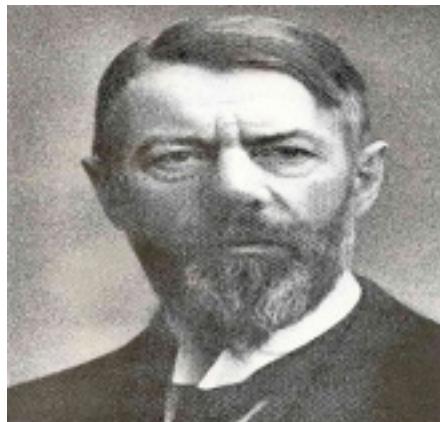
Weber's most important works were written between 1903 and 1920 include *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905), *The Social Psychology of the World Religions* (1915), *Economy and Society* (1909- 1920), and *General Economic History* (1919-1920).

### 5.1.1 *Verstehen*

Weber's thoughts on *Verstehen* were relatively common among German historians of his day and were derived from a field known as *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics was a unique method for comprehending and interpreting works of literature. Its objective was to comprehend the author's thought process as well as the text's fundamental



## Max Weber- Biographical Sketch (1864-1920)



Maximilian Karl Emil Weber was born on April 21, 1864, in Erfurt, in the southeastern part of Germany. He was the eldest of seven children born to Max Weber Sr., a prominent lawyer and politician in Berlin, and his wife, Helene Fallenstein, a devout Calvinist and ascetic. They both had a profound influence on Weber's intellectual orientation as well as on his psychological development.

Weber established himself as an outstanding student early in his career. After finishing secondary education, he obtained a university degree in law and eventually a doctorate in political economy with a specialization in medieval commercial law. Under the influence of his aunt, Ida Baumgarten, Weber developed an enduring admiration and respect for the Protestant virtues during his compulsory year of military service in Strasberg. He married Marianne Schnitger in 1893, who was a well-known sociologist in her own right and a pioneer in the field of feminist sociology.

Although Weber began his academic career studying law, he quickly shifted his focus to his lifelong interests in economics, history, and sociology. In 1894, Weber was appointed as a professor in economics at the University of Freiburg, and in 1896, he was appointed to a similar position at the University of Heidelberg. He was one of the youngest scholars to obtain a professorship at a premier university at that time. Following a nervous breakdown and a personal crisis, Weber was forced to take a break from his academic profession. In 1903, Weber resumed his scholarly work, starting research on two large essays, one on *Protestant ethics and religion* (1904-1905) which eventually became his best-known work as *the Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, and the other one on methodological problems in the social sciences; *the Methodology of Social Sciences* (1903-1907).

organisation. This concept is expanded upon by Weber from the comprehension of literature to the comprehension of social life. In other words, Weber aimed to explain actors' interactions and ultimately

all of human history using the methods of hermeneutics.

Weber used the German word Verstehen in the context of social action, which literally

translates to “human understanding,” to describe what he considered unique in the subject matter of the social sciences. Weber believed that, no matter how precise the natural sciences were, their subject matter limited them to the study of external characteristics and the outer state of things in the natural world. Social sciences, on the other hand, are concerned with the inner states of actors who act based on their understanding (Verstehen) of the acts of others and one’s interpretation of their social environments. One cannot, for example, use the same method of studying atomic structure in chemistry to understand human action or behavior. Because natural science methods are inadequate for studying human actions. In this way, the study of human ‘social acts’ distinguishes from the study of the physical and natural world. As a result of his emphasis on subjective understanding, Weber developed an extremely important scientific discussion.

The central aspect of social action theory, which he proposed, was that people act based on their understanding (Verstehen), which reflects their judgments and evaluations. Weber’s main goal was to find a way to explain how these judgments manifested themselves in people’s social acts without resorting to a “psychology” of the act. Weber distinguished between two types of understanding that can be used for social action: one is referred to as “direct understanding,” while the other is referred to as “interpretive understanding.”

The first is direct observable understanding of the subjective meaning of a given behavior. That is, we can understand an act simply by observing what people are doing or by observing physical characteristics of that action. For example, you can directly understand what a person means when he states  $2 \times 2 = 4$ . Similarly, we can also recognise an outburst of rage or any other

emotion of others, shown through their facial expressions or exclamations. We comprehend the act here based on our direct observation.

Second, there is an understanding of the motive and called explanatory understanding. Here, we understand an individual’s act based on the emotional context or motive attached to it. We can reproduce an empathetic understanding of the act through the purposive reasoning of the actor or their actions in our minds. For example, when someone says that twice two equals four, we understand the situational context in which they engaged. They could be giving a scientific demonstration or a mathematical lecture. Similarly, we have a motivational understanding of an angry outburst or any other emotion if we know it was triggered by jealousy, injured pride, or an insult. The specific act has been evaluated based on the sequence of motivation rather than the act’s visible characteristics. This, according to Weber, entails interpretive activity, which is more than observing the visible characteristics of the act.

Direct understanding grasps the physical characteristics of an act occurring in the outside world. On the other hand, explanatory understanding, as we’ve seen, is a type of social action that involves making judgments and assigning motives to actions. Understanding motive, according to Weber, occurs within the actor’s “inner subjective state,” rather than in the objective world. This is referred to as “subjective meaning” by him, and it occurs in the actor’s “cognitions (mind),” which are not visible to others. For example, a person’s unhappiness as a result of disappointment, is greatly affected by his or her state of mind and is specific to them. Weber reasoned that, in order to fully understand a motive, the actor must engage in “interpretive understanding” by attaching a meaning to the act, a meaning that is the result of their immediate experience of their



immediate judgment and evaluation.

### 5.1.2 Sociology: Study of Social Action

For over a century, sociology has operated within the bounds of science. However, society is made up of qualities that are objective facts, and also it is unquestionably made up of activities that express subjective meaning. That is, when we closely examine social reality, it is defined by its dual character in terms of objective facticity and subjective meaning. Weber shared the belief that natural and social sciences are opposed and he made a valiant effort to create a sociological system retaining the most valuable elements of the two approaches. Sociology under Weber asserts its uniqueness and distinctiveness from physical science. You may wonder how Weber related the concept of ‘social action’ to his analysis of the methodological dilemma in the social sciences.

Between 1911 and 1920, Weber published *Economy and Society*, in which he first formulated a theory of social action. The term social action derives from Weber’s methodological writings, which were concerned with valid judgments about the decisions and evaluations individuals make in their actions with others in a social environment. Weber came up with the term “social action” to explain a critical distinction between the natural and social sciences. While it is sufficient to observe events and report relationships between things observed in the natural sciences, social science investigations must go beyond physical observation of individual acts and behavior. Weber believed that the natural and social sciences obtain different kinds of knowledge because human actors interpret the actions of others. Knowledge in the natural sciences is of the external world, which can only be explained in terms of valid laws, whereas knowledge in the social sciences must be,

‘internal’, or “subjective.” Since, human beings have inner subjective states that must be understood in order to explain outward behavior; Weber believed knowledge must be “subjective” to explain individual social acts as action considerations.

In *the Nature of Social Action* (1922), Weber defines sociology as follows “*Sociology is the science whose object is to interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which the action proceeds and the effects which it produces*”. For Weber, the central facts of sociology’s scientific analysis were the qualities of ‘action and meaning’. He defines sociology as a science that progresses from an interpretive understanding of social action to a causal explanation of its causes and effects. To put it simply, sociology is defined as “the science of social action related to the causal explanation of human behavior. In other words, sociology, according to Weber, is concerned with nature, causal relations, and the outcomes of social action. In this definition, ‘action’ refers to human behavior to the extent that the individual agent or agents perceive it as subjectively meaningful. The meaning attached to the act can be the meaning intended by an individual agent or a group of agents on a specific historical occasion, as well as the meaning attributed to the agent or agents in an abstract, pure type.

The nexus of any scientific sociological analysis, according to Weber, is the act and the meaning attached to it. In Weber’s writings, the term “social action” referred to developing a theory of society that was consistent with making judgments about the decisions people make in their interactions with others in a social setting. According to Weber, social action takes place only when the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to the act, it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented towards its course. Thus, ‘action,’ in his

opinion, is a social thing. In other words, action refers to human behavior in which an acting individual attaches a subjective meaning and clearly involves the intervention of thought processes. Attaching subjective meaning to an action specifies the rational reasons put forth by an individual to explain his actions. Purely reactive behaviors are those that are devoid of subjective meaning and do not involve any necessary thought processes. These reactive behaviors are outside the scope of sociological study.

That is, in contrast to physical behavior, action according to Weber, represents a kind of behavior in which the actor gets involved with the following aspects:

- ◆ Social action involves all human behavior that attaches a subjective meaning to their act.
- ◆ The acting individual or individual takes into account the acts and behavior of others.
- ◆ People interpret the actions and words of others in order to decide how to react in a social situation.
- ◆ Individuals act based on their understanding (Verstehen), and this understanding reflects their judgments and evaluations.

Weber assumed that humans vary their actions according to social contexts. Human beings have “inner” subjective states that must be understood in order to explain their outward behavior. Because social action is a product of the actor’s “inner states,” Weber sought to develop methods for demonstrating how these “inner states” enter into individual social acts as action considerations. The primary assumption of social action theory is that individuals act on their understanding (Verstehen), and that this understanding reflects their judgments

and evaluations. Following our discussion of Weber’s different types of social action, we will go over these concepts in depth.

### 5.1.2.1 Types of Social Action

Weber’s sociology distinguishes four major types of social action and they are:

1. Zweckrational or Instrumental rational action with reference to goals
2. Wertrational or value rational action with reference to values
3. Traditional action
4. Affective action

#### 1. Rational action with reference to a goal (Zweckrational)

Weber discusses rational actions in which the goals and means are chosen purely in terms of the possible successful outcomes. Here, the actor is free to choose the means of action, even at the cost of forgoing their value considerations. The actor takes into account of intended means and ends of their action prior to the act, in order to maximize their chances of success. The characteristic features of these acts include:

- (i) Understanding of the circumstances and existing of realities
- (ii) The likely behaviour of ‘significant others’ in the situation and their influence on secondary consequences
- (iii) The possible obstacles and alternative strategies which affect the attainment of particular ends are also valued.

These acts are also referred as instrumental

action, as they depend on the means of accomplishing a particular act. Instrumental rational actions generally represent cost benefit acts, where we assess the most effective means to achieve a particular goal from a number of options available. Whether it's political, economic, or legal outcomes, instrumental action aims to maximise personal benefit. By forming strategies based on determining the most efficient means of achieving desired goals, instrumental action acts as an interface to the world and material reality. It dominates modern capitalistic society.

Net profit or net gain is the decisive criterion in determining behaviour in an instrumental rational action and the actor is free to choose their means of action based on its rational efficacy (that is based on a possible successful outcome in the future). In instrumental action; the ends, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed for the explicit successful outcomes and to control unforeseen circumstances in reality.

## **2. Value rational action with relation to a value (Wertrational)**

Value-Rational action in relation to a value is defined as an act in which the ends are determined by values. The actor assigns these acts a subjective meaning, and the means are chosen solely for their efficiency. These acts demonstrate how an individual, a group, an organization or a society is committed to its ideals, values, or beliefs. Value rational action is characterised by a specific meaning that is subjectively assigned to the action by the actor for the purpose of achieving some greater good.

Weber defines value rational action as acting in the world with an ultimate value orientation. The actor or individual seeks to put into practice their convictions 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 what it consists of, regardless of the possible cost to themselves. The meaning of an action in this case is to carry out the realisation of specific value implications for its own sake. Thus, the objectives of value rational action are:

- (i) The realization of a specific value or higher good that is designated as meaningful to the actor
- (ii) The moral obligation imposed on the actor by the value in question.

Commitment to family, the environment, or valuing the spirit of patriotism, loyalty, or friendship are all examples of rational actions in support of their values. The meaning of an action lies in carrying out the realization of specific value considerations. Another perfect example of a rational action is a captain jumping overboard with a sinking ship.

## **3. Affectual or Emotional Action**

The third type of action referred to by Weber is affectual action (emotional action). Action is emotional when it satisfies a need for revenge, sensual gratification, devotion, contemplative bliss, or the working off of emotional tensions. The actor is compelled to act on the basis of an emotional response to a circumstance that is determined by the emotional state of the actor. These acts lack a specific rational orientation to the world. It avoids calculation based on means and ends because it is governed by an impulse that frequently has no goal or purpose. Affectual action, like traditional action, is not subjected to internal assessment and requires little or no judgment on the part of the actor. Similarly, it does not consider the consequences of action in advance to the same extent. That is, emotions and impulses

determine the ends and means of an act. In a game, for example, a player who throws a punch at a partner out of sudden emotional outburst represents affectual action.

#### 4. Traditional Action

Weber refers to a type of social action that is based on a set of traditional beliefs that act as ethical principles on the judgment of the actor. Traditional action differs from other types of action because it lacks a subjective meaning attached by the actor to the situation, as well as responses to situations based on their customary view of reality. In traditional action, individual reacts automatically to problems in the outside world and to external circumstances in a habitual manner. The way we have some particular habits, ceremonies and rituals all constitute traditional actions, because both the ends and the means are determined by customs. They are regarded as traditions and customs passed down from generation to generation. To act in this way, we may or may not be conscious of a specific value or an outcome, but are fixed by certain beliefs and customs with no or little judgment. According to Weber, most of our everyday actions correspond to this type. To act in accordance with tradition, the actor does not need to envision a goal, visualize an outcome, or be aware of specific commitments to values.

It is clear, we have covered Weber's introduction and the various types of social action he defines. Now we'll take a closer look at the characteristics of social action. According to Weber, the interpretation and understanding are a necessary condition of human conduct, as opposed to the conduct of natural things, which do not act on their understanding or interpretation. Following this, Weber introduced a number of concepts in order to clarify the relationship between human conduct and subjective understanding. This includes the concepts of understanding

(Verstehen), interpretive understanding, subjective meaning, and so on. We will go over each of them in detail here, which will help you clarify the concepts we discussed previously.

#### 5.1.2.2 Causal Interpretation of Social Action and the Concept of Social Relation

Weber believes that social scientists' ability to grasp the subjective nature of human behavior is dependent on their ability to interpret the causal meaning of human activity. When outright action and motives have both been accurately understood and the relationship between both has become meaningfully comprehensible, then we can say there is a causal interpretation of a concrete cause of action.

Furthermore, Weber coined the concept "social relationship" to characterize "patterns of intentional, meaningful, and symbolic human interaction". Individual social action, according to Weber, is sociologically relevant since it is directed toward others and incorporates subjective meaning on the actor's part. By integrating the activities of one individual with the actions of others, Weber broadens the meaning of social action, allowing him to proceed beyond the study of individual social action to the definition and analysis of social relationships. The social relationship thus consists totally and solely of the existence of a chance that a meaningful sequence of social action will occur, regardless of the circumstances. In other words, each social relationship is linked to a meaningful activity that is appropriate for the connection. In any absolute or theoretical sense, meaning is not accurate or correct. According to the modalities of social activity orientation, there are six types of social relations. These, according to Weber, are "patterns of human behavior" caused by the recognition of normative expectations:



- (i) Usage: The behavior expressed to conform to a style or pattern.
- (ii) Custom: Habitual practices with the roots in antiquity
- (iii) Rational orientation: Social actions which are the consequence of actors orienting themselves to one another, on the basis of similar ulterior expectation. For example, mutual self-interest
- (iv) Fashion: Social action resulting from the adherence to contemporary trend
- (v) Convention: type of social action performed in recognition of social moral obligation
- (vi) Law: Type of social action performed in recognition of codified expectations and restrictions

## Recap

- ◆ Subject matter of the social sciences is different from the subject matter of the natural sciences.
- ◆ Individuals act in and come to understand the social world through their interpretive acts
- ◆ Social action involves the intervention of subjective thought processes
- ◆ Human social action involves the process of assigning meanings to the given factual states in the outer world
- ◆ The process of assigning meanings to the human action, involves inner states of actors including their inner judgment and evaluation.
- ◆ All social action are interpretive in a sense that the actor could not decide how to respond to the acts of others without interpreting their acts.
- ◆ Understanding or Verstehen helps an individual to interpret the acts of others.
- ◆ Weber distinguishes 4 types of actions based on value orientation and rationality
- ◆ Actions that are controlled by traditions and habits are called traditional social action
- ◆ Affective social actions are determined by one's specific emotional state.
- ◆ Value rational social action involves actions that are determined by inherent values, beliefs and ideals.
- ◆ Instrumental-rational social actions are cost – benefit acts that are carried out to achieve a certain goal.

## Objective Questions

1. Where did Weber first mention the interpretive theory of social action?
2. What forms the nexus of any scientific sociological analysis, according to Weber?
3. What do you call those that are devoid of subjective meaning and any necessary thought processes?
4. What do you call the way we understand an act in terms of the motives attached to it by the individual?
5. What is the action when an individual reacts automatically to problems in the outside world and to external circumstances in a habitual manner?
6. What does the term Verstehen mean?
7. Which type of social action is guided by virtue of values?
8. What makes an actor compelled to act on the basis of circumstances in affective action?
9. What is the term Weber coined to represent patterns of intentional, meaningful, and symbolic human interaction?
10. What is the social action resulting from the adherence to contemporary trends?
11. What is the social relation in which social action performed is in recognition of social moral obligation?
12. Which type of social action is performed in recognition of codified expectations and restrictions?

## Answers

1. In his work *Economy and society*
2. The act and the meaning attached to it.

3. Reactive behaviors
4. Exploratory understanding
5. Traditional action.
6. Understanding
7. Value rational action
8. Emotional response
9. Social relations
10. Fashion
11. Convention
12. Law

## Assignments

1. Briefly discuss about Max Weber's methodology to understand social reality.
2. Explain the different categories of verstehen explained by Max Weber.
3. Examine the different types of social action to determine the objective facts of human relationships.
4. What are the different patterns of human behavior caused by the recognition of normative expectations?
5. How do you think traditional actions are different from emotional actions? Illustrate with examples

## Suggested Readings

1. Giddens, A. (1977). *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory – An Analysis of Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Weber*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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## Ideal Types, Religion and Economy

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ comprehend concepts and thoughts related to Max Weber in the study of society
- ◆ conceptualize Weberian tool of ideal type in understanding social phenomena
- ◆ examine sociological dimensions of religion and economy discussed by Max Weber

### Prerequisites

Do you think that religion and the economy are interrelated? Religion as we know is spiritual and supernatural and economy is materialistic. Both are viewed as contradictory and negate the other in terms of principles. Economy is related to the accumulation of wealth, power, luxury, and entertainment while religion promotes celibacy, rejection, and minimum requirements for life. Could you find out if any religious doctrines promote wealth accumulation? Or can we say that religion is entirely against being frilled?

Here, sociologist Weber has studied the relationship between religion and economy and argued that religious doctrines of Calvinism had led to economic development in the West. In this unit, we will discuss the sociological thoughts of Weber; the ideal type and debate on religion and economy.

# Keywords

Social Action, Ideal Type, Interpretivism, Verstehen, Protestant Ethic

## Discussion

### 5.2.1 Weber's Sociology

Weber defined sociology as “a science aiming to interpretively understand social action to subsequently achieve a causal explanation of its course and effects”. By placing “interpretive understanding,” or Verstehen, at the forefront, Weber’s vision of sociology provides a distinctive alternative to those who sought to ground the nascent discipline in the pursuit of universal laws applicable to all societies. Weber’s perspective on the sociological task integrates his emphasis on Verstehen (interpretive understanding) with his conception of social action. According to Weber, the sociologist’s responsibility is to comprehend the meanings that individuals attribute to the contexts in which they act and discern the impact of such meanings on their behavior and the world.

### 5.2.2 Ideal Types

Ideal type is one of the significant contributions of Max Weber that centers on Weber’s preoccupation with the methodology of social sciences. It provides a framework to analyze the significant theoretical formulations and empirical context. Ideal type stands out as a methodological and conceptual breakthrough by Weber, contributing significantly to his widespread recognition in contemporary sociology. An ideal type serves as an analytical or conceptual framework that accentuates particular features of people’s orientations and actions, facilitating analysis and comparison. According to Weber, an ideal type is a mental construct, akin to a model,

employed for the thorough examination and systematic characterization of a specific situation. Weber effectively utilized the ideal type as a methodological tool to comprehend and analyze the complexities of social reality.

“The concept of the ideal type enhances our ability to attribute meaning in research. It doesn’t represent a factual description of reality; instead, it strives to provide clear and precise expressions for such descriptions. Essentially, ideal types are conceptualized based on diligently and analytically collected facts for empirical research. In this regard, ideal types serve as constructs or concepts that function as methodological devices or tools in our comprehension and analysis of various social issues.”

Weber held the view that it was the duty of sociologists to create conceptual tools that could be utilized later by historians and sociologists. The primary and most significant conceptual tool among these was the ideal type. In the period between 1903 and 1908, Weber published a series of essays labeled as “methodological,” addressing various questions regarding the objectives, subject matter, and methodologies of the social sciences. One of the most renowned essays in this collection was “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy,” released in 1904 as Weber assumed the co-editorship of an influential journal. In this piece, he outlined his vision of the social sciences, grounded in cognitive interests that are both historical and theoretical, with a focus on relevance to questions of value and contemporary social



policy. Weber extensively delved into the formation of concepts, with a particular emphasis on his concept of “ideal type” concepts.

Ideal types serve as conceptual tools designed to capture the most pertinent aspects of a given object, such as ‘city,’ ‘patriarchy,’ or ‘capitalism,’ to facilitate scientific investigation. Constructed deliberately, they undergo a process of selection, abstraction, and idealization. The primary goal of ideal-type concepts is utility rather than descriptiveness, as they are not intended to mirror actual phenomena. Weber argued that they were indispensable for the purposes of inquiry and clear presentation. Furthermore, ideal types align well with a vision of social science focused on representing the cultural significance and value-oriented aspects of social phenomena within the framework of historically oriented causal investigations.

Weber envisioned ideal types as hypothetical constructs, not referencing something normatively ideal, but rather an ideational type serving as a mental model. This model is widely shared and utilized because analysts agree that it encapsulates essential features of a phenomenon. The ideal type doesn’t mirror reality but endeavors to distill its crucial features in a model, facilitating a clearer recognition of its real characteristics when encountered. It doesn’t represent a singular side or aspect but rather a synthetic ideational representation of the complexities found in real-world phenomena.

For example, in Weber’s analysis, he took emerging terms and ideas that were prevalent in contemporary bureaucracies at the time he was writing. These terms served as the foundation for the theoretical construction of an ideal type of bureaucracy. This process involved a transformation of everyday language used within bureaucracies into the ideal type. However, there is a normative shift in this process because Weber employs

ordinary language terms, as defined by members of organizations, to describe the actions of these members. The individuals in question were members of the Prussian and German bureaucracies within the state and military, characterized by a fiercely strong sense of duty and conformity.

Weber employed ideal types in three distinct ways, each characterized by varying levels of abstraction. The first category of ideal types is deeply rooted in historical specifics, such as the Western city or the Protestant ethic. In essence, these ideal types reference phenomena that manifest exclusively in certain historical periods and specific cultural regions. The second category deals with abstract elements of social reality, exemplified by concepts like bureaucracy or feudalism. These social reality elements are observable across a range of historical and cultural contexts. The third type of ideal type involves the reconstruction of a particular kind of behavior. In other words, Weber provided several variations of ideal types:

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

According to Weber, an ideal type serves three distinct purposes. Firstly, as a logical construct, it doesn't describe empirical reality but enhances our conceptual comprehension of what to seek in empirical data. Secondly, it doesn't directly offer a hypothesis about reality; instead, as a regulative principle, it indirectly aids social scientists in formulating research questions and hypotheses concerning social reality. Thirdly, as a one-sided exaggeration, the ideal type doesn't present an account of some 'average' level of social reality.

### 5.2.3 Weber on Religion and Economy

Max Weber has extensively discussed the interconnectedness between religion and the economy. Whether the religious ethos influence economic activities? In this stream, Weber located the relationship between Protestant ethics and the growth of capitalism in Europe. Weber theorized the capitalist growth in Europe in terms of the pursuit of Protestant values. His seminal work, "*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*" stands as one of Weber's most renowned pieces. Within this work, he delineates an archetype of the capitalist spirit, conducts a comparative historical examination to ascertain the emergence of capitalism, and employs the notion of *verstehen* to grasp the subjective outlook and drive of the individuals involved. According to Weber, Protestantism, particularly the Calvinist ethos contributed to the economic development in the West.

For Weber, three interconnected motivations worked behind the study about the interrelationship between religion and economy. Initially, he aimed to challenge Marx's assertion regarding the ascent of capitalism, which he deems as "naive" within Marx's historical materialism. Secondly, closely intertwined with the first reason, Weber

sought to oppose raw structural coercion and advocate for the impact of cultural values on social behavior. The third rationale behind Weber's writing of "*The Protestant Ethic*" was to elucidate why rational capitalism emerged exclusively in the West and not elsewhere. While capitalism had been present in prior instances, it had been traditional rather than rational.

In traditional capitalism, conventional values and social hierarchies remained significant; the privileged class would invest but only to the extent necessary to sustain their accustomed lifestyle. Essentially, they engaged in capitalist ventures to uphold their standard of living. The persistence of traditional values and social positions hindered the emergence of rational capitalism in certain regions. Conversely, rational capitalism prioritizes the accumulation of wealth for its own sake and operates on utilitarian social dynamics. Understanding Weber's objectives in the book requires a basic understanding of two factors: the intellectual environment in which he wrote and the connections between the work and the extensive study program he undertook in the later phase of his career.

In his initial research phase, Weber focused on determining the influence of certain religious beliefs and practices on the emergence of the distinct type of modern ("rational") capitalism observed in Western Europe and the United States. What distinguished this modern capitalism was primarily its emphasis on the methodical structuring of labor carried out by workers engaged in a formally unrestricted market, and businesses dedicated to maximizing profit without adhering to traditional norms. This concern with modern capitalism recurs throughout his work.

#### 5.2.3.1 Spirit of Capitalism

Weber acknowledged the existence of



various historical forms of capitalism within Europe and non-Western societies. He also recognized that the emergence of capitalism as a distinct economic system in modern Europe stemmed from a multitude of factors, encompassing both material and cultural elements. His primary concern was twofold: firstly, to elucidate the genesis not of capitalism as a whole but of the unique “spirit” or mentality underlying this new economic system; and secondly, to demonstrate how this ethos catalyzed the substantial growth of modern capitalism during pivotal periods, notably the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consequently, the issues he tackled were intricate yet well-defined, as were his hypotheses, lines of reasoning, interpretations of evidence, and conclusions. It is worth noting that while his arguments were not devoid of ambiguities, and the evidence he presented may not have been entirely convincing.

What exactly was the novel “spirit” of capitalism that Weber examined? He depicted it as an ethos, albeit a secular one, detached from direct religious underpinnings or associations, yet advocating the relentless pursuit of accumulating wealth as a moral obligation. Whether one is an entrepreneur, skilled artisan, or worker, the imperative is to prioritize the accumulation of wealth from their vocation as the focal point of their existence.

Simultaneously, individuals are also obligated not to pursue wealth for the sake of indulging in luxury or leisure. The accumulation of wealth is deemed inherently valuable. Wasting time or money is discouraged; instead, virtues such as frugality, reinvestment, and creditworthiness are promoted. While the exact historical roots of this distinctly modern mindset are ambiguous, Weber proposed that this new positive moral perspective regarding wealth acquisition emerged in America and

Western Europe by the eighteenth century. One remarkable assertion is that Weber’s concept of the spirit of capitalism evolved and thrived largely autonomously from the capitalist system itself.

### 5.2.3.2 Protestant Ethic

In his quest to trace the historical origins of capitalism’s modern ethos, Weber began by examining the contemporary debates surrounding the contrasting attitudes of Roman Catholics and Protestants towards capitalist economic endeavors. Within this context, empirical observations highlighted that Protestants were more inclined than Catholics to engage in innovative and technically skilled forms of capitalist activities. Simultaneously, they were more likely to pursue appropriate training and education for such endeavors, leading to greater prosperity compared to their Catholic counterparts, who were more entrenched in tradition. The efforts to elucidate these disparities sparked extensive yet ultimately inconclusive debates at the time when Weber commenced his investigations.

As Weber investigated the potential origins of these disparities, he identified them in the early history of Protestantism. Firstly, Luther and Lutheranism played significant roles, particularly in promoting the concept that worldly economic endeavors aimed at livelihood were meaningful “callings,” thus imbuing enterprise and labor with moral approval. This, Weber reasoned, motivated individuals to engage more deeply in economic pursuits compared to situations where tradition viewed work as morally neutral or even sinful, albeit necessary for survival.

Secondly, Calvin and Calvinism introduced additional crucial motivations for unwavering dedication to one’s economic calling. Here, Weber’s argument regarding the interplay between religious beliefs and

economic activities becomes intricate and revolves around the paradox of unintended consequences.

Weber's primary concern was to understand the origins of capitalism in the Western world rather than elsewhere. While key elements of capitalism, such as the drive for acquisition and the pursuit of wealth, have been present across various cultures and times, Weber argued that "unlimited greed" is not the defining factor. Instead, he suggested that capitalism might involve the rational regulation or even suppression of this innate impulse.

Weber proposed that the distinct

rationalism observed in Western culture had deeper roots. While capitalism existed in societies like China, India, and Babylon, as well as in historical periods like the classical world and the Middle Ages, it did not progress towards economic rationalism in the same way. Weber attributed this to the influence of magical and religious beliefs, which hindered the development of rational capitalism by lacking a supportive ethos or spirit. Crucially, Weber highlighted that only in the West did the rational organization of formally free labor emerge. He argued that free labor was essential, as precise calculation the foundation of capitalist practices could only occur within such a framework.

## Recap

- ◆ Max Weber was born in 1864 in Erfurt, Germany
- ◆ Weber assumed a lecturer position at the University of Berlin in 1889
- ◆ In 1894, Max Weber commenced his tenure as a full professor of economics at Freiburg University.
- ◆ In 1909, Weber founded the Heidelberg Academy of the Sciences and formed the Sociological Society in 1910.
- ◆ Weber's perspective is rooted in Verstehen (interpretive understanding) with his conception of social action.
- ◆ Ideal type is a mental construct, akin to a model, employed for thoroughly examining and systematically characterizing a specific situation.
- ◆ Weber employed ideal types in three distinct ways
- ◆ Historical ideal types, General sociological ideal types, Action ideal types and Structural ideal types.
- ◆ "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" is one of Weber's seminal works.



- ◆ Protestantism, particularly the Calvinist ethos contributed to the economic development in the West.
- ◆ Rational capitalism prioritizes the accumulation of wealth
- ◆ Calvinism introduced additional crucial motivations for unwavering dedication to one's economic calling

## Objective Questions

1. Where was Max Weber born?
2. Where did Weber assume a lecture position for the first time?
3. Who authored the book of 'Mother and Love'?
4. Who authored Weber's autobiography "Max Weber: A Biography"?
5. In which university, Weber was appointed as chair of economics?
6. When did Weber visit the United States?
7. Who founded the Heidelberg Academy of the Sciences?
8. What do you mean by 'Verstehen'?
9. Who authored a series of essays labeled as 'methodological'?
10. What is the primary goal of an ideal type?
11. Who authored 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'?
12. According to Weber, what introduced additional motivations to one's economic calling?

## Answers

1. Erfurt, Germany
2. University of Berlin
3. Marianne Weber
4. Marianne Weber
5. University of Heidelberg
6. 1904
7. Max Weber
8. Interpretive understanding
9. Max Weber
10. Utility rather than descriptiveness
11. Max Weber
12. Calvinism

## Assignments

1. Examine the academic life of Max Weber and analyze his intellectual contributions in the early years.
2. How does Weber's sociology differ from others? Elaborate Verstehen perspective.
3. What is an Ideal type? Explain its significance by analyzing scientifically a given phenomenon along with covering various types of ideal types.
4. Comprehend major nuances presented by Weber on religion and economy. Do you think that religion can be influenced by economic growth?



5. Assess the role of Calvinism in the development of capitalism in the West in the light of the ‘Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism’.

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1. Abraham, F. (2009). *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction*, New Delhi: OUP.
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**BLOCK**

**Emile Durkheim**



# Social Fact, Division of Labour

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ introduce the dimensions of social fact in understanding social realities.
- ◆ comprehend the concept and types of social solidarity
- ◆ explain the theory of division of labour and its application in the society

### Prerequisites

We may all think that a woman's freedom to give birth and the number of children she would like to reproduce, etc. are completely personal choices. The 21<sup>st</sup> century's social changes has enabled substantial influences in self-care, mental health and reproductive aspects on women's life. Women may feel that they have gained the control over their body as they experience more freedom in their personal and social spaces. The choices and decisions of women seem personal and private. But the decline in the birth rate as a global trend reveals that every woman just plays her part in the huge social wave.

We understand that there is nothing 'personal' in any aspect of social life. Even the thoughts that lead us to our very personal decisions are the result of some social influence. In the above mentioned example, the freedom of reproduction that women possess is the ultimate result of women's empowerment, education, economic growth and the Government's initiative of family planning.

Here, the fertility or birth rate is the external factor which is placed outside the individual. In this context, what is this outer dynamism that controls individuals? French sociologist Emile Durkheim terms it as 'social fact', which will be explained in this unit.

## Keywords

Personal, Fact, Social currents, Solidarity, Organic, Mechanical, Division of labour

## Discussion

According to Emile Durkheim society exists above the level of the individual and it has its own existence. Social facts constrain people to behave according to societal norms. For Durkheim, sociology was the scientific study of social facts. He carefully observed the changes in social trends. He believed that when social facts are studied with scientific techniques, there is no need to focus on individuals. Social complications could be addressed through studying social facts.

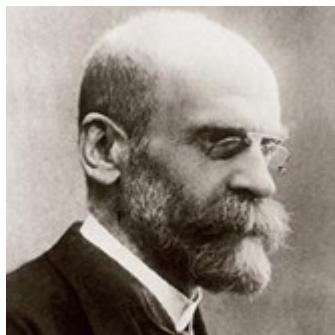
### 6.1.1 Durkheim's Sociology

Durkheim had a functionalist approach

in studying society. This approach or theory based on the principle that all aspects of a society institutions, roles, norms, etc. work for a purpose and those aids in the long-term survival of the society. Durkheim's functionalism is based on the ideas that looks at society from a large perspective. It examines the inevitable social structures that make up a society and how each part helps to keep the society steady. According to functionalism, society is always moving towards an equilibrium.

Durkheim began studying society by applying the scientific method of natural science to social science. For him, a true

### Emile Durkheim –Biographical Sketch



David Émile Durkheim was born in April 1858 in Épinal, located in the Lorraine region of France. He has the ancestral legacy of rabbis (spiritual leader and religious teacher of a Jewish community or congregation). Durkheim did not continue this tradition; he was interested in academics and started studying philosophy in 1879. He graduated in 1882 and began teaching the subject in France. He published his doctoral thesis titled as 'On the division of social labour' in 1893. His other major works are *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), and *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897). *L'Année sociologique* is a biannual peer-reviewed academic journal of sociology established in 1898 by Émile Durkheim.

and effective social science stressed on empirical facts and induce general scientific laws. Positivism or scientific way of studying society can take the following levels:

- a. Society can be studied by the examination of social facts
- b. The only valid way to gain objective knowledge is scientific method
- c. Social sciences can be scientific, only if it gets detached from the metaphysical and philosophical abstractions.

As per Durkheim's assumption, society is a *sui generis* reality. It means the reality unique to itself and involved to its constituting parts. Social reality is shaped when individual consciences interrelate and fuse together to create a synthetic reality which is completely new. This reality is greater than the sum of its parts. French society and its political changes had influenced Durkheim's theory in many ways. He was interested in the various ways in which society works. He examined the evolution and functions of traditional and modern societies. The norms, values and structures of society could be considered as social facts which regulate social life.

### 6.1.2 Social Fact

Consider the duties performed by you as a sister/brother, wife/brother, friend/colleague/ etc. The obligations related to this role are defined by social law and customs. We may feel that the actions produced by the role simply just conform to our inner consciousness and sentiments. As you perform our family roles it is natural to generate such subjective feelings. Durkheim says that the social roles and obligations; each one of them, is just the result of the reality received through education or socialization. A single individual or his/her sentiments

have nothing to play in it.

Similarly if you are unaware of the social obligations, norms, rule, and law or custom which is to be practiced in a social system, you naturally consult an experienced person or a legal code. Family also advices you to follow the obligations. This means that the 'external forces' that controls us exist outside us even before us, and would continue influencing others too, after us. The system of signs used for communication, the monetary system, commercial set up, sentimental practices that you follow, etc. are the entities that function independently outside you. There are ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside the consciousness of the individual, which is defined as social fact.

The book '*The Rules of Sociological Method*' written by Émile Durkheim, first published in 1895; contains the explanation of social facts. Durkheim wrote, "The first and most fundamental rule is: consider social facts as things." He sets another example, "*I am not forced to speak French with my compatriots, nor to use the legal currency, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise. If I tried to escape the necessity, my attempt would fail miserably. As an industrialist nothing prevents me from working with the processes and methods of the previous century, but if I do I will most certainly ruin myself. Even when in fact I can struggle free from these rules and successfully break them, it is never without being forced to fight against them.*" Social facts function in an unknowing way, its presence is rather silent.

Sociology, as a discipline should respect and apply a recognized, objective, scientific method, to bring it close to exact sciences. This method should avoid prejudice and subjective judgment. The best way for it is to consider social happenings as social facts and then study it scientifically.

The above-mentioned examples like legal and moral rules, religious dogmas, financial systems, etc. contain the beliefs and practices already well established. No social fact can exist without a well-defined social organisation. For example, a public gathering, the great waves of enthusiasm, energy or otherwise, a mob's indignation and pity that are produced have no one individual consciousness. They are not part of common norms or rules but they develop abruptly, come from outside, and sweep us along. Thus there are other facts that do not present themselves in this already crystallised form or pattern. But it possesses the same objectivity and domination or control over the individual. These are called as social 'currents'.

Hence, Durkheim's sociology says that social events could be dealt with by analysing social facts. Basically when we make the world more equivalent for all, its impact on individuals will be in a similar way. If more women are empowered, it will be reflected in the whole women's community. If social inequality is taken as a social fact, it will be an answer to all the class, caste differences.

### ***Characteristics of Social Facts***

For Durkheim, social facts could be values, norms, structures, etc. that control and exercise power on individuals. The discipline of sociology is the empirical study of social facts. Durkheim proposes certain main characteristics of social facts. They are (i) externality, (ii) constraint, (iii) independence, (iv) generality. Social facts always exist outside individual consciences and hence we can say that their existence is external to the individuals.

But Durkheim couldn't successfully explain the social problems as he followed the functionalist approach. He just borrowed the views of conservative intellectuals, and insisted the need for a strong society.

Individuals have desires and urges which definitely results in social disorder or chaos. Then society limits them through mechanisms like socialization and social integration. These mechanisms are also social facts.

### **6.1.3 Division of Labour**

A sociologist is definitely a product of society and the same is the case for his theories. The 19th-century French society influenced Durkheim to bring up his doctoral thesis 'The Division of Labour in Society' (French: De la division du travail social) in 1893. Auguste Comte's ideas influenced him in developing social perspectives and he observed that social order was maintained in societies based on two different types of solidarity namely mechanical and organic solidarity.

Before understanding the concept of 'division of labour' it is important to learn the types of solidarity observed by Durkheim. The type of solidarity will relate with the type of society, either mechanical or organic society. Morphological and demographic features, norms, intensity and collective conscience are variant for different societies. Small, socially cohesive, undifferentiated societies possess mechanical solidarity. Societies with complex division of labour have organic solidarity.

#### **a. Mechanical Solidarity**

A society with mechanical solidarity has homogeneity of individuals. People do similar work and they have common educational and religious training and lifestyle. Society with mechanical solidarity is traditional and function by small-scale societies. Tribes are a suitable example of society that possess mechanical solidarity. These societies are much simpler and solidarity is rooted in kinship ties and family network relationships.

The social integration of members of a



society who possess common values and beliefs is called mechanical solidarity. The common beliefs form a ‘collective conscience’ which work internally among individual members. This feeling works as an adhesive in social unity. Here Durkheim applied the method used in natural science to explain the function. The internal energies cause the molecules of a solid to come together; similarly there are forces which bring people together. So, he used the terminology used in physical science to coin the term-mechanical solidarity.

### b. Organic Solidarity

A modern or an industrial society functions by the interdependence among people and through the specialization of work. People perform various types of work and they acquire different values and interests. The order and solidarity of society depends on the operation of the specified tasks. The interdependence of the component parts maintain the social solidarity in industrial society. For example, agriculture has more division of labour when the population and process are large. Farmers produce food, which feeds the tractor-makers, who in turn provide their industrial material for food production. Sectors are interrelated and inter dependent. In complex societies there is a need for individuals to rise up for the needs of others. Greater division of labour necessities the interdependent functioning of the whole system; just like different body parts contribute to the whole body. Societies with greater division of labour have organic solidarity.

### c. The concept of ‘Division of abour’

Emile Durkheim saw Division of labour as the separation and specialization of work among people. Separation implies the parting of the various components of the work process. According to Durkheim moral and economic regulations were inevitable in

maintaining social order. Such regulations especially organic solidarity are formed naturally in response to the division of labour. This allows individuals to “compose their differences peaceably”.

The increasing interdependence and interconnections between people and the different sectors resulted in the development in the division of labour. It is different for different societies and that leads to different forms of solidarity. Durkheim says that “... *the economic services that it can render are insignificant compared with the moral effect that it produces, and its true function is to create between two or more people a feeling of solidarity.*” Hence, Durkheim indicates to the role played by division of labour to establish social solidarity.

When it is put to very simple terms mechanical solidarity roughly relates to smaller societies and organic solidarity relates to larger societies. Cohesion, connection, integrity, homogeneity in work, beliefs, religion and lifestyle of simple societies produces mechanical society. The more complex societies naturally falls into compartmentalization and specialization of work which causes division of labour and it eventually leads to organic solidarity.

### d. Functioning of Division of Labour in society

The establishment of specified jobs for certain people benefits society because it escalates the reproductive capacity of the work course and also the skill set of the workers. It also creates the solidarity feeling among people who do the same job. For Durkheim, division of labour is beyond economic interests. It creates a sense of social as well as moral order in the society. Durkheim says that “*The division of labour can be effectuated only among members of an already constituted society.*” Societies with more moral density have straight proportion

of division of labour.

Now that you have developed an understanding of social solidarity and types of society, you may also be reflecting that any person who rejects the social fact will encounter difficulty. This is the exact point which questions the necessity of individuality of people. If social facts control the whole social system, what vitality does individual opinions hold? This is the oldest and important

limitation of Durkheim's methodology. It fails to address the aspects of individual behaviour. Functionalism is also regarded as conservatively biased by some critics. Later postmodern thinkers like Lewis A Coser says that Durkheim's perspectives on social facts completely ignores the importance of individuals. H.E. Barnes criticises the term 'things' that Durkheim uses for social facts. He says that Durkheim was uncertain what his 'things' are.

## Recap

- ◆ To Durkheim, society exists above the level of the individual and it has its own existence
- ◆ Sociology was the scientific study of social facts
- ◆ Durkheim began studying society by applying the scientific method of natural science to social science.
- ◆ Durkheim had a functionalist approach in studying society
- ◆ Durkheim's functionalism is based on the ideas that looks at society from a large scale perspective.
- ◆ Functionalism proposes that each and every part of society has its own function.
- ◆ According to functionalists, society is always in the process of progress.
- ◆ Social reality is greater and important than its constituent parts
- ◆ The book 'The Rules of Sociological Method' written by Émile Durkheim contains the explanation of social facts.
- ◆ Externality, constraint, independence and generality are the main characteristics of social fact.
- ◆ Social facts could be values, norms, structures, etc. that control and exercise power on individuals.
- ◆ Durkheim couldn't successfully explain the social problems as he followed the functionalist approach.
- ◆ Small, social cohesive, undifferentiated societies possess mechanical

solidarity.

- ◆ Societies with complex division of labour have organic solidarity.
- ◆ A society with mechanical solidarity has homogeneity of individuals.
- ◆ The social integration of members of a society who possess common values and beliefs is called mechanical solidarity.
- ◆ A modern or an industrial society functions by the interdependence among people and through the specialization of work.
- ◆ Moral and economic regulations were inevitable in maintaining social order.
- ◆ Mechanical solidarity roughly relates to smaller societies and organic solidarity relates to larger societies.

## Objective Questions

1. What are the examples of social fact?
2. Which approach sees society as a whole?
3. What is the ‘thing’ which exist outside the individual exerting control over him/her?
4. Who insisted that sociology should be studied as the empirical study of social facts?
5. What are the other facts which do not present themselves in the already crystallised form or pattern but possess the same objectivity and domination or control over the individual?
6. What is as the separation and specialization of work among people?
7. Who opined that division of labour played a role to establish social solidarity?
8. Which society experiences cohesion, connection, integrity, homogeneity in work, beliefs, religion and lifestyle, etc.?
9. Which type of society focuses on compartmentalization and division of labour?

10. Which is the oldest and important limitation of Durkheim's methodology?
11. Which theorist criticised that Durkheim was uncertain on what his 'things' are?

## Answers

1. Values, norms, reproductive freedom, suicide etc.
2. Functionalism
3. Social fact
4. Emile Durkheim
5. Social 'currents'.
6. Division of labour
7. Emile Durkheim
8. Simple societies
9. Complex societies
10. No importance to individual agency
11. H.E.Barnes

## Assignments

1. Evaluate the possibilities of studying society using Durkheim's methodology
2. Describe the importance of social facts while dealing with social structure
3. Why do societies possess different types of solidarity based on its nature?
4. Elaborate the contemporary examples of social facts using Durkheim's



methodology

5. Examine the division of labour in the present society and assess its volume of interdependence in terms of generating organic solidarity.

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1. Collins, Randall, C. (1986). *Weberian Social Theory*. Cambridge: University Press.
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5. <https://classicalsociologicaltheory.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/emile-durkheim-what-is-a-social-fact.pdf>
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## Types of Suicide, Theory of Religion

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ comprehend the concept of suicide as a social issue, typology, and its interconnection with social elements.
- ◆ analyse the theory of religion in society in terms of origin and evolution proposed by Durkheim
- ◆ examine the concept of sacred and profane in formulating religiosity in society

### Prerequisites

Suppose you come across the disheartening news of your dear one's suicide. The very first notion that comes up in your mind would be about the untold depression and suffocations that person had been passing through. You may feel broken because you couldn't be a solace for him/her at the most needful crucial point. You may also most probably seek that person's problems rather than their social aspects. You may talk to that person's family members and eventually find out that the reasons may be personal complexes, unemployment, toxic relationships, betrayal, etc. Most probably you may not point to the 'social conditions' that may have led to the point which have made the person end his/her life. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Emile Durkheim observed the increasing rates of suicide in France, he researched the social aspects of it.

By now, you are familiar with the aspect of social fact and Durkheim's methodology. He took suicide as a social fact and analysed it. It gave a better dimension

to suicide which explains that it is no longer personal, but social. According to Durkheim, suicide is a social activity. Now let us explain the work done by Durkheim in detail.

## Keywords

Social fact, Suicide, Integration, Regulation, Sacred, Profane

## Discussion

According to a world statistics report, suicide is more than as much as ten to twenty times higher than homicide (the killing of one human being by another) across all countries in the world. Suicide is one of the most dreadful social activity as it is the appalling decision one's takes for himself. Emile Durkheim became anxious about the suicide rates of that period in French society. He analysed the differences in the rate of suicide between Protestants and Catholics. As a functionalist, he was interested in the role played by religion in society. Durkheim's approach to religion will be studied in detail in the upcoming unit.

### 6.2.1 Durkheim's Book on 'Suicide'

Durkheim's views on suicide were published as a work 'Le Suicide' in 1897. This book was the first one to manifest a sociological study of suicide. It was an eye-opener and groundbreaking as it proved that suicide is not the result of individual temperament. Suicide has its origins in social causes rather than any other personal dissatisfactions or sufferings. Society puts its members in the stage of the dilemma of suicide. Durkheim's classic text on suicide has always been a specimen for psychologists

and sociologists as well.

As mentioned earlier Durkheim analysed the rates of suicide among Catholics and Protestants. He found lower rates of suicide among Catholics and theorised that stronger forms of social control and social cohesion helped them in social bonding. Protestants experienced less social bonding and hence they are more exposed to the tendency of suicide.

The following are the main aspects of Durkheim's work on suicide:

- a. **Principles of the suicide theory:** Durkheim's theory has two major core principles. The first one is that the suicide rate has its own function in society. It resembles the social relationships and integrity of its members. The second one is that social relationships vary, increase, or deteriorate, and the fluctuations in social integrity result in an increasing level of suicide
- b. **Bonding among individuals:** Durkheim found that emotional bonding is inevitable to stay away from suicide. Suicide

rates are lesser in people who are in romantic or family relationships. The rates are lower in those who have children. He also observed that soldiers commit suicide more often than civilians. Interestingly, soldier suicide rates are much higher during peacetime than during the war-times.

- c. **Social integration:** Psychological, personal, and emotional factors may contribute to suicide. However social factors play an important role while examining the causes of suicide. Social disintegration leaves members in a state of anomie which eventually results in suicide. When a person is socially integrated he possesses a feeling of general belonging. Life makes sense in this situation/context. When social integration withers away, people lose the will to lead life.

### **Salient Features of Durkheim's Suicide Theory**

- ◆ Men commit suicides more than women
- ◆ Childless married women showed a high suicide tendency
- ◆ Single men commit suicide more than those who are in sexual/physical relationships
- ◆ Childless people commit suicide more than people with children
- ◆ Soldiers commit suicide more than civilians
- ◆ A higher level of education is directly proportional to the suicide tendency

- ◆ Religiosity prevents people from suicide. For example, Jewish people were generally highly educated but had a low suicide rate.
- ◆ Suicide rates are higher in Protestants than in Catholics and Jews.

### **6.2.2 Typology of Suicide**

Developing a typology was essential in explaining the different effects of social factors that may lead to suicide. There are four major kinds of suicide:

1. **Anomic suicide:** This type of suicide is related to the condition of anomie (anomie refers to the total breakdown of social standards and norms) or the extreme response of a person who experiences a sense of worthlessness. The feeling of disconnection from family and society results from deteriorated social cohesion. When severe social, economic, and political upheavals occur extreme social changes happen and individuals feel utter confusion and disconnection from all social responsibilities and they choose to commit suicide.
2. **Altruistic suicide:** Have you heard of the tradition of Japanese Kamikaze pilots of World War II? Around 3,800 kamikaze pilots died in the WW II. Japanese military culture was rather altruistic and hence they preferred the tradition of brave death instead of getting captured and defeated. Altruism refers to those acts which promote

someone else's welfare, even at a risk or cost of the self. So, altruistic suicide is the result of extreme regulation of society on the members. You may remember the World Trade Center attack by terrorists in 2001. What is the instinct that made the terrorists sacrifice their lives in this terrific action? Or what leads a soldier to be brave enough to martyr his life for the country? These people are completely aware of their upcoming death and they willingly get ready to kill themselves for the benefit of the common cause or for the society as a whole. Warlike social situations and social emergencies result in the development of altruistic feelings in people. They kill themselves to achieve collective goals. It is an effort to bring in social solidarity.

3. **Egoistic suicide:** According to Suicide Prevention India Foundation, A study conducted by Patel and Kumar (2020), during COVID-19 in India, found that around 15.57% of suicides were due to the experience of loneliness in the time of quarantine. Egoistic suicide is the profound response to the detachment from society. People are functional and integral in society for the roles executed on them. When such roles weaken, family and community ties also weaken. Eventually social bonds also wither away. The gradual disappearance of the existing assets, be it material or non-material; weakens the social bonds and puts people into 'remote islands'. Elderly

people who suffer losses of their dear ones, who falls into social isolation after retirement, individuals with social media addiction etc. are likely to fall under the category of egoistic suicide.

4. **Fatalistic suicide:** Individuals may encounter extreme social regulation that denies his/her existence at both personal and social levels. Extreme social control may result in oppressive conditions which causes the rejection of self and agency. This may lead to a condition where the person chooses to end his/her life rather than suffering in oppressive conditions. The best example is suicide among jail prisoners.

### 6.2.3 Theory of Religion

What according to you, is religion? It is normal to develop a supernatural or divine status in the aspect of religion. As it is connected to belief systems, fear of the unknown and the infinite power people consider it as of a celestial origin. Emile Durkheim is of the opinion that religion is the product of society and it has its own function. Similarly, religious beliefs are also a product of social life and it also has effects on the social life. There are a few common things religion puts its emphasis on.

Religion is not a fantasy, rather it has its natural origin. As mentioned earlier, every social aspect should possess a social function to exist in the social system. Religion, as a social structure, provides social control, cohesion and adhesion. It also delivers a mean of communication and ways of communication for its members and it also ensures reaffirmation of social norms.

According to Weber “*religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say – things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices, which you need them into a single moral community, for all those who adhere to them*”.

### a. The Elementary forms of religious life

The book ‘*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*’ published in 1917 is one of most influential works of Durkheim. It was published just five years before his death and is regarded as his academic best. Apart from his research on suicide, this work was more focused and used a different methodology. The work on suicide focused on a large amount of data from varying religions and other sources, whereas ‘*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*’ used in-depth case study of the Australian aborigines. The Australian aborigines are considered as Earth’s oldest civilization. The Aboriginal people always attracted the curiosity of sociologists as they possessed a particular amount of cultural peculiarities. Their society also showed the most basic and elementary forms of religion.

### Features of Aboriginal people

- ◆ Self-control and self-reliance
- ◆ Courage and friendship
- ◆ Empathy and holistic sense of oneness and interdependence
- ◆ Reverence for their land and country
- ◆ Responsibility to oneself and to society
- ◆ Complex set of spiritual values
- ◆ Colonisation history and devastations on their organic culture

- ◆ Despite the impact of colonisation, the aboriginal group still stay strong with their culture and remain resilient

The conclusion of the Durkheim’s book is that, religion is something eminently social. Religious representations exist as collective representations which express collective realities. It acts as a source of solidarity in mechanical solidarity systems than organic solidarity systems. Social norms, morals, meanings etc. of social life are reinforced by religion.

Hope you all have seen religious assemblies, mass prayers and services. Religion pulls people together, both mentally and physically together. They act as entities which function for social solidarity. Thus religion reaffirms collective morals and beliefs among the members of society. Durkheim insists that if left alone for a long period, beliefs and convictions of people gradually weakens and it requires reinforcement and strengthening. Society represents the collective norms and beliefs, whereas ‘religion’ influences society.

Throughout his academic career Durkheim was concerned with social cohesion and functions of constituent parts. He says that “*A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.*”

### b. Sacred and profane

Durkheim also identified certain common elementary forms of religion across different cultures. The ‘supernatural realm’ is not common in all religions. One important aspect of all religions is the division of behaviours into two categories- the sacred and profane. Objects and behaviours believed



as sacred were regarded as part of the spiritual or religious realm. Sacred aspects of religion were confined to religious rites, objects of reverence and behaviours of religiosity. Then what are the things related to profane? All the things which do not have a religious function or religious meaning could be considered as profane.

These two categories of sacred and profane are rigidly and strictly defined and set apart. But they interact and depend on one another for existence.

Have you noticed the crucifix or the ceremony of mass in Church? Have you observed the rituals in a temple or the prayers in a mosque? Those acts have a function, they are sacred and contain the aspects of social life with moral superiority or reverence. The features of ‘sacred’ in social life is different in different cultures. For example, the religious practices of Australian Aboriginals and Native American societies have great variations. Certain behaviours, animals and objects turn out to be sacred because the respectable community has marked it so. On the other hand, profane is everything related to mundane activities. It refers to everything else, all those mundane things like our jobs, bills, eating, sleeping, travelling, etc.

It is important to note that all the profane things could be given the version of sacredness, when the aspects related to it is incorporated into the mundane activities. For example, a workbench; which is rather profane in any other place, when placed in a church becomes a pew and a place for prayer; and it is transformed as sacred.

The ideas of sacred and profane exceeds everyday existence. The aspects of sacred is extra ordinary, potentially dangerous, remarkable and fear creating ones. It also refers to the things that are socially defined as something which requires special religious

action. A rock, a sculpture, a tree, an animal or a bird is sacred as it is marked as sacred by a religious group or community. Once something is identified as sacred, it gets established as symbols of religious beliefs or sentiments. Irreverence to sacredness would be hurting the religious feelings of the community. When objects with profane aspects are not respected, it is not a matter of fact, because those are mundane things in everyday life.

As the profane grips the everyday attitude of frequency, utility and familiarity of objects, it is common to contaminate the holy or sacred objects. The contempt of the sacred is the denial or sub-ordination of the holy. If people manifest their disrespect to the sacred things, it creates negative emotions. Later it leads to the creation of strong taboos to avoid the disregard of the sacred things. Imposing sacredness to various objects helps in promoting social solidarity. Ceremonies, rituals, practices and various rites promote oneness and integrity within the community. Thus it is clear that religion is socially created and then just think about the silliness of communalism and religious violence happening all around the world!

In short, Durkheim asserts that suicide and religion are socially produced aspects. They have nothing personal or supernatural. Durkheim also argued that suicide rates were related to the degree of clarity and coherence of group’s rules and social norms. Living in a poorly regulated society or social group result in an increased tendency of suicide. On discussing about the sacred and profane; these aspects of religion are closely related because of the highly responsive or sensitive attitude towards them. The circle of sacred objects cannot be confirmed then once and for all. Its magnitude varies indeterminately according to different religions. The significance of the sacred lies completely in the element of its distinction from the profane.

## Recap

- ◆ Suicide rates has its own function in the society and it resembles the social relationships and integrity of its members
- ◆ Durkheim analysed the differences in the rate of suicide between Protestants and Catholics
- ◆ Durkheim's views on suicide was published as a work 'Le Suicide' in 1897
- ◆ Social disorder results in Anomic suicide
- ◆ Lack of social integrity causes Egoistic suicide
- ◆ Suicides related to collective goals are altruistic suicides
- ◆ Extreme social regulation may result in fatalistic suicide
- ◆ Emile Durkheim is of the opinion that religion is the product of society and it has its own function
- ◆ Religion is socially created
- ◆ Religion, as a social structure, provides social control, cohesion and adhesion.
- ◆ The book '*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*' was published in 1917
- ◆ One important aspect of all religions is the division of behaviours into two categories- the sacred and profane
- ◆ Profane refers to everything other than sacred, all those mundane things like our jobs, bills, eating, sleeping, travelling etc.

## Objective Questions

1. What was Durkheim's methodology in studying suicide and religion in society?
2. What are the two main aspects of religion according to Durkheim?
3. Which suicide is the product of extreme social order and control?

4. Which is the last work of Emile Durkheim?
5. Which work of Durkheim deals with the in-depth case study of the Australian aborigines?
6. What exist as collective representations which express collective realities?
7. What are the aspects in religion which do not have a religious function or religious meaning?
8. Which aspects of religion are extra ordinary, potentially dangerous, and remarkable and fear creating one?
9. Who proposed that there is no supernaturalism in religion and it performs social function?
10. Which academic study of Emile Durkheim deals with the analysis of the differences in the rate of suicide between Protestants and Catholics?

## Answers

1. Functionalism
2. Sacred and Profane
3. Fatalistic suicide
4. The elementary forms of religious life
5. The elementary forms of religious life
6. Religious representations
7. Profane
8. Sacred
9. Emile Durkheim
10. ‘Le Suicide’ (1897)

## Assignments

1. Evaluate the sacred and profane aspects in our everyday life
2. How important is Sociology of Religion introduced by Emile Durkheim?
3. Describe the typology of suicide with relevant examples
4. ‘Suicide is not personal’. Validate the statement with Durkheim’s theory

## Suggested Readings

1. Durkheim, Émile. (1979). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Trans. Spaulding, John A. New York: The Free Press.
2. Jones, Robert Alun. (1986). *Émile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications.
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1. Abraham, F. (2009). *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction*, New- Delhi: OUP
2. Coser, L.A. (2015). (Indian Edition) *Masters of Sociological Thought*. Jaipur: Rawat
3. Giddens, Anthony. (1977). *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory – An analysis of writings of Marx, Durkheim and Weber*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



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