

May 7-9, 2011

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SOCIOLOGY 300//

CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY

MAJOR DEBATES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND PRE-ENLIGHTENMENT

A. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT DEBATE: HOBBS AND LOCKE

THOMAS HOBBS (1588-1679)

1. The nature of human nature-a mechanical model based on the elements of motion (Hobbes). Action is based on Will (endeavor): appetite or desire (for what is good for one) & aversion (shunning what is evil, esp. death). Humans basic desire is for self-preservation; humans are self-regarding. Happiness is continual success in getting what one desires.

Society & state - based on this will or inclination toward power-insatiable.

Individual - the proprietor of his own power or capacities-owing nothing to society.

Society - relations of exchange between proprietors; all relations are in effect market relations.

Basis of society - universal political or moral obligation.

Rights - equal rights (based on fact) is inherent in equal need for continued motion. (materialist view) Therefore, right and obligation are derived from fact.

Humans - rational, calculating, self-correcting machines.

2. How is society possible? The Hobbesian Question

State of nature (society removed from human association)--force, fraud, war; humans are made sociable.

"There is no justice without law, no law without discipline, no discipline without sanctions." Justice and rights are products of society.

3. The Leviathan - the creation of a social organism or collective person: a Commonwealth created by a group of people. Gov't. becomes the representative or authoritative person for all members of society. Covenant - an agreement to transfer ind. rights to a sovereign in order to protect themselves. One gives up liberty for security & protection. (War is natural; peace is social.) The Commonwealth is a civil society (bourgeois); reflects modern urban commercial life.

4. The Laws of nature: the precepts of reason leading to self-preservation:

i. to seek ways to obtain peace (in spite of fear & mistrust)

ii. to compromise & content oneself with limited liberty & for others as well - the golden rule idea

iii. to live according to the covenant made

JOHN LOCKE (1632-1704)

1. The nature of human nature - naturally social & rational. Humans are born for freedom-a natural right. "Men" are naturally social & rational; the mind is a tabula rasa; therefore, the importance of education. Nature & rights are God-given. Locke makes the case for constitutional monarchy to who that gov't. could rest on rational rather than mystical grounds.

Natural law=a command of God; a rule of reason; a law in the nature of things

2. Society - All men are eligible for membership in society who possess the rights of life, liberty & property. Labourers, foreigners & natives (not full members of society) give their "tacit consent". Women are naturally cursed by the evil of Eve; therefore, patriarchy is natural. Importance of duty; respect for others; the law of nature.

How is society created? Through the social contract: Govt. is created by the consent of the governed (majority rule) & exists to promote their welfare (according to the laws of nature).

3. Property: The individual as the natural proprietor

i. one's self - one's person

ii. life, liberty, labour-one is entitled only to those goods with which one has mixed one's labour.

iii. the material possessions which result=private property. Labour creates property & gives value to things--a labour theory of value. Greed & waste must be checked.

HOBBS AND LOCKE

1. Locke-the state of nature is the only home for the state of war; not to be endured. Society makes humans social. Hobbes-society controls men's will.

2. Self-preservation is a basis element in the law of nature.

3. Civil government is the remedy for the inconveniences of nature.

DIFFERENCES:

1. Locke's state of nature is not violent-difficulties rather than viciousness & antisocial character assumed by Hobbes.

2. Locke's civil gov't. is less absolute than Hobbes. Limited gov't. based on the consent of the governed is more effective & beneficial than the unlimited power of the absolute sovereign of Hobbes.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) The State of Nature & the Soc. Contract

In order to fully understand Rousseau's conception of the "Social Contract", it is necessary to first explain his conception of the state of nature, and indicate how it differs from that proposed by another contract theorist we discussed earlier, Thomas Hobbes.

Both Hobbes and Rousseau knew that there was really no such thing as man within a true "state of nature". Presocial men, as Rousseau explained, could not really be called men at all. But speculation about a hypothetical state of nature could be helpful to us if it sheds light on the basic nature of man. In order to do this, we divest man of all his social qualities and try to imagine what he might be like if he had ever lived in isolation- this is of course an impossibility.

Although both Rousseau and Hobbes speculate on what such a "natural man" might be like, they differ in many respects. As Rousseau points out, even "savages" yield a very inaccurate picture of the state of nature, because even though they might seem primitive to us, they are actually socialized in their own particular way. Therefore, theorists (like Hobbes) who maintain that natural man shares the warlike and brutal traits of "savages" is actually attributing to natural man characteristics which he has acquired in society.

Rousseau's conception of the "state of nature" is thus in almost complete opposition to that offered by Hobbes. In Rousseau's "natural state", there is a perfect balance between man's needs and the resources at his disposal. Man doesn't want anything beyond what he already has- and he already has everything he needs. Like the animals, he has sensations, but no knowledge and no language. Since, for Rousseau, language is a social product, natural man cannot possess it. His needs are simple and purely physical- food, a mate, and rest. He cannot conceive of the future and is oriented solely to the present.

What, then is the relationship between humans in the "state of nature"? Certainly not a state of war. Rousseau rejects the Hobbesian notion of a "war of all against all". If man has what he needs, why should he attack others? In fact, in the primitive natural state, men are indifferent to and isolated from others. So Rousseau agrees with Hobbes that natural man may be egoistic (perhaps even brutish) but he asserts that this does not lead to war. War is a social institution- man learns to make war only in society. Man does not attempt to rob, dominate or harm others- instead, in his natural state, he remains indifferent to them- although he is capable of putting himself in their place and feeling some sympathy for them. He doesn't want to join with them to form a society, but neither does he want to harm them. According to Rousseau, then, men in the state of nature are quite similar to animals- they are neither good nor evil (having learned neither good nor evil). They are neither quarrelsome nor domineering. They do not benefit from speech, they have no notions of "progress" or education- and every generation remains much like the last. In short, natural man does not live in society and has no culture.

Rousseau on the Origin of Society

The state of nature is fine as far as it goes, but according to Rousseau something inevitably happens to upset it. The catalyst may be an increase in population, or the challenge created by a poor harvest. This forces men to work together and learn to cooperate with one another. Families form and band together to create societies. Parents and children experience bonds of love and closeness. Man learns to speak and to pass on culture to future generations.

This was a happy time for mankind, in Rousseau's view, because although we were now capable of vanity and envy, we were also learning to love our fellow men. At this stage there were no true social inequalities—of course children were subordinate to their parents, but this is a natural and temporary condition. However, once men become more knowledgeable about the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals, and the division of labour increases in complexity, social inequalities begin to emerge for the first time. The institution of inheritance & the realization that some men possess more than others— all of this divides society against itself.

The result of this discord and inequality is that governments must be formed to protect property. Obviously, this benefits the rich more than the poor. Like laws and government, war is a social institution arising out of envy— it is only in society that men learns to attack his fellow men. Hobbes is wrong, then, in his assumption that man is naturally brutal. Man makes war, according to Rousseau, only as part of an organized community. So for Hobbes, war is a natural state, but for Rousseau it is a social phenomenon.

For Rousseau, as for Locke, Hobbes' social contract is an asymmetrical one involving coercion. What sense does it make, as Rousseau points out, to offer people a "contract" which assumes that, "You need me, for I am rich and you are poor. Let us therefore make a contract with one another. I will do you the honour to permit you to serve me under the condition that you give me what little you still have left for the trouble I shall take in commanding you." In other words, "Heads I win, tails you lose". As Rousseau reminds us in The Social Contract, a man (or a collectivity) which gives itself away for nothing has done something absurd and incomprehensible. Such an act is obviously invalid, since the man who does it must be mad. To say the same thing of a whole people is to make them all mad, and madness does not make right. And even if, by some outrageous process of reasoning, such an act could be considered legitimate, how could one make it on behalf of one's children, as Hobbes argues? After all, children are born free, and such a presumption surely goes far beyond the rights of parenthood.

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Rousseau on the Social Contract

In Ch. II of The Social Contract (The Right of the Strongest) Rousseau contradicts Hobbes' assertion that "might makes right". He points out that even if we accept this claim, "nothing results from it but a mass of nonsense". All this means is that if the strongest is always right, it is only necessary to make sure that you are the strongest. But what kind of right is it that ceases to exist without strength? If a man is forced to obey, he no longer has any moral obligation to do so- the words "right" and "might" are clearly contradictory. Many things are forced upon us- does that mean we should do nothing about them? All power comes from God, Rousseau agrees, but does that mean that if God inflicts disease on us, we are forbidden to call a doctor? A bandit can force me to part with my money, but do I have a moral obligation to give it to him because he has a pistol? Of course not- we are obliged to obey only legitimate powers.

How is power to be made legitimate? Other contract theorists (such as Hobbes and even to some extent Locke) viewed society as an agreement established through the subjection of its members. But Rousseau offers a contract based on freedom and equality. That is the premise inherent in his notion of the General Will. It is a radical form of pure, direct democracy which Rousseau himself realized was not possible outside of very small communities. Rousseau explains that the General Will involves "the complete surrender of each associate, with all his rights, to the whole community. Since each man gives himself entirely, the condition is equal for all; and since the condition is equal for all, it is in no one's interest to make it burdensome for others".

The advantage of this "General Will" is that it provides us with the same protection as subjection to an absolute ruler- we each have the collective strength of the whole community behind us (strength in numbers). But each man remains as free as before and ultimately obeys only himself- in surrendering himself to all, he surrenders himself to nobody. There is no common authority to make decisions for us- we make them for ourselves. The sovereign, then, is formed only by the individuals who compose it. Therefore it cannot have any interests contrary to those of its subjects, nor can it have any desire to harm- for how can the body want to harm any part of itself? But the subjects, alas, do not always have the best interests of the collectivity at heart. Sometimes we may want to enjoy the rights of a citizen without fulfilling our duties as a subject. What to do? According to Rousseau, anyone who refuses to obey the "General Will" shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. He shall be "forced to be free"- this is the only way the arrangement can work. This of course is open to question and of course there must be good will on all sides, but Rousseau stresses that there is a great difference between each subjecting himself to the whole, and the subjection of an individual to a sovereign.

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Kant, Herder, and the Promise of the Enlightenment

Before we begin discussing the assigned articles, it's a good idea to review some of the most important assumptions of Enlightenment thought, since Immanuel Kant is an archetypal Enlightenment theorist.

The era of the Enlightenment extends throughout the eighteenth century. The source of this illumination is of course the use of the methods of the natural sciences to study both the natural and social worlds. It was in terms of the scientific method that the 18th c. theorists sought to construct a science of humanity.

Reason (use of the mind) would be supplemented by experience or the use of the senses, especially observation. This led to the conception of a new and better future, fashioned with aid of scientific knowledge. This emergence of a scientific method to be used in the study of man makes the Enlightenment the logical starting point if one is interested in the origins of sociological theory.

However, reason, by itself will not yield knowledge of reality, but in combination with observation will enable us to better understand both the natural and the social worlds (the methodological application of the human senses to the empirical world). By studying nature, including the nature of man, we can learn not only about the existing order, but also about its future possibilities. The existing order was thus studied in order to learn how to transcend it- to change the rigid conventions which Enlightenment thinkers saw as stifling man's potential and limiting new possibilities. Thus, we are speaking of the light of intellectual understanding which contrasts with the darkness and ignorance of the old order. Not all Enlightenment thinkers agree on every point, but in general they felt that their task was one of political education. They sought to eliminate custom, superstition, backwardness and ^{the} social practices and institutions which nurtured them. With these stifling constraints removed, reason and self-control (rather than control of man by external forces such as the church) would flourish.

Central to the renunciation of traditional Christianity was the realization that ignorance, and not man's "sinful" nature was the cause of most of the world's problems. Once ignorance is overcome, and man assumes his proper place of prominence, the world will become a better place in which to live.

Immanuel Kant believed that the Enlightenment represents man's emergence from immaturity. He believed that the motto of the Enlightenment should be, "Dare to know. Have the courage to use your own understanding". And indeed, during Kant's time one did have to be daring in order to use one's own understanding, since every independent thinker had to face serious sanctions- repressive custom, prejudice and the arbitrary exercise of power by the elites. But the implication of his motto is clear- understanding is not limited to an elite group- it is within the reach of every individual, through the use of reason.

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Kant, Herder and the Promise of the Enlightenment continued:

This emphasis on change, progress and the use of reason has a negative and critical aspect as well as a positive one. It is negative most of all in its repudiation of the existing order, with its traditional assumption that all inequalities between men were somehow natural and "ordained by God"- and therefore not subject to change. With the Enlightenment, there came a new realization that all men are free and equal in the Kantian sense already mentioned- we all possess reason. In this respect the Enlightenment affirms the sanctity of the individual over that of the collectivity. After all, individuals alone can be said to possess reason- not societies, classes or institutions.

Herder and Kant

In many ways, Herder's (1744-1803) thoughts run counter to the Enlightenment. For example, he rejected the idea that social reality was ordered in terms of universal and unalterable laws which rational investigation could discover. In opposition to this, he maintained that every historical period, and every culture and people, possess a unique and individual character of their own. From this notion, it follows that if we want to understand society, or forms of community and historical periods, we have to concentrate on what makes them distinctive and unique. This is more important than global similarities. If we describe phenomena in generalities or in terms of universal laws, we rob them of their special, idiosyncratic qualities.

Therefore, Herder sees a radical distinction between the methods appropriate to the study of society, and those used to study nature (natural science). It's fine to look for similarities when studying objects in nature, but Herder felt that such methods were not appropriate for the social sciences.

Herder also differed from the Enlightenment philosophers in that he thought they had misunderstood the nature of progress. According to Herder, progress did not mean advancement in science or technology, or even in commerce, for he maintained that any improvement in these areas usually is accompanied by a decline in others- particularly the moral or spiritual realms. In other words, Herder was one of the first theorists to observe that it is possible to be technologically advanced, but morally bankrupt. As he saw it, progress did not necessarily mean an increase in goodness or happiness for the individual. He did, however, believe that human and social evolution would lead to the realization of the potential of mankind and the development of the human mind.

The reading-"On the Philosophy of History"- reveals Herder's general attitude towards mankind which is in tune with the Enlightenment. There is a basic sense of idealism in his optimistic view of the potential for human development- both at the level of individual cultures (not specific individuals) and on a global level. Herder stresses the importance of the diversity of cultures, and the inter-relationships between all aspects of man's personlaity, which he sees as a blend of rationality and irrationality- into one harmonious whole.

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Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Kant was inspired by Rousseau and felt an affinity with the spirit, attitudes and values which emerged in the second half of the Enlightenment. There was an intellectual division between Kant and Herder (for example, as I have said, Herder was not in agreement with the idea that there are laws of nature which determine human action- but Kant was). But Herder and Kant do share common ideals- a belief that it is both possible and desirable for mankind to achieve spiritual self-determination. In addition, both refuse to accept any kind of dogma, whether theological or scientific. This call for self-determination is the main theme in Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment?" Kant said, "Have the courage to use your own understanding"- but the Prussia of Frederick the Great (and mid 18th century Europe in general) was built on an open and explicit denial of freedom.

What is Kant saying in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" First of all, it is quite obvious that in Kant's view Enlightenment is defined in terms of freedom and autonomy. The message of this essay is clear- if man will only use his uniquely human capacity to reason, he can produce a better society- but he must do it for himself. Thus Kant defines Enlightenment as man's departure from a condition of self-imposed servitude. (pg.132) Kant views the age in which he lives as an age of Enlightenment- not just individuals, but a whole epoch is freeing itself from the chains of the past.

Although Kant discusses this in relation to several spheres of life, he focuses especially on religion, where the struggle is against superstition. He points to the need to use one's own reason, in spite of the fact that the priest says- don't argue, believe! (pg. 134) The tax collector says- don't argue, pay! For Kant, Enlightenment is not a private and personal achievement- it is a general historical achievement which is universal. According to Kant, this entails the creation of a world for which man must bear sole responsibility. So all that appears to be imposed on man from the outside (the bad as well as the good) is in reality his own doing. At the end of the essay, Kant poses a question- "Do we live (at present) in an Enlightened age?" (pg.138) He answers that, no, we do not- but we live in an age of enlightenment. It is an ongoing process- who can say when (or if) it will ever be completed?

Of course this notion of man's responsibility leaves us with the problem of what to do about accusations which were previously levelled at God. For if man is really autonomous and fully responsible for his actions, we cannot escape the conclusion that he is also responsible for all the evil and misery in the world. This realization of course makes us all very uncomfortable- but so be it.

Kant's other essay, "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent"- deals with his less optimistic philosophy of history- that is, his explanation of how change comes about. Although Kant retained the belief in progress, and saw an increase in freedom which could not be reversed, he argues that it is antagonism or conflict which brings this about- this is the driving force of history. Kant argues that this "asocial sociability" is innate in man, and it is due to the effects of this antagonism (pg.120, 4th principle) that the first steps from barbarism to culture were achieved.

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Immanuel Kant continued:

Far from associating harmoniously with one another, men were inclined to hold themselves apart from the rest of society, because of a selfish desire to have everything their own way. For Kant, progress comes about through "antagonistic cooperation" and it is discord (conflict) which stirs people out of their passivity and laziness. The progress of man was thus laid down by the "will of nature"- the catalyst is the tensions at work in society, and man's ambivalent desire to be both "social" and "asocial".

Kant's Theory of Knowledge

In late 18th and early 19th c. Europe, the Newtonian conception of a rational and mechanistic universe was rejected. This was especially evident in the religious sphere, where the importance of inner experience was restored- as well as in philosophy, where the mind was assigned a creative role. This shift was especially important for Kant's new epistemology, in which he argues against Locke's theory of knowledge. (remember Locke's notion of the "blank slate" or "tabula rasa"). As we discussed before, Locke was an empiricist- he argued that all knowledge originates in sensory experience. The mind is a passive receptacle in that it only receives the sensory experience, but has no creative role in the selection or organization of the impressions it receives.

In contrast to Locke, Kant argues that the mind is an active and creative agent which plays a role in the processing and structuring of sensory data. For Kant then, knowledge is created through the activity of the human mind. It begins through sensory experience, which is then processed through the individual's mental framework.

But how does the mind do this? According to Kant, there are certain universal elements which are necessary conditions for all knowledge. These necessary conditions Kant calls a a priori (elements which are prior to anything else) These organizing principles necessary for perception and knowledge are space and time. All objects of experience must appear in space and time- the need for this is inherent in the mind itself. It follows from this that knowledge of the world as it exists (independent of the knowing subject) is impossible, because the mind interprets in accordance with its own nature and laws. What we perceive is already given to us arranged in space and ordered in time. We experience changes as our consciousness moves through space and time. Thus it follows that all are experiences are fragmentary and depend on our position in space at various times- all knowledge is perspectival, and there can be no such thing as absolute truth. For example- we never see our own face as it really is, but only as we perceive it to be from various angles. We can never study reality apart from our perceptions of it, and Kant argues that we can never really know if there is anything beyond what we see. Thus Kant is a skeptic of metaphysics- he is skeptical about the reality of "things in themselves".

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Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy and the Assumptions of Social Realism

Before we begin discussing Comte's positive philosophy, it would be helpful to examine the social realist assumptions which are of fundamental importance for his work.

Social realism asserts that society is a reality in and of itself- we cannot simply reduce it to the attributes of its individual members. Secular conservatives (as opposed to religious ones) do not assume that society operates according to God's laws, but according to its own laws. The task is to understand these laws and to obey them. What, then, are the laws of society (according to the social realists?)

1. Social realism assumes that society is an organic unity, greater than the sum of its individual members, with its own unique characteristics. It is, in other words, a reality with its own properties. So according to this view, the individual is not the basic unit of analysis -the fundamental unit of society. Instead, the basic units are the groups and relationships which emerge out of the family, the community, religion and the workplace. These units are interdependent, so that a change in one will bring about a change in them all. Just as is the case with organisms in the natural world (such as the human body) society avoids radical change, and instead strives to maintain persistence and stability.
2. The second assumption is that society predates the individual (it was here before any one of us) and provides the setting in which we develop. Society is morally and ethically superior to the individual, and sets the parameters of our development. Outside society, man is impossible.
3. The third assumption is that social institutions serve as necessary checks on man's uncontrollable, selfish needs. These institutions (family, church, state, etc.) give order, meaning, and stability to life. We need the limits they provide, because without them, we would be subject to constant unhappiness and frustration. Man is insatiable- the more he has, the more he wants.
4. The fourth assumption deals with the fragile nature of the social bond. These bonds rest on tradition and custom, and the social order will break down if individuals attempt to interfere with its workings or hasten its process of development in any way. Individual interference in the laws of society results in disorder and unhappiness.

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Comte and Social Realism continued:

5. The fifth assumption centers around the non-rational aspect of the social order. What does this mean? By non-rational, we mean that all social institutions were not deliberately constructed to meet a goal or solve a problem. For example, we did not set out to create families in an attempt to solve the problem of how to raise children. They do- but their origin is non-rational and natural- not the result of conscious human interference. It is because society is more powerful than the individual, and exists over, above and independently of him, that it inspires in people a sense of wonderment and awe. This is almost the way we feel about God- but according to the secular conservatives, society is not given to us by God. In fact it is just the opposite- society is the source of the sacred. Emile Durkheim (more about him *(later on)*) put it this way: "Religion is society worshipping itself".
6. Finally, social realism stresses the importance of hierarchy and status. Status differentials are deeply rooted in custom and tradition. Again, these are non-rational in origin- they are not the product of conscious human intervention, but are natural and God-given. They are beneficial, because they classify people and assign them to their proper tasks, and this ensures harmony and order. For example, some people are better able to lead than others- status differentials give them the opportunity to do this.

The major implication of all these assumptions is obvious. We must not challenge time-honoured values and institutions, lest we undermine the very fabric of society. In contrast to Enlightenment thinkers, conservative thought stresses social authority (obligations) over individual rights and freedoms, hierarchy over equality, the power of the non-rational over individual reason, and stability over progress.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857)

Comte was Saint-Simon's pupil and friend for many years, but their friendship was broken around 1824, when each accused the other of stealing his ideas. Saint-Simon tried to commit suicide over this in 1824, and in fact it seems likely that his death in 1825 was the result of a successful suicide attempt.

Their ideas are very similar, but in fact Comte far surpassed his mentor in reputation. If he appropriated almost all of Comte's ideas, he also reformulated them to some degree. He agreed with Saint-Simon that the representatives of science and industry should administer the progress of society. But he also felt that rational administration was not enough to create a society which is efficient and well-integrated. Even more important, for Comte was the maintenance of a cohesive set of values similar to those found in traditional society. We don't

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Auguste Comte continued:

just need rational administration- we also need a moral code which will restrain the unreasonable desires and vanities of the mass of the population, and teach them to accept their place in society. Sociology, then, must be both the science of society and the religion of humanity. So Comte sees a division between moral and temporal power- we need a moral force in society (he called these the savants), as well as a class of administrative officials. The savants would help to guide the administrators in their decision-making.

The essential theme of Comte's sociology is thus the reconciliation of "progress and order". Progress is possible only within the context of social order. Advancements take place only within established structures, and changes must be consistent with the laws of society. But progress is not only a result of order, it also furthers the cause of order (leads to greater order). It is a process of harmonious evolution.

The progress and order theme is reflected in two main components of Comte's sociology- the study of social statics and social dynamics. Statics involves the study of social consensus, the non-rational foundations of society (family, church, all sacred customs) which hold society together. Dynamics involves an examination of the laws of social progress and the necessary stages of social growth. Through dynamics, we discover the patterns of evolutionary development. Through statics, we learn that this pattern is grounded in social solidarity.

Comte's Law of the Three Stages

This is related to Comte's study of social dynamics- the process of evolution in all human societies. Comte also discussed the process of evolution as it occurs in scientific thought- "the hierarchy of the sciences"- but this is not as relevant for our purposes. Comte's Law of the Three Stages is based on an organicist analogy which assumes that the evolution of the collective mind (society) parallels the evolution of the individual mind. He identifies the following three stages in both individual and collective development:

1. Theological stage- Comte points out that the individual tends to be a devout believer in childhood- one who seeks what he calls "the essential nature of things" and "their first and final causes". At this stage of development, we believe that events are caused by the actions of supernatural beings (one God or many Gods). In society, the theological stage is dominated by priests and military men- can be compared to the feudal system.
2. Metaphysical Stage- as one of criticism and questioning- typical of rebellious adolescents. A period of upheaval for society as well, in contrast to the relative tranquility of the theological stage. Upheavals in the existing order of things may verge on anarchy.

Comte's Law of the Three Stages continued:

The period in which Comte lived seemed to him to be profoundly critical and disordered. However, Comte believed that these periods of disequilibrium were a necessary prelude to the next organic stage of development.

3. In the positive stage of development, the human mind no longer seeks "first and final causes"- the individual gives up his quest for absolute truth, and seeks instead to understand the laws of the universe and their relationship to one another. At this stage, both a belief in the supernatural and philosophical speculation are abandoned in favour of the scientific approach. Comte believed that the scientific principles of observation, experimentation and comparison would enable us to uncover the secrets of both the natural and the social worlds.

Comte's Vision of Sociology as "Applied Social Science"

But what is the point of such knowledge about the social world? Comte believed that knowledge we gain about social phenomena will allow us to predict the course society will take in the future, and furthermore, that we will be able to control its course. Comte's motto was, "Know in order to predict, predict in order to control. In contrast to Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, Comte believed that human nature was predictable. But only the positive science of sociology can yield such practical applications- what Comte termed "social engineering".

When we speak of Comte's positivism, we are really using the word in two senses. For Comte, social sciences are positivistic because they seek to uncover the regularities of human behaviour which can then be expressed as laws. For Comte, positivism refers to an attitude of mind towards science and the explanation of nature and society, not some misguided search for mathematical precision which is not possible in the social sciences. However, he did believe in the unity of the sciences, and he stressed that the same methods can be used in both the natural and the social sciences. The sciences are continuous and related to one another, not only in terms of methods, but also in terms of goals. The second use of the term "positive" refers to a positive spirit of unity and acceptance of things as they are (facts as they present themselves in nature and society).

What, then, are the methods which Comte advocates? These are:

1. observation
 2. experimentation
 3. comparison
 4. historical method
- Let's look at them in more detail:

1. Observation of phenomena through the use of the physical senses (sight, hearing, etc.) which could be properly carried out only when guided by theory.
2. Experimentation- Comte realized that in the social sciences, strictly controlled laboratory type experiments were impossible, but he had something like controlled observation in mind.

Comte and "Applied Social Science" continued:

3. Comparison between human and animal societies, between co-existing societies, and between social classes within the same society- all of this enables us to determine which forms of behaviour are universal, and which are specific to a particular place or type of social organization.
4. Historical method is a very imp. part of the comparative approach. Comte stresses that comparison of co-existing societies will not allow us to compare the successive stages through which a given society evolves. Yet we can only understand a given society as it is if we view it in the light of its previous developments- all of which have left an imprint. Social phenomena, therefore, must not be viewed in a kind of historical isolation or vacuum - they are all products of what has taken place in the past. For Comte, then, sociology is the study of the historical evolution of societies.

So, to get back to Comte's vision of sociology as "applied social science". Why would we want to use scientific knowledge to "predict and control" the destiny of man? Comte's answer would be that this leads to the betterment of man and greater happiness for all. In fact, however, many critics of Comte (all the way from John Stuart Mill to Irving Zeitlin) believe that his prime goal was the establishment of intellectual order (that is, conformity) which he believed was the basis of all order. And this intellectual order rests on the submission of the revolutionary spirit within the masses, which if unchecked, will lead them to rebel against the existing regime. But the positive spirit, in contrast, fosters a sense of unity and acceptance- not the negative and critical attitude so typical of Enlightenment thinkers.

Comte believed that the subordinate classes must resign themselves to their position- and they will do so once they understand that social phenomena are governed by laws similar to those which affect nature. We cannot stop the sun from rising and setting- and we don't try to. Once we understand that the social world operates in much the same way, rebellion will be understood to be useless. According to Comte, true liberty is nothing less than submission to the laws of nature. The scientific elite are the most able judges of what these laws are and how the lot of the lower classes can be improved. Change in social institutions achieves nothing- such revolutionary ideas are pernicious and destructive and must be avoided. What all of this implies, of course, is the limitation of certain freedoms of speech (and even thought) which Enlightenment theorists (like Kant) championed when they exhorted us to dare to use our own understanding. It means that we surrender our freedom, and our responsibility, to a group of elites who ultimately will make our decisions for us. This truth cannot be covered over by Comte's call for "moral reconciliation", or his recommendation that we should all "Love one another".

May 23, 2012

Classical Social Theory 300/1

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)

Like Auguste Comte, Spencer recognized and advocated the possibility of a science of sociology- in fact he admitted borrowing this term from Comte. Spencer was systematic thinker and his ideas form a coherent and logical whole. Certain ideas are especially important as a foundation for his approach to social theory: 1. Society as a self-regulating system. 2. Notion of differentiation of functions. 3. His evolutionary theory. Let's look at these in more detail.

1. Spencer derived the first idea- that is, of society as a self-regulating system - from the classical economic notion of laissez-faire. Spencer believed that this principle of non-interference in the marketplace could be extended to all areas of society- he viewed society as self-sufficient. Therefore, the state should have only limited power to control the actions of individuals- although he was not against its existence as such. A good society, according to Spencer, is based on contracts between individuals pursuing their self-interest. Whenever the state interferes in these contractual arrangements, it distorts the social order. Poor laws and other social welfare legislation is counter-productive, because it upsets the process of natural selection and Darwinian "survival of the fittest". The only real power that Spencer was willing to grant the state was that of protecting individuals and collectivities against outside enemies (foreign aggression).
2. The second idea, the notion of differentiation of functions, relates to both economy and biology. Spencer's organicism implies the mutual dependence of the differentiated parts of society on each other. The combination of the idea of a self-regulating system and that of functional differentiation brings Spencer very close to a modern functionalist theory of society (this came later in Durkheim). The whole structure of Spencer's theoretical system is bound together by the third element- the idea of evolution.
3. It is through the concept of evolution that Spencer establishes a direct link between the social and the biological sciences. Spencer views society (as did other 19th.c. theorists such as Comte and Durkheim) as a functional organic unity which is slowly evolving and developing in a cumulative, directional way. This is true of all the institutions and parts of society. Thus Spencer saw the process of change in the social world as a reflection of change in the biological world. The social world includes the immense complex of customs, traditions and institutions- eg., politics, religion, industry, the professions, etc. For Spencer, social evolution implies progress. It is not just change, but a long cumulative movement towards increased social harmony- although Spencer did recognize the possibility of regression (at times). His view of human nature is also related to the notion of human progress. The species is constantly adapting and improving, but adaptation is variable and dependent on the nature of the environment. Thus, there is no universal human nature, there are many, depending on the time and place.

May 23, 2012

Herbert Spencer- "A Society is an Organism"

In Spencer's consideration of society as an organism, he argues that society and biological organisms are alike in four ways, and that they also differ from one another in four ways- but he couldn't call his essay "Society is Kind of Sort of Like an Organism in Certain Limited Ways", because that doesn't scan very well. First, let's consider the likenesses:

1. Both begin as small organisms and slowly develop into larger ones. Therefore we can see that both increase in size. A small community can grow into a metropolis, just as an embryo grows into an infant and then into an adult.
2. As societies and organisms grow in size, they also become more complex in structure- they develop from the simple to the increasingly complex. Thus a one-celled organism (ameoba) has by definition only a simple structure, whereas higher organisms are multi-faceted. In societies as well, we see this progression from community or village to metropolis, with increasing differentiation of political, economic and social structures.
3. The third way in which biological organisms and societies are alike is in their progressive differentiation of functions. So, as there is growing differentiation of structure, there is also growing differentiation of function.

Thus we can see that while Spencer was an evolutionist, he was also a functionalist- that is, he saw social structures as arising out of social functions. At first there is a minimum of mutual dependence, because functions can be carried out by all members (both in a simple organism and a simple society). For example, in a primitive society, all members can grow food and build shelters, as well as take care of younger members. There is a minimal division of labour- but in a more complex society there is a greater dependence on other people to carry out specialized tasks- growing complexity in the division of labour. This is similar to the gradual differentiation of parts and functions in a biological organism- each part gradually acquires specialized functions. So, in summary, in societies, as in biological organisms, there is a progressive differentiation in structure - from the simple to the increasingly complex.

4. The last way in which society is like an organism is that both the biological and social organism can continue to live after their respective unit members have died (of course, in both cases this does not mean all of them, or for an unlimited period of time). For example, society as an entity lives beyond the life span of its individual members- and the life of a biological organism can go on even though certain parts are lost (an arm, a leg, or even brain cells).

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"A Society is an Organism" continued:

Spencer saw four fundamental and important differences between societies and organisms:

1. The first of these is that while biological organisms have a concrete external form, societies do not.
2. The second difference is that in a biological organism the parts are physically connected (through tissue and joints, etc.) and encased in the skin, while in a society the members are quite loosely dispersed in space. However, although the members are not always in direct contact, cohesion and cooperation are maintained by means of language (both oral and written) as well as by emotional (affective) behaviour.
3. The third difference is that the parts of the organism are always in a fixed relation to one another. That is, the organs of the body are always found in the same place in everyone. This is in contrast to human members of society, who have great mobility.
4. The fourth and most important difference is that consciousness is located in only one part of the biological organism (brain or nervous system). But in a society consciousness is diffused throughout the individual members, and each member can have his own individual notion of society.

Spencer was an extreme individualist- that is, he saw society as existing for the benefit of its individual members, in spite of his organicist approach. Most organicists (like Comte and Durkheim) are social realists- they tend to see the individual as secondary to society. Spencer tried to reconcile this tension between his individualism and his organicism by using the idea of consciousness existing in each individual (each member of society) to support the assertion that society cannot exist without its members and ultimately must serve them. He argues that because there is no social consciousness or sensory system, the welfare of the whole of society cannot be considered apart from that of its individual members. Therefore society should permit individuals to pursue their interests (especially economic ones) to the greatest extent possible. This in fact is the hallmark of an evolved, sophisticated society, in Spencer's opinion- to what extent is it organized around the needs of commerce and industry, rather than focusing on readiness for war. He sounds a good deal like John Locke here- we should trade with our neighbours, rather than quarreling with them, and governments should involve themselves as little as possible in the marketplace, since individuals will engage in endeavours which further the interests of all interested parties, if left to their own devices.

May 28, 2012

Classical Social Theory 300/1

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) First Woman Sociologist

Harriet Martineau is considered to be the first woman sociologist, and she was especially concerned with formulating a science of sociology- as were Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, among others. Spencer's organicism influenced her, too- but she was an unusual positivist in that she did not share the conservative, even regressive approach to social change and the maintenance of hierarchy in society which as we have seen, was characteristic of de Bonald, de Maistre and Comte. Remember that Comte in particular advocated positivism not only as it refers to the unity of the sciences, but also in the sense that it implies a positive acceptance of things as they are- of facts as they present themselves. Martineau certainly believed that we should employ scientific methods in the study of the social world- but that does not necessarily mean that everything in this world is as it should be. Martineau deplored Comte's smug complacency, and warned all those who read her translation of his Positive Philosophy, that although she hoped that she had rendered his ideas accurately and fairly, the reader should not infer that she agreed with them.

There is very little in Harriet Martineau's background to suggest that she would become such a prolific writer, much less a champion of scientific sociology. Her childhood seems to have been ordinary; she was the sixth of eight children, born in England to a Norwich manufacturer who had limited financial success, but managed to raise his family quite comfortably. Harriet was well-educated and clever, despite her many childhood illnesses- one of which left her with a partial deafness. But she might never have been motivated to write had it not been for the crash of 1825, which wiped out most of her family's assets, and forced her to find a way to make a living. And make a living she did- by writing- for the next fifty years of her life. As Seymour Martin Lipset observes in his introduction to Society in America, "Harriet Martineau suffered from many ills, but writer's block was not among them." (p.39-40) Many of her works, including How to Observe Morals and Manners (1838) and Society in America have special relevance for sociology.

Both of these works grew out of a two-year stay in the United States, from 1834-1836. She spent time mostly in the eastern U.S., chiefly New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, and although it was partly a pleasure trip, it is clear that she also wanted to study the "morals and manners" of Americans in a scientific way. Like Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, she believed that a science of society was possible, and in How to Observe, she explains that any observer of foreign culture must keep several rules in mind, lest he "contaminate" his findings and jeopardize their validity. These guidelines are still valuable for those who use the participant-observer method today.

What are the guidelines which Martineau recommends to any observer of morals and manners? First of all, she begins by using the comparative approach- she compares America to England, the position of women in America to that of slaves, the rich with the poor, and the lower, middle, and upper classes to one another.

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Classical Social Theory 300/1

Harriet Martineau continued:

Martineau stresses that a great deal of mental preparation is required to carry out this task of observation and comparison properly. She points out that few of us would attempt to make observations on the natural world without some understanding of its underlying principles. However, "few, or none, make the same avowal about the morals and manners of a nation. Every man seems to imagine that he can understand men at a glance". (How to Observe, p.2)

What sort of preparation is necessary? Of course we must first decide what it is we want to know. Once that has been taken care of, we must guard against an almost inevitable tendency to be ethnocentric- that is, to judge other cultures by the standards of our own. If the traveller is to learn anything at all from what he observes, he should not be judgemental about varieties of human custom and behaviour. As Martineau points out, "He is not to suppose their social meetings a failure because they eat with their fingers instead of silver forks, or touch foreheads instead of making a bow". (How to Observe, p.22) Such an attitude will never advance the goal of mutual understanding.

Martineau was also aware that there are two parties to any inquiry of this sort- the observer and the observed. We affect a situation just by becoming part of it- we may cause people to act differently, and therefore may receive a distorted picture of events and customs. Thus, the observer must attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible- either by becoming part of the interaction, or by separating herself from it, so as not to interfere with it in any way. Martineau was also sensitive to the problem of sampling bias. She believed that we must seek out all classes of the society we visit- the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the great and the ordinary. But she was also aware that a lone observer cannot possibly interview a representative sample of the population, and the small numbers we can meet and talk with might not give us an accurate picture of the whole. What can be done about this problem of sampling bias?

Martineau suggests that we should focus our efforts on what we can study systematically- the institutions of society. Rather than restricting ourselves to talking with individuals, we must study the life of the group. Martineau emphasizes that the study of political, religious, and social institutions yields evidence which could not be gathered in a lifetime of studying individuals. We must ask ourselves about their character and purpose- what segments of the population participate in them, and are religious, political or festive gatherings most popular?

*May 23, 2012*Harriet Martineau continued:

In Society in America, Martineau asks why it is that the United States, with its emphasis on the "inalienable rights" of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", has not managed to extend these rights to all its citizens- namely women. Martineau compares the lot of women to that of slaves. Neither women nor slaves have much opportunity to receive an education or use their intellect except in very limited ways. Any education offered to women is expected to encourage them to become wives, mothers, and decorative and amusing assets in society. If women reject marriage, their only option is domestic service of some sort- which offers little prestige, low wages, and no security in later life. Furthermore, if either the slave or the woman aspire to something greater than the usual occupation, they are not applauded for it; but are scorned by society- both are accused of getting "above themselves", and aspiring to something which is beyond them.

Martineau suggests that if economic conditions in the U.S. made it necessary for women to work, they would be able to exercise their full potential- and at last show society what they can do. But society as it is now structured prefers to keep both women and slaves weak, poorly educated, and reliant upon the good will of masters (or husbands).

Martineau believes that this situation cannot help but corrupt the morals of both women and men, and debase the institution of marriage. She observes that this is one reason why there is such a high incidence of women marrying men much older than themselves- society offers them no option but marriage, and preferably marriage not for love- but for money. Only education and a gradual change of attitudes on the part of both women and men can alter this.

May 30, 2012

Harriet Martineau on Religion and the American Character

Martineau's views on religion as it is conceived of and practiced in the United States are intimately connected with her assessment of the American character. She finds much that is praiseworthy in Americans- according to Martineau, they are almost always kind, friendly and open, and attempt to deal with one another in the egalitarian manner which is so much a part of their moral tradition. As Martineau expresses it (on pg.128 of your coursepack):

In America... the English insolence of class to class, of individuals towards each other, is not even conceived of, except in the highly disgraceful instance of people of colour. Nothing in American civilization struck me so forcibly and so pleasureably as the invariable respect paid to man, as man. Perhaps no Englishman can become so fully aware, without going to America, of the atmosphere of insolence in which he dwells; of the taint of contempt which affects all the intercourses of his world.

As the quotation above indicates, Martineau believed in America's promise as an egalitarian democracy- but of course for it to truly achieve this promise, the disgraceful institution of slavery must be abolished, and the position of women elevated (see class notes *May 28, 2012*). However, an egalitarian society is not necessarily one which is free of competition. As Martineau realized, the reverse is often true. The guideposts which traditionally defined status and hierarchy in the old world have been swept away- but Martineau discovered that a society based on achievement rather than ascription may be more status-conscious than even the ancient aristocracies of Europe. Americans have lost their situation and have reinvented themselves based on new criteria- success is now measured in terms of wealth and popularity. As Arthur Miller reminded us in Death of A Salesman, "it is not enough to be liked, one must be well-liked". One must in fact be well-liked (as far as possible) by everyone- and this imposes an almost intolerable burden on the individual- a ceaseless demand for conformity which corrupts the personality and distorts all values. In Martineau's opinion, Americans are so other-directed that much of their discourse is reduced to the level of ritual banality- lest they offend anyone. Harriet Martineau was thus in agreement with Alexis de Tocqueville (coursepack, pg.139) who observed that, "I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America..."

What has any of this to do with religion? Martineau herself believed that religion should serve as a guide for life- that it should teach decency and human values in the true sense of the term. In her view, it should spring from morals, but as she observes, "If religion springs from morals, the religion must be most faulty where the morals are so. The greatest fault in American morals is an excessive regard to opinion". (Coursepack, pg.168) The end result is the degradation of religion to nothing more than an empty mouthing of dogma- professing beliefs which one does not hold in order to maintain the appearance of propriety. Martineau concedes that some Americans do live according to humanistic beliefs (pgs.168-169) but for most, principles are not put into action.

What's Wrong With Evolutionary Theories?

Irving Zeitlin gives a very useful account of some of the problems associated with evolutionary theories (so far we have looked at Comte's Law of the Three Stages and Spencer's organicist analogy). You may wish to consult his discussion, "Was Marx a Social Evolutionist?" (see Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory- on reserve at S.G.W. Library- pgs.176-178 esp.) We will not be studying Marx until next term, but much of what is said applies to evolutionary theories in general.

Such theories are seductive because it seems to make sense, on an intuitive level, to compare the development of societies with the development of the individual human being. However, they seldom stand up to careful scrutiny, because they are almost always shot through with conservative assumptions which tell us more about the agendas of the authors themselves than they do about actual parallels between the natural and social worlds.

Zeitlin reminds us that most nineteenth century evolutionary schemes had certain assumptions in common (whether or not they were explicitly stated). They may be summed up in the following way: Change is natural, directional, immanent, continuous, and derived from uniform causes. (pg.176). But why should we assume that societies develop in a linear, progressive and predictable manner, just because this is the case with living organisms? Human beings (and the societies we have created) are not carrots or cabbages which develop in the same manner, generation after generation, regardless of time, place, or other special circumstances. Embedded in such analogies is the assumption that anything "different" or "unusual" is by definition a possibly harmful mutation which should be eliminated for the good of the species- in this case, the collectivity. Of course, even in the natural world, not all mutations are harmful- some may be beneficial, perhaps in unanticipated ways. More to the point, the use of such rigid, law-like models in the social world is not only scientifically unsound, it does violence to that which renders us human- our capacity for creativity and autonomy. We are not simply passive receptacles of environmental influences or "laws of nature"- we are able to act on the social world and change it, at least to some degree.

It is this conservative, even regressive approach to the issue of social change which is the hallmark of most evolutionary theories. This is particularly evident in Comte's approach, which characterizes any sort of rebellion as destructive- remember he exhorts us to "Love one another" and reconcile our differences, lest we tear asunder the fabric of society. Spencer tried to reconcile organicism with an individualistic approach- he at least recognized that only human beings have will and consciousness- societies do not. But his individualism undermines his organicist scheme- if society is based on contracts freely entered into by human beings who possess will and agency, then what becomes of his analogy?

June 4, 2012

Classical Social Theory 300/1Sigmund Freud- Civilization and its Discontents

In this work, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) comes closest to being a sociologist, while at the same time preserving his basic psycho-analytic concepts. It is an examination of the antagonism between the individual and society, and the reasons for this antagonism. But although Freud's work can be seen as an attack on civilization, he is in some ways one of its most ardent defenders.

At the outset Freud reflects on the fact that many people think we would be much happier without civilization- that we should perhaps abandon it altogether and return to so-called "primitive" conditions. But Freud points out that this is an astonishing assertion. After all, society does protect and nurture us. It protects us, especially, from three fundamental sources of human suffering- the superior power of nature, the feebleness of our own bodies, and the fact that relationships between human beings (if we were left to our own devices) would be chaotic and often violent.

Still- nothing can change the fact that even having said all this, man's basic nature makes him an enemy of civilization. He is fundamentally anti-social. Why? Because in protecting us from nature (including our own nature) society demands the renunciation of the instincts. Of course, we can't renounce our instincts entirely- that would be impossible. All of us continue to experience the instinctual drives of sex and aggression. But civilization works by dividing man against himself, so that his ego and conscience emerge in opposition to his basic nature.

With the growth of civilization, Freud explains that "external coercion gradually becomes internalized...only by this means does man become a moral and social being. Such a strengthening of the super-ego is a most precious asset in the psychological field. Those in whom it has taken place are turned from being opponents of civilization into being its vehicles". But we are divided vehicles for in becoming civilized we do not eliminate our opposition to society, we internalize its demands (as Mead would say) and sublimate our own desires.

This is a good time to briefly explain Freud's well-known model of personality. Its three basic concepts are the id, the ego, and the superego. The id is the impulsive, unsocialized aspect of the personality. Its sole activity is to strive for the satisfaction of the organism's needs, and to seek pleasure. The newborn infant is presumably all id. With socialization, a part of the id gradually develops into the ego, which is the mediator between the id and the outside world. The ego guides the impulsive, unrestrained id in order that the human being may better adapt to his environment. Without this guiding force, the id would soon face annihilation at the

Civilization and its Discontents continued:

of society. Thus the ego forces the id to face reality- the reality that all impulses cannot be gratified. Instead the ego teaches the id to give up some goals completely, deny gratification of others for a time, or change the mode of gratification.

In the course of socialization and development, another mental process emerges- the superego- that is, the "censor" or "conscience". Its main source is the parental influence, which remains at its core. Later, however, the superego embodies all the values of society which have been internalized by the individual. As a result of the development of conscience, the individual begins to experience guilt- that is, the need to be punished for real (or even imagined) wrongdoing. The superego begins to exercise strong restraint over the forbidden wishes and fantasies of the id (e.g., suppressed sexual desires, such as those typical of the Oedipus complex, or aggressive impulses). The superego ensures that for the most part, these desires remain at an unconscious level.

Yet civilized man is not at peace with himself, for the demands of the pleasure principle remain alive within his unconscious. Sometimes forbidden desires may be expressed in an apparently joking way, which helps to make them less threatening. Thus, on page 47, Freud includes this quotation from the work of his friend Heinrich Heine, who confesses: "Mine is a most peaceable disposition. My wishes are: a humble cottage with a thatched roof, but a good bed, good food, the freshest milk and butter, flowers before my window, and a few fine trees before my door; and if God wants to make my happiness complete, he will grant me the joy of seeing some six or seven of my enemies hanging from those trees. Before their deaths I shall, moved in my heart, forgive them all the wrong they did me in their lifetime. One must, it is true forgive one's enemies- but not before they have been hanged".

Forbidden urges may be destructive and dangerous, but they are also a source of energy. What do we do with this life-force, as Freud sometimes calls it? We sublimate it or redirect it in socially useful and desirable ways. It is the redirection of the energy of the id which is in fact responsible for many of the achievements which we associate with "civilization". Culture, in short, is sublimation- and it is both a cause and consequence of repression and neurosis. The further civilization advances, in Freud's view, the more repressed and guilt-ridden we become. Freud in fact takes guilt to be the fundamental experience of civilized man. As he says, "the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt".

Yet self-mastery (which is necessary if social order is to be maintained) paradoxically offers its own kind of freedom. Mead would agree with this too- the more we have internalized the demands of society, the less we need to rely on external controls, and the more we are able to keep what little freedom we have. Cold comfort, but it's better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick.

June 6, 2012

CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY Soc.300/1
 EMILE DURKHEIM (1858-1917)

Father was a rabbi-fourth child, second son, expected to become a rabbi. Attended Ecole Normale Superieur-trained in philosophy and history. Read Comte and Spencer.

PhD. -University of Paris

1887-faculty appointment at the University of Bordeaux-taught education students. Taught the first course in Sociology.

Chair of Social Science-1896-1902

1902-position at the Sorbonne, Paris. Chair of the Science of Education.

1913-changed appointment to the Chair of The Science of Education and Sociology

1894-The Dreyfus Affair-Dreyfus was falsely accused of treason (collaboration with the Germans) by right-wing groups to protect Major Esterhazy, an army officer who was the guilty person.

Durkheim took up Dreyfus's cause-an essay on "Individualism and the Intellectuals". Dreyfus was exonerated in 1906 but sentenced earlier to 10 years in prison.

1898-founded L'Annee Sociologique

Durkheim's son Andre was killed in WW I (he was his father's intellectual collaborator).

Influences on Durkheim: Kant, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Saint-Simon, Comte, Spencer, Wundt, Martineau

MAJOR WORKS:

The Division of Labour in Society 1893

The Rules of the Sociological Method 1895

Suicide 1897

The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life

Socialism

Montesquieu and Rousseau: Forerunners of Sociology

Society as an organic entity

Importance of laws at each level of existence

Importance of mind and consciousness--on the societal level, there is a collective consciousness.

Social reality is a reality sui generis (of its own kind); it cannot be reduced to simpler terms. It predates us and succeeds us as individuals. Society is an external force.

Collective representations=collectively shared ways of acting, thinking, believing. Individual representations are less important.

In the Division of Labour in Society he traces the evolution of society from mechanical to organic solidarity.

June 6, 2012

CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY 300/1
EMILE DURKHEIM - THE METHODOLOGY OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology as a Positive Science

- the primacy of inductive methods
- laws & types (following Montesquieu)
- laws of society no different from those in nature
- can be discovered by same (scientific) method
- positivism--the unity of the sciences

The principal divisions of Sociology--Thompson pp.21-27.
 Society is a reality sui generis (of its own kind)
 Society is composed of collective representations--formed out of social relations

Sociology studies the stages of society (historical & evolutionary) and social institutions (ways of acting & thinking general-to the collectivity).

Sociology is the study of social facts and social are things. Social facts are to be distinguished from individual facts. Their thing-like nature is not necessarily material but amenable to study through scientific methods. That is, to observe a particular mental attitude towards them.

Social facts: Social facts are ways of acting, thinking & feeling, external to the individual and endowed with the power of coercion (constraint- direct or indirect), by reason of which they control the individual. They exist independent of individuals. They are representations or actions which are neither psychological nor biological.

Social facts are remarkable in their obligatory character; they are collective and carry an obligation for those who live by/with them. Sociological method must be independent of philosophy & of practical activity.

Sociological method aims toward greater objectivity. Therefore, social facts are defined as things.

Sociological method is specific to the study of social facts.

Function: the operation and consequence(s) of a social fact.
 must separate its cause from its effect. Cause may be found among preceding social facts.
 Function is not necessarily related to end or purpose. It may never have had a purpose or may have lost its utility.

Sociology must distinguish between the normal and the pathological.
Normal=phenomena which are true or found in the majority.
General; occur with only minor variations.
the average type

Pathological= variations in phenomena; the minority; occurring only periodically.

The normal and/or the pathological are relative; always with reference to this or that. For example, deviance or crime may be normal; may prepare the way for change.

"The principle object of all sciences of life, whether individual or social, is to define and explain the normal state and to distinguish it from its opposite."

June 6, 2012

Classical Social Theory 300/1

The Methods of Sociology:

Historical method

Comparative method

Method of Concomitant Variation--statistical correlation--to see how phenomena vary with one another; the interdependence of factors.

Basic Methodological Assumptions or prerequisites:

1. All preconceptions must be eradicated.
2. The subject matter must be defined in advance by common external characteristics.
3. One must distinguish between the phenomena themselves and their individual manifestations.
4. One must show the function of social phenomena.

June 9, 2010

CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY
Sociology 300
Summary Sheet on Positivistic Organicism

The perspective of the first group of theorists studied in the course is identified as positivistic organicism, simply as a means for understanding the relation of their ideas about sociology to a particular view of social reality.

Positivism - an orientation in science which restricts explanation of all phenomena purely to phenomena themselves, which insists on the use of exact scientific procedure and which rejects all ideas and assumptions which go beyond "scientific" limits. It insists that experience is the basis of all knowledge (empiricism), that all facts are relative and that the sciences comprise a unity in terms of subject matter (the equivalence of physical, natural and social phenomena) and method (the methods of the physical and natural sciences become the prototype for methods in social science). It suggests a positive acceptance of phenomena as data and is in that sense uncritical of what it studies.

Organicism - a perspective which uses an organic or biological model of society (society as an organism). It suggests that there are certain inherent and natural laws which influence the course of development of the society. Change is seen as development or evolution, suggesting an inevitable direction and leading to the idea of progression or progress.

The two concepts are complementary in the work of Saint Simon, Comte, Martineau, Spencer and Durkheim and others.

Both perspectives emerge from natural science (positive methods and the emergence of sociology out of biology in the hierarchy of the sciences) and involve a focus on natural and progressive change. Both reflect the reductionist tendency of parsimony, that is, the reducing of complexities of society to the analogy of a biological organism.

There are some contradictions in the two terms. The empiricism of positivism insists on facts which are free of assumptions or preconceptions (see Durkheim for example), while the organic model of society contains a whole set of assumptions about the nature and functions of society. Positivism insists that one can study scientifically only those phenomena which are empirically observable or measurable. Organicism suggests a model whose elements may not be observable, as with Durkheim's conscience collective. Society involves values, and therefore a totally uncritical approach to understanding, as suggested by positivistic organicism, may be impossible. The goals of positivism of prediction and control (for purposes of social engineering or social policy - Comte and Durkheim) conflict with the organicists' emphasis on the natural development or evolution of society (Martineau and Spencer). Although positivism derives considerably from Enlightenment thought, organicism is a product of the conservative romantic reaction, an attempt to retrieve tradition and history.

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CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY 300/1
EMILE DURKHEIM'S THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IN SOCIETY 1893

What is the purpose and the "problem" of the book?

"To treat the facts of the moral life according to the method of the positive sciences." A science of ethics. Moral facts are phenomena like others--Rules of action are recognizable by certain distinctive characteristics." It is possible to observe, describe, classify them and to look for the laws explaining them.

From the Division of Labour in Society:

Science can help us adjust ourselves, determining the ideal toward which we head. Science permits us to assess the state of moral health by collecting facts, to understand the changes and problems, to see the contradictions or imperfections and to eliminate or correct them.

"Science tells us simply what is necessary to life." And this becomes transformed into imperative rules of conduct; into an art. "Ethics is for us a system of realized facts, bound up in the total world-system."

Durkheim emphasizes looking for the objective element of facts and if possible measurement.

*Durkheim is interested in the relationship between individual personality and social solidarity. Specifically, How can it be that the individual, while becoming more autonomous, depends more heavily on society (becomes more solidary)?

*Durkheim observes that the division of labour is more and more becoming one of the fundamental bases of the social order.

Specialization beings a categorical imperative to "make yourself usefully fulfill a determinate function."

Specialization emerges especially in the 19th century; already the negative effects of specialization were being well recognized; a retrogression.

"Our work is divided into three parts:

1. to determine the function of the division of labour--to see the social needs it satisfies.
2. to determine the causes and conditions on which it is dependent.
3. to classify the principal abnormal forms; the pathologies.

What is the function of the division of labour?

--The division of labour is not confined to the economic world; it refers to the specialization of functions in all spheres.

--The true function of the division of labour is to create between two or more persons a feeling of solidarity; to cause coherence.

Social solidarity: not easily observed or measured, so how do we study it? Durkheim selects indicators, external visible symbols to study it: particularly Law.

Durkheim is interested in analyzing the transformation from traditional to modern society:

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Collective conscience--the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society. It forms a determinate system which has a life of its own. It is diffused into every reach of society. It is independent of place and does not change with generations. It creates a psychical type of society; that is, people tend to share a common collective (psychological life). This is the difference between individual conscience and collective conscience.

Collective conscience does not disappear but comes to consist of very general and indeterminate ways of feeling and thinking. It increasingly leaves room for individual differences. As the division of labour develops, the cult of individualism is strengthened. All social links which result from likeness progressively slacken.

An act is criminal, therefore, because it shocks the common conscience (NOT that an action shocks the common conscience because it is criminal). It is a crime because we reprove (censure) it. Crime is an offence against authority and is therefore related to public affairs and to religion.

Punishment is an act of vengeance; also an act of defense.

Religion is the basis of criminal law. Expiation is relation to satisfying some real or ideal power; something sacred.

We avenge society, not ourselves.

Durkheim speaks of a solidarity sui generis which links the individual with society. Punishment is meant to maintain social cohesion intact while maintaining all its vitality in the common conscience.

Laws express only partially the ties among people; must also have religion or the interdependence of the division of labour. Law relates to functions in society.

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MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY

- Similarity of function
 Solidarity of resemblances
 Segmental type
 clan/family based
 Little individual independence
 social bonds=weak
 Low volume of population
 Low material density
 Low moral density

ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

Specialised division of labour
 Interdependence of difference
 Organized (differentiated) type
 occupational/urban based
 Individualdiffs./interdependence
 social bonds=strong
 High volume of population
 High material density
 High moral density

Law: the visble symbol of D.of L.:

Public (penal) Law
 emphasizes precise punishment;
 + or - ; based on passion

Civil (private) Law (commercial,
 procedural, administrative,
 constitutional law);
 individual/contractualrights

Repressive sanctions:

diffuse-common morality
 organized-penal law
 to punish by equal retribution

Restitutive sanctions:

regulative function
 civil law
 to restore to original state:
 reestablish equilibrium
 contracts=cooperation;reciprocity

Basis of solidarity:

Conscience collective
 high volume=consensus
 high intensity=
 high rigidity= clarity
 content

Basis of solidarity:

Division oflabour/specialization
 low volume=lack of consensus
 low intensity
 low determinateness=clarity
 content

Highly religious

Highly secular

Supreme value to society

Supreme value to individual
 dignity,equality of
 opportunity,work ethic,social
 justice

Norms: Concrete and specific

Abstract and general;ambiguous

The problem of nonconformity
 " change

The problem of happiness:
 meaning of work
 limited capacity for happ.
 suicide-need for stability

Abnormal forms of D. of Labour:
 Anomic division of labour
 Forced division of labour
 Uncoordinated div. of labour

June 13, 2012

CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY 300/1

DURKHEIM ON SUICIDE

Durkheim considers suicide to be social--we must look to social factors to explain (causation). Cannot look at: (1) motivation--not empirically observable; difficult to get at or (2) ends--one's behaviour may serve many different ends--is death inevitable if regrettable, or desired and sought? (3) Reasons assumed or given are only individual expressions of a general state.

Definition: suicide is defined in terms of knowledge of it by the actor. (p.95)

In what sense is suicide sociological? Suicide is understood as a social fact, sui generis, with its own nature and unity. 'Every society at every moment of history has a certain tendency towards suicide;' the rate of mortality due to suicide. Durkheim wishes to understand and explain the causes of suicide rates (relation b/n the total of voluntary deaths in a population and other characteristics: age, sex, religion, marital status, economic position, density of pop., etc.)

The social types of suicide are derived from a classification of causes which produce them.

**Durkheim assumes that humans act as social beings--members of groups and societies. Therefore, what are the social concomitants of suicide? How do different social environments (religion, family, politics, class, occup, educ., etc) function to create differences in suicide?

Egoistic suicide:

- a. Religion: Catholics--lowest
 Jews--as low if not lower (occup. & ed. raise it)
 Protestants--highest

Degree of self-control and discipline

Beliefs against suicide related to authority of God (general)

Differences lie in increase of free inquiry & challenge to traditional beliefs.

Protestants have fewer common beliefs & practices.

Protestants--less strongly integrated as a church.

Judaism--strongly integrated group & cultural life.

Integration rests on the number of beliefs & practices held in common which are recognized as traditional & therefore obligatory. In these situations integration is low or weakened culturally.

b. Family:

1. Too early marriages have an aggravating influence on suicide, esp. for men.

2. From age 20 people benefit from a 'coefficient of preservation'.

3. sex--varies by society

4. widowhood--suicide rates higher than for married, but lower than singles. Influence of family, especially children (Durkheim). (Suicide may be reduced but not necessarily unhappiness.)

c. Politics:

Revolution reduces rather than raises suicide. Also war.

June 13, 2012

Why? Because it arouses collective sentiments.

Altruistic suicide:

Insufficient individualism, just as excessive individualism, leads to suicide.

Suicide in primitive societies: aged or sick men
 women on death of husband
 followers or servants of leader

Suicide as duty-to avoid dishonour

The ego is not its own property--external codes of conduct

High group integration

Army-higher rates of suicide than civilians-provides for very little individualism.

Anomic suicide:

This form is a function of low control or regulation.

Economic crises-sudden increase in wealth or power as well as less.

Disturbances of the collective order --disequilibrium.

Relations between needs and means must be balanced.

i.e., unlimited or insatiable desires; passions are less disciplined.

Society must be the moderator, and if it is not, suicide may rise.

Loss of power of religion--in such areas as roles of employers & employees.

Govt. has become the instrument of the economy, rather than the reverse. (Durkheim here is criticising materialists for seeing economics as determining base of behaviour).

The disequilibrium of industrial capitalism and new wealth as well as the loss of former political and religious controls contributes to suicide.

Therefore, an insufficient presence of society in the individual (p.112).

Men benefit most from marriage. Therefore, divorce may contribute to male suicide.

Fatalistic suicide

Durkheim mentions a fourth type of suicide but does not emphasize or develop it like the other types. This type occurs in situations of excessively high regulation, where there seems to be little possibility of change. Suicide among slaves, prisoners, captives would be examples.

In Durkheim's consideration of suicide as a social phenomenon, we see the factors of integration and regulation and their effects.

These are types, for Durkheim, and are not meant to be all-inclusive or exclusive.

June 16, 2010

Emile Durkheim- The Functions of Religion

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was a French sociologist who was especially concerned with the maintenance of social cohesion. This preoccupation is evident in your assigned reading, "The Persistence of Religion", which briefly summarizes his views on religious ritual as an integrating force.

Why is ritual important, according to Durkheim? For one thing, Durkheim studied the problem of suicide and concluded that it was social, rather than individual in nature. He found that groups which have a high social density- that is, groups whose members interact frequently and share the same beliefs and values- tend to have a lower suicide rate. Durkheim argued that a dense social structure creates a kind of "cocoon" around the individual, making him or her more secure and less concerned with selfish personal goals- in other words, less individualistic, and more a member of the group.

The meaning of life becomes attached to something beyond the self and one's own wishes. An individual who is well-integrated into the group is by definition happier and more stable. A high suicide rate, in Durkheim's view, is an indicator of social disintegration and misery. But how is the "moral cocoon" formed which helps to keep the individual stable?

Durkheim traced the formation of this mechanism to what may be called "social rituals", of which religion is perhaps the most important. Durkheim explained that a ritual is a moment of extremely high social density, which need not be specifically religious in character in order to be effective. Ritual of any kind heightens the contact between people- by performing shared gestures, chanting in unison, and so on, people all focus their attention on the same thing. They become acutely conscious of the existence of the group. Certain objects take on a "sacred" character as well, which Durkheim argues is socially constructed. A cross is not inherently "holy", nor is an altar- unless the believers have chosen to confer this meaning upon it. The same function may be served by the flag of one's country, for example, as well as by other "collective representations" (as Durkheim called them) which symbolize the shared life of a group.

Before we go any further, it would be a good idea to clarify what Durkheim means by religion. A commonsense definition would probably describe it as a "belief in spiritual things". But Durkheim would argue that such a definition is inadequate, because it fails to include those religions in which the idea of spirit or God is absent. Buddhism, for example, does not concern itself with the notion of divinity at all.

June 13, 2012

Emile Durkheim- The Functions of Religion continued:

According to Durkheim's own definition, all known religious beliefs divide the world into two domains- the sacred and the profane (or secular). It is all those beliefs and practices associated with the domain of the sacred that we call religion. Thus, when members of a society think and act in the same way with respect to the sacred, they share a common religion or church. To put Durkheim's definition of religion in capsule form- "Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, which unite those who adhere to it into a single moral community called a church".

We have already seen that for Durkheim, when we come together as members of a church, to perform certain religious rituals, we both create and reinforce social solidarity. This leads to a very important point- the real meaning of religion, as Durkheim sees it. For Durkheim, God and society are one. As he puts it, "Religion is society worshipping itself". This is because what we call God is actually a symbolic manifestation of the powers of society. Every believer is right in assuming that there exists a power greater than himself- on which he depends and from which he receives all that is best within himself. Such a power does exist, but it is not God, and it is not the supernatural. God is no more than the symbolic representation of society itself.

Thus Durkheim's concern is with what we might call the "latent functions" of religion (the ones which are hidden, or at the very least, less obvious). The "manifest functions"- that is, those which revolve around expressing a more conventional belief in God, and a desire to worship Him- are less important in his view. Durkheim's sociology of religion therefore focuses on function, (latent purpose) rather than the specific content of religious beliefs.

Religious ritual is thus important in the sense that it maintains cohesion, as we have seen, but it also performs other vital functions. Ceremony can sometimes offer an escape from difficult, stressful circumstances, creating a sense of collective ecstasy and exuberance. Once again it should be noted that rituals need not be specifically religious in nature in order to accomplish this. One might with almost equal justification say, "Going to the movies is society worshipping itself", or "The Super Bowl is society worshipping itself" or "Visiting the Statue of Liberty is society worshipping itself". More to the point, "Visiting Graceland is society worshipping itself". (People even speak of making a pilgrimage to Graceland).

Ritual also helps us feel that we are more in control of often uncontrollable, capricious events which threaten the safety of the group. On an intellectual level, of course, we know that we cannot completely master nature, however hard we may try to accomplish this. Ultimately, it will master us. But certain rituals

June 13, 2012

Emile Durkheim- The Functions of Religion continued:

allow us to experience a sense of comfort as well as control in the sense that they reassure us of the continued existence and strength of the group, even in the face of adversity. Funerals are an excellent illustration of such a latent function. These ceremonies are meant to honour the dead, of course, but their real purpose is to demonstrate the ongoing resilience of the collectivity. Even though a member has been lost, the group carries on, and must demonstrate this to itself. To bury the dead without proper ceremony, then, is not only an insult to the memory of that individual, but is a grievous affront to the flock.

Finally, Durkheim reminds us that all religions, regardless of their specific content, perform a crucial disciplinary function, which is vital to the maintenance of social order. This will no doubt remind you of Mead's emphasis on the internalization of social norms. No religion ever tells its members, "By all means do whatever you want". On the contrary, religion emphasizes "Thou shalt not". Whether this injunction is obeyed because believers truly accept the rightness of such commands, or because they fear the repercussions of disobedience, is a debatable point. In any case, the discipline imposed by religion prepares believers to meet the demands of everyday life as well.

Durkheim was well aware that the role of conventional religion would "contract" (as he put it) in contemporary society. He admits that, "religion tends to embrace a smaller and smaller sector of everyday life". (pg.245). What then, is the future of religion? Is it finished in modern society? Durkheim says no. He tells us that, "there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself...What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians celebrating the principle dates of the life of Christ, or Jews remembering the exodus from Egypt...and a gathering of citizens commemorating the institution of a new moral or legal system or some great event in national life?" (pgs. 243-244).

We don't know the form which our yet-to-be created rituals will take, and Durkheim feels that this is because we are going through a transitional stage in our development- one of "moral mediocrity". (pg.244). We no longer are moved by the ceremonies which used to fill our ancestors with awe, either because they have grown stale with repetition (although repetition should be part of their charm) or because they no longer answer our needs. In other words, "the former gods are growing old or are already dead, and others are not yet born". (pg.244). But this does not mean that we no longer need gods. They will simply take on a different form, and we are quite capable of inventing new ones. It is in the nature of society that it revitalizes itself through assemblies and doctrines which have a religious character, if not a specifically religious content.

June 13, 2012

CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY SOC.300/
DURKHEIM ON RELIGION, SECULARIZATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Religion is the basis of knowledge; it is also seen by Durkheim as society in divine expression.

Categories of understanding (Aristotle): time, space, class, number, cause, substance, personality, etc.-the property of things. Other ideas are contingent and variable.

Religion--eminently social and collective; a manifestation of society internalized in individuals.

--expresses the power of society and our obligation or commitment. The basis of civil morality for members of society.

--religious representations are collective representations reflecting collective realities.

--Time--impersonal, abstract arrangement outside of the individual--the rhythm of collective life.

--Space--collective

--The Sacred and the Profane: all religious beliefs classify the world into these terms; distinct and distant from each other. The profane: everyday utilitarian affairs

The sacred: those things set apart, the extraordinary, the transcendental--establishes bonds among those who participate and believe. It has a communal function--binds people.

Magic: composed of beliefs and rituals, myths, dogmas.
 elementary and general
 seeks specific technical and utilitarian ends
 no church associated with it

Church: a community united by beliefs and practices relating to the sacred.

Totemism: --a totem is a material expression of something--a symbol of the clan.

--totemic principle or God represented

--personification of the group

The moral authority of society over us--something which causes us to act in a certain way--the force of a god. Respect for God creates confidence and energy.

Religion is a collective force which exists outside of us but is taken into consciousness; internalized; a part of our being which is also projected outward toward some object. Religion both dominates and sustains.

Kings as gods or representatives of gods.

Society consecrates things; social life depends on systems of symbols.

Man is moulded by the totality of intellectual property in society.

The fundamental categories of thought (and science) are religious in origin (also magic, to some extent). Social institutions originate in religion.

June 13, 2012.

Classical Social Theory 300/1

Religion mirrors society--it makes a place for good and evil
--a systematic idealization
--the sacred; added to & above the real.

The ideal world is a product of social life and a part of it.

Religion is society conscious of itself; reaffirming itself.

Religion relates to man, nature and society.

Religion, like science, seeks to classify, explain, systematic aspects of reality. Science, for Durkheim, is only a more perfect form of religious thought.

Durkheim seems to end with a Comtean vision that science will become the mistress(?) of thought.

Religion loses its speculative function (Weber's demystification or disenchantment of the world).

July 4, 2012

G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) REASON AND THE HISTORICAL PROCESS

It would be very difficult to overestimate the influence of Hegel's thought on the German academic community in general, and on Karl Marx (1818-1883) in particular.

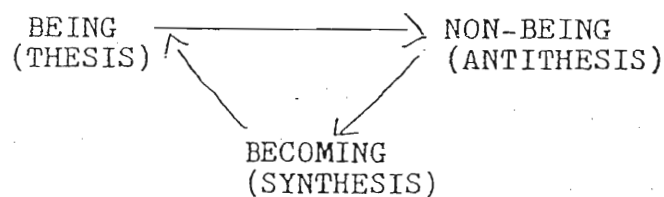
Hegel wrote 2 esp. imp. works- The Phenomenology of Mind and The Philosophy of Right (1821) which are imp. reference points for Marx.

In these works Hegel elaborates his philosophy of history and related notions of reason and freedom. Hegel's perspective on the unfolding of history was based on his idealism.

What does this mean? Hegel assumes that man's existence has its center in the human mind (that is, in reason) and it is from this center that man builds up his world of reality. In other words, the world is simply ideas made concrete. History is continually striving towards the goal of greater reason, and by extension, greater freedom.

Not solely on an individual level- it is not enough to say that I am becoming more enlightened and "reasonable", or that you are- but on the level of the species. Mankind as a whole must fulfill its potential, and this is reflected in the institutions of society.

But this does not happen without conflict (again on the level of ideas) which is the engine of history- the catalyst for change. More specifically- Hegel believes that the boundaries of human imagination are not fixed, but changeable. As new ideas develop, they tend to contradict the old established ones, and ultimately the resulting contradictions (or conflicts) are resolved when new social arrangements replace the old. This constant change and dialectical development continues without let-up- reality is always in the process of becoming something else. Hegel's dialectic can be represented in this way:



Thus- the struggle between what we might call conventional wisdom (thesis) and the new, radical idea (antithesis) leads to a synthesis or new way of thinking (and behaving) which at the same time contains elements of the old. It is not wholly destructive, but rather is transformative. This synthesis is itself destined to be transcended, in a continual process of negation and creation.

July 4, 2012

MARX'S SYNTHESIS- HEGEL'S IDEALISM AND FEUERBACH'S MATERIALISM

Ludwig Feuerbach was another German philosopher who inspired Marx- both disagreed with Hegel's idealism. Marx in fact claimed that Hegel was "standing on his head" and must be "set right side up"- more about this later.

Like Marx, Feuerbach had been a follower of Hegel, but later came to disagree with Hegel's first principle that mind or spirit is the essence of reality. Instead Feuerbach insisted on the primacy of matter over mind. He felt it was quite obvious- if matter did not exist, there would be no possibility of mind or spirit- after all, we are made up of matter.

Marx agrees with Feuerbach on this, and claims that any understanding of history must start with real people and what they must do to survive- this is what determines their thinking.

As Marx says in The German Ideology (pg. 47) "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life".

Thus, Marx feels that Feuerbach's materialism helps to set Hegel "right side up"- but Marx did not fully agree with either of them. Marx thought that Feuerbach was right in assuming that history begins with real people and their need to survive, but he found Feuerbach to be overly passive and contemplative. He observed the world, but did not think that anything could be done to change it. Feuerbach recommended self-change, rather than change in social structures.

Marx arrived at his own materialist conception of history, based on the fundamental concept of human labour, which combines both our mental and our physical powers, and thus is generative and creative. Every act of labour carries within it the potential for social transformation.

Thus, Marx's position is based on a synthesis and reformulation of Hegel's idealism and Feuerbach's materialism. For Marx, each of these views of reality, taken alone, are one-sided and deficient. Marx's master assumption is that people make society (through labour) but although we are active creators of our social existence, we are nevertheless constrained by the past.

July 4, 2012

Marx and Engels THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY

We have seen that Marx takes issue with Hegel and his followers who believe that mind (spirit, reason) is the driving force of history.

The Hegelians believe that new ideas will result in institutional changes, and if these changes cannot be achieved, it is up to human beings to alter their perceptions of reality. (Hegel would say that you only truly become a slave if you think as one).

Marx, however, insists that a revolution in thought is not enough. We must begin by changing the real-life conditions of real men. This can only come about through labour, which Marx defines broadly as any activity combining both mental and physical powers in a way that is uniquely human and creative.

Marx refers to this as an expression of our species-being- that which separates us from animals. When animals search for food, use tools, or build shelters, they do so without awareness or reflection- merely out of necessity (e.g.-birds building nests, beavers building dams). But human labour is meant to express man's will and consciousness- our creative essence.

Marx is painfully aware, however, that even in pre-capitalist society, man laboured as a member of a class, in a realm of necessity and not one of freedom. He further points out that the role one plays in the division of labour (where one stands in relation to the means of production) determines one's consciousness.

On pgs. 43-46 of The German Ideology, Marx and Engels discuss 3 pre-capitalist systems of property ownership, and from this derive 3 main types of non-capitalist social structures which depend on them:

1. Tribal ownership- social structure is based solely on the family division of labour (kinship criteria). Similar to hunters and gatherers. Subsistence economy-little or no surplus = equality.
2. Ancient communal and state ownership (early city-states of Greece and Rome). Here the division of labour is between owners of property and their slaves (pg.44).
3. Feudal or estata property (pg.45). This is primarily a rural social formation, and it is composed of landowners and a serf class.

Later, in capitalism, the town has become the center of economic life, the productive system has shifted from agriculture to industry, and there is a fully developed political and civil life. There is widespread emergence of private property (due to the creation of an ever-increasing surplus) and a developed class system- composed of capitalists (owners of the means of production) and workers who contribute physical labour.

July 4, 2012

MARX'S THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

Marx and Engels wrote The German Ideology in an effort to elaborate two important ideas. First, even in pre-capitalist forms of social organization, inequality existed because an elite group was able to appropriate the surplus created through the labour of an oppressed class. The political power which results from ownership of private property is real and cannot be dissolved through theorizing, but only through changing underlying conditions which make it possible. In other words, not contemplation or criticism, but revolution is necessary. (The German Ideology, pg. 55).

Second, Marx and Engels wished to make a connection between power and the production of thought and ideas. See The German Ideology pg. 64- "Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas". The class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. They are in a position to disseminate ideologies (false or illusory beliefs) which allow them to legitimate and justify their position, further their own interests and represent them as universally valid.

The ruling classes are able to do this, Marx asserts, simply because survival is man's first principle, and those who control economic life are therefore able to wield great power. Furthermore, we do not perceive reality directly (as it is) but rather through the filter of prevailing ideas, which become so much a part of our thinking that we do not question them.

They do not arise in a vacuum, however (as Hegel believed) but again are the result of economic structures. Thus, during the epoch when the aristocracy was dominant, notions of "honour" and "loyalty" were especially important

In capitalism, "freedom" and "equality" are depicted as universally held values- but in fact "freedoms" supposedly enshrined in the legal system (for the good of all) actually benefit owners of the means of production.

According to Marx, both the elites and the oppressed believe in the rightness of these claims to authority- the elites are taken in by their own ideologies. In fact, everyone is a victim of ideological thinking- except Marx and Engels, of course.

July 9, 2012

Marx's Dialectic- The Unity of Theory and Practice

It is in the "Theses on Feuerbach" (German Ideology pgs. 121-123) that we can find the principle source of the Marxist doctrine of the unity of theory and practice.

Very simply, for Marx this means the resolution of theoretical problems through practical activity. Thus, the idea of "theory and practice" has to be understood in the context of Marx's materialist transformation of world history.

Marx's dialectic- his materialist conception of history- is, as we have seen, one in which practical human activity, rather than thought, plays the crucial role. Marx thus rejected Hegel's philosophy of history, which was based on idealism.

After Hegel, Marx took the dialectic in a different direction, developing the material side by looking at historical and economic growth. Marx's doctrine of development is called the materialist dialectic to indicate the shift from the dominance of ideas to the dominance of economic conditions. Marx took the view that the principle of change could be found in economic production (not in the conflict between opposing ideas, as Hegel claimed)

For Marx, then, the principle of contradiction manifested itself in the form of the coercive class structure of society. This class structure existed to some degree even in pre-capitalism- remember the 3 forms: 1. Tribal 2. Ancient city-states (slavery) 3. Feudal (agrarian).

These contradictions reach their apex in capitalism, and this leads to the development of a revolutionary class (the proletariat- more about this later) who are conscious of their common interests and the conditions which oppress them. In this sense, Marx's historical examination of successive societies and modes of production makes the dialectic real and concrete.

If we examine Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, we can see the importance of a revolutionary class. Marx argues that, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."

What is Marx saying here? Simply that the problems philosophers identified cannot be resolved through passive interpretation of the world as it is. Only changing the world in fundamental ways (through labour, broadly defined) will eliminate the contradictions which are an inherent part of it. Revolutionary transformation of society (leading to communism) will allow us to "solve the riddle of history".

July 9, 2012

Marx on Labour and Alienation

We have already seen that for Marx, labour is an expression of man's essence- his "species-being". He must use both his mental and physical powers in an unconstrained and creative way if he is to be connected to himself.

Unfortunately, we generally labour in a realm of necessity and not one of freedom. This is especially true in capitalist society, because the demands of the marketplace result in a forced division of labour- that is, a situation where the worker must perform repetitive tasks in a mechanical fashion in order to increase efficiency, productivity and profits.

Marx is not saying that the division of labour itself can be completely eliminated (although we do derive the greatest satisfaction if we create an object ourselves in its entirety). Marx admits that tasks must be allocated in order to meet the needs of a growing population.

But it is the forced and unfree character of labour under capitalism which transforms useful labour carried out to meet human needs into abstract labour- a commodity to be bought and sold.

What does Marx mean by these terms? As indicated, useful labour meets a need, and confers value on the materials which have gone into the creation of a product. Eg.- a piece of leather has little value in itself until the labour of the worker transforms it into a pair of shoes. Such useful labour is the result of human imagination, muscle and skill.

However, the forced division of labour reduces useful labour to what Marx calls abstract labour, stripping it of meaning and individuality. Under capitalism, all labour is abstract- a "thing" to be sold and paid for at an hourly rate, with no recognition of the special skills which different individuals possess. Therefore, it doesn't matter what you as a worker can contribute in concrete qualitative terms, only the quantitative value of labour power in the abstract- How little can the owner pay? How much can he make?

The transformation of useful labour into abstract labour leads to what Marx calls alienation.

This is a central concept which in Marxist terms refers to the worker's loss of control over the labouring process. When labour is alienated, it means that the worker is no longer free to make decisions about what, when and how he produces, thus surrendering his autonomy and compromising his self-definition.

Marx on Alienation and Labour continued:

According to Marx, alienation occurs in four broad ways:

1. Workers become alienated when the means of production falls into private hands, and labour is thus subject to the demands of the marketplace.
2. Alienation occurs when the self-defining nature of labour is surrendered- when workers must sell their labour in exchange for wages, and therefore it is owned by others. This loss of productive activity leads to what Marx calls a fundamental 'reversal' of 'what is human to what is animal'. This reversal takes place in the sense that the worker is only free in those functions which he or she shares with animals, such as eating, sleeping, drinking, etc.- since it is only in these functions that he is alone and unsupervised.
3. Alienation takes place when human beings lose the connections they have to their own species since, under capitalism, labour is turned into a physical rather than a creative act. Like animals, human beings are required to perform their labouring functions only to fill their immediate physical needs, and in doing this they relinquish their conscious being.
4. Alienation occurs when human beings are estranged from their fellow humans as a result of the fact their labour under capitalism has turned them into individual beings who compete alone against others in the pursuit of private gain. (This is especially true in the case of the owners). This disruption of the labour process estranges individuals from the human community since at one time their labour was cooperative and collective, whereas now it is individual.

Marx on "Class" and "The State"

It's important to remember that for Marx, human beings never produce as completely isolated individuals, but only as members of a definite form of society (a class). All labour is cooperative to some extent, because we depend on others to produce goods and services that we need in order to carry out our own tasks.

We tend to lose sight of this fact under capitalism (see last week's notes on "Alienation") but nevertheless there is no type of society which is not founded upon a definite set of relations of production. To think otherwise would be to fall victim to a bourgeois philosophy of individualism, which serves to conceal the social character of production, and the crucial role played by class interests (domination).

Given that the concept of class was so important to Marx, it is ironic that he did not define it clearly and consistently. Much of his writing centers around discussing what a class is not, rather than what it is.

According to Marx, class must not be identified with either the source of one's income or the function performed. This would yield a great many classes- eg.- doctors, who receive their income from the treatment of the sick, would be in a different class from farmers, who derive theirs from the cultivation of the land.

Marx also stated that classes are not synonymous with income groups. He rejected this idea because it perpetuates the notion that re-distribution of wealth will eliminate class conflict. This is not a real solution- as Marx points out, it simply results in "better payment for the slave".

So- what is a class, according to Marx? Class and class membership are based on the ownership of private property in the means of production. This yields a model of class relations which is basically dichotomous- 2 antagonistic classes- one dominant (the owners) and the other subordinate (the workers). This necessarily results in conflict between the two.

It's important to note that for Marx this two-class model of society is a theoretical construct or ideal-type model- not meant to accurately reflect reality at all times under all historical conditions. Marx was aware of the existence of other classes- realized that not every-one could fit neatly into the owner-worker dichotomy. He sometimes spoke of the "landowning" classes, the "intelligentsia", and the "lumpenproletariat"- those on the fringes of society, vagabonds who do not really play a part in the productive process.

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Marx on "Class" continued:

Thus we can see that Marx was aware of the multiplicity of class structure. However, he felt that as bourgeois capitalism becomes increasingly refined, these fringe groups- whether professionals, peasants or so-called "intellectuals" will more and more be absorbed into one of the "two great warring classes". In bourgeois society, relationships become simplified and polarized.

Under capitalism, then, we may speak of the "propertied" versus the "propertyless" class. Owners (employers) ~~possess~~ possess capital, while non-owners (that is, workers) simply possess labour power. These are economic categories- that is, Marx is not trying to say anything about the social or political characteristics of these groups, or in fact about any characteristics not open to empirical investigation. For his purposes, all the owners have in common is that they own property, and all the workers have in common is that they don't. Of course, they may have other things in common which cannot be seen and measured- but Marx is not concerned with inner dispositions. In other words, he is adopting a "scientific" or "positivist" approach to the study of class.

So far, we have been using the terms "worker" and "proletariat" or "owner" and "bourgeoisie" as though they are interchangeable- but in fact this is not really so. A vital distinction must be made here, between what Marx calls a class "in itself" and a class "for itself".

We may call those who possess property "the owners" when they are merely a class "in themselves"- that is, when they haven't yet become fully aware of the need to protect their own interests in relation to the workers. Once the owners develop linkages with each other- a heightened sense of class consciousness and awareness that their interests are in opposition to those of the workers- we may call them the "bourgeoisie". They have become a class "for themselves", rather than simply a class "in themselves".

The same thing can be said of the workers, too. Once they have become fully aware of their exploitation at the hands of the owners, they may be called the "proletariat"- they have become a class "for themselves"

How does this happen? According to Marx, self-consciousness develops gradually, and not necessarily at the same rate in all countries. Often it grows simply as a result of members of each class coming together (perhaps quite accidentally) to air their grievances and then goes on from there- small meetings begin to attract more participants, and so on.

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Marx on "Class" continued from pg.2:

Similarly, the owners only become aware of themselves as a class when they see the evidence of this new militancy in the ranks of the workers (proletariat) whom they now view as a threat to their interests. However, Marx believed that the bourgeoisie could never develop a true and united consciousness of their own interests in the same way that the proletariat can. Marx sees the self-interest of the bourgeoisie as ultimately destructive of their class and destructive of capitalism itself.

Their greed prevents them from uniting in the economic sphere, and thus leaves them at a disadvantage in relation to the proletariat, who are capable of uniting for the good of their class (after all, they have nothing to lose). Once the proletariat become aware that they are alienated from the productive process, and confront their antagonists, the capitalist system is doomed. Ironically, it is the very creation of an army of workers (who will inevitably become conscious of their interests and their power) which results in the collapse of bourgeois society.

Of course, any claim to self-consciousness is debatable, because it develops in the subjective realm only- and remember that Marx is attempting a scientific, objective analysis of this issue. Nevertheless, heightened self-consciousness (among the proletariat for example) may manifest itself in disturbances of all kinds, which disrupt the economic system. More on this later- see "Revolution

Marx on "The State"

In Marx's view, the state apparatus under capitalism serves to buttress the interests of the ruling class (bourgeoisie). Its origin can be traced back to the division of labour- as we have seen, according to Marx those who control the economic substructure are also in a position to shape society's superstructures (eg.- the state and its interconnected legal realm, as well as the spheres of religion, education, the arts, etc.- according to their will. This does not necessarily mean that everything in the superstructural realm is a reflection of the interests of the dominant group- that would be too dogmatic, even for Marx. Nevertheless, he asserts that the state is the handmaiden of the ruling class- allowing them to collect taxes, make laws which work to their advantage, and mould other institutions. As Marx expressed it in The Communist Manifesto: "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie".

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Marx on "Revolution" and "Future Communist Society"

We have already seen that for Marx, the way in which our survival needs are met is so fundamental to the human condition that those who control the economic substructure are in a position to shape much of the superstructure as well. Thus the owners (bourgeoisie) are able to consolidate their power to an extraordinary extent. Given that the ruling class manages to perpetuate a set of ideas and social relationships which reinforces their position, how does any of this ever change?

Marx explains it in this way: In a relatively stable society, there is an equilibrium between the mode of production, the social relationships which support it, and the "superstructure" which is so closely tied to the means of class domination.

Inevitably, however, something happens to upset this stability- it's not that everything is fine the way it is, but simply that in periods of relative calm, tensions remain below the surface. When a change in the mode of production occurs (as was the case when much of Europe shifted from a primarily agrarian and cottage-industry mode of production to an industrial one) the difficult period of transition allows unexpressed conflicts and contradictions to manifest themselves. These overt class conflicts terminate in revolutionary struggle in the political sphere. They manifest themselves ideologically as clashes between competing "principles" or opposing principles of "right" and "wrong". Each group engaged in the struggle represents his ideas as the only "true" and "valid" ones.

Sometimes the struggle destroys both groups, but at other times it results in a radical reconstruction of society- as occurred when capitalism overcame feudalism. But in all of previous history, once a revolutionary class has gained power, it ceases to be revolutionary- like its predecessors, it now seeks to justify and maintain the existing order. In so doing, it inaugurates yet another period of relative stability, which will continue until the mode of production undergoes a change- it "contains the seeds of its own destruction", as Marx puts it.

The revolutionary rise to power of the proletariat, however, is not destined to repeat this pattern. According to Marx, the proletariat cannot come to power "except by abolishing its own previous mode of appropriation and thereby also every other mode of appropriation" (Communist Manifesto, pg. 147)

With the rise of the proletariat, it will be possible for mankind to recover his alienated self- in a rational order which has no need for the old forms of domination.

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Marx on "Revolution" and "Future Communist Society" continued:

What does Marx mean by "revolution"? He means a change in the fundamental principle on which the social order had been based in all previous societies. This implies a transformation- a systematic, structural change in power relations. A previously dominant class loses control and some new arrangement is substituted.

Let's look at the terms "revolution" vs. "evolution". Evolution, as we have seen, implies a linear, almost "lawlike" and gradual change of structure and function. No sudden leaps are involved in evolutionary change- it involves building on the past. This, then, is not consistent with the kind of fundamental change Marx had in mind. But he chose the term "revolution" not to express the suddenness or violence of the change, but rather the fundamental, radical transformation of the system which it involved. There is a change from a system based on the ownership of private property to one in which this is absent. But this revolution need not occur suddenly or violently, nor need it involve the spilling of a single drop of blood- in fact, Marx was very much against such a thing.

He *preferred* to think that perhaps in America or in England, the working class might come to power through the parliamentary system- they might be voted into power, and proceed with the revolution from there.

That's why he says the following (on pg. 236 of McLellan):
 "We are aware of the importance that must be accorded to the institutions, customs and traditions of different countries; and we do not deny that there are countries like America, England (and if I knew your institutions better, I would add Holland) where the workers can achieve their aims by peaceful means".

However, despite Marx's hope that the ruling class will go quietly, he is aware that this may not happen. He goes on to say that:
 "However true that may be, we ought also to recognize that, in most of the countries on the continent, it is force that must be the lever of our revolutions; it is to force that it will be necessary to appeal for a time in order to establish the reign of labour". (McLellan, pg. 236)

What does Marx mean by "force" here? As we have seen, he wasn't in favour of the spilling of blood- so the "reign of terror" typical of, for example, the French Revolution, was rejected by Marx. He knew that this achieves nothing- and in fact, that after such a period of violence, there is likely to be a backlash during which conditions return to their original state. You can't impose by sheer force what is not yet inherent in society.

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Marx on "Revolution" and "Future Communist Society" continued:

The type of "force" which Marx had in mind, then, involves what he called the "dictatorship of the proletariat". "Dictatorship", however, didn't have quite the same connotation for Marx as it has for us. He was thinking back to the Roman office of the dictatura, where all power was legally concentrated in the hands of a single individual (temporarily) during a period of crisis. Marx explains the powers and responsibilities such a dictatorship would hold at greater length in The Communist Manifesto.

How would the revolution come about? Obviously Marx did not accept the sort of romanticism which asserts that, "If you want revolution badly enough and get everybody together, you can have it". This, in his view, is pure fantasy. Revolution cannot come about unless objective (real) conditions in society are ready for it.

What is Marx saying here? Remember he stressed that revolution cannot be imposed on a society through terror (as the Jacobins tried to do in France). Society must be "ripe" for revolution- and according to Marx, it would be an economic crisis of one sort or another which would be the precipitating factor. This is what he means by objective conditions- the real conditions of man's material life. As he puts it on pg. 223 in McLellan: "At a certain stage of their development the material forces of production in a society come into conflict with the existing relations of production- or- what is but a legal expression for the same thing- with the property relations within which they have been at work before".

Such an economic crisis might stem from a number of problems- for example- a depression, a high rate of inflation, food shortages, etc. If the resulting attempt to change society is to have any hope of success, it must embody what Marx called "revolutionary praxis"- the unity of theory (ideas) and practice. We must alter the way men live and the way they think- and on a structural level. As Marx says in McLellan, pgs. 225-226:

The alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, in a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew .

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Marx on "Revolution" and "Future Communist Society" continued:

Let's assume that the revolution is successful- what does the future communist society look like? Those who want specific details look to Marx in vain, and some critics point out that this is a weakness (presumably deliberate) in his theory- it cannot be disproven. If Marx is vague as to the exact nature of post-capitalist society, there is no point at which we can say that he was wrong- it may simply be that in certain societies (the Soviet Union, for example) his ideas were not properly executed, and that is why the experiment failed.

At any rate, in Marx's view, the precise nature of new social structures cannot be determined before the fact. One thing seems certain, however- the role of the state will change drastically. We have already seen that according to Marx, "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie". With the end of class domination, the state as we have known it will no longer be necessary, and nor will the state bureaucracy. For Marx, socialist society thus meant the destruction of "the centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of the standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature". We will no longer need the state, and in Engel's words, it will "wither away".

The state will not completely disappear, however. According to Marx, it will still be at least temporarily needed to perform quite a few crucial functions. You should turn to pg. 219 of the McLellan reader for an elaboration of what these are. Marx's ten-point program interestingly enough seems to necessitate the creation of a new state bureaucracy- in opposition to Engel's assertion that it will "wither away", Marx envisions a future in which the state may paradoxically become stronger than ever.

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Max Weber- Intellectual Orientations

In beginning our discussion of Max Weber's (1864-1920) ideas, it is first important to see how he defines sociology, and contrast this with the ideas of some of the other theorists we've been studying so far.

We've seen that Marx was primarily interested in the conflicts between social classes, and in how these antagonistic relationships changed as the mode of production was transformed. On the other hand, the social realists- e.g., Comte, Durkheim, etc.- concentrated on the evolution of society- a natural consequence of their tendency to view society as a living organism.

Weber's orientation differed from all of these- he focused on the subjective meanings that human beings attach to their actions, as they interact with others. So he defines sociology as "a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects". (Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization)

"Action" (for Weber) refers to all human behaviour to which an individual attaches subjective meaning. It is social in so far as it takes account of the behaviour and expectations of others, and is therefore oriented towards them. Almost everything that human beings do fits into this category, of course- whether we respond positively or negatively to the behaviour of those around us, or choose to ignore them, there are social ramifications involved, and we have come to this decision based on factors which have meaning for us and require interpretation on our part.

This does not necessarily imply that we all share the same meanings, but Weber is interested in that too- the asymmetry which is sometimes involved in social relationships, and how they are created, maintained, used, and even destroyed. Because Weber is concerned with meaning on a subjective level- how are we to interpret a given action, what is its significance to the person carrying it out- he sees the individual as the basic unit of analysis. This is quite different from the viewpoint of the social realists, or even from that of Marx, who saw almost everything as a function of class membership. But as has been said, Weber believed that the individual is the sole carrier of meaningful conduct, because only the individual can be said to possess will and consciousness.

Why is this emphasis on meaning so important? Because it is impossible to achieve an understanding of what an action means to an individual through the use of natural scientific methods, and therefore Weber rejects them as a tool to be used in the study of society. Remember that the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and science led to a belief

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Max Weber- Intellectual Orientations *Continued*:

that the natural and social worlds could be studied in the same way- a unity of the sciences- through observation, comparison, etc.- of whatever phenomena interested us.

This is all right as far as it goes, but for Weber, it doesn't go far enough. The trouble with the use of scientific methods based on observation, comparison and experimentation is that people are not the same as rocks, bugs or bacteria in a laboratory dish. And if we treat them as though they are, we are missing out on the most fascinating aspects of the social world. Natural scientific methods are adequate for examining external characteristics and allowing us to formulate general laws about them. Rocks, bugs and bacteria don't really consist of anything more than their external characteristics- they don't (as far as we know) have goals, feelings or desires. Nor do they have any ability to affect the world around them, or change it in any way- only people can do that.

Furthermore, Weber wanted to go beyond Comte's maxim of "Know in order to predict, predict in order to control." Understanding, for Weber, was a higher goal than either prediction or control. Again, if human beings possess unique and spontaneous motivations and desires, how can we either predict or control their behaviour? And why, in fact, would we want to? If we attempt to study them in the same way we do inert objects, we are making their motivations irrelevant.

In addition to all of this, Weber rejected the social realist assumption that certain elites in society have the right (or even the ability) to make choices (on the basis of scientific knowledge) as to what is "best" for the whole. There is no type of scientific knowledge which entitles us to make such decisions. Scientific data and theories tell us what we can do about a particular problem, but not what we should do. Science offers us no moral guidelines- it tells us we can split the atom, but is silent on the question of whether or not we should drop the bomb.

Weber on 'Ideal-Types'

Given Weber's emphasis on the subjective meaning that individuals attach to their behaviour, and the necessity of achieving an understanding of this, it is not surprising that one of his primary goals is to elaborate a typology of social action. Weber discusses four major types of social action, which will be elaborated shortly- but first, some explanation is needed as to why ideal-types are necessary at all. What are they, and how do they further our understanding of reality?

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Max Weber on 'Ideal-Types' continued:

You already have some familiarity with ideal-types whether you realize it or not- for example, when Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke speak of the so-called "state of nature", they are really referring to an ideal-type- a hypothetical construct which cannot be found in reality. Social researchers need to use ideal-types because according to Weber, it is impossible to know all of reality. Reality for him is a "vast chaotic stream of events, which flows away through time". Furthermore, even a description of the smallest slice of reality can "never be exhaustive".

Since we can never hope to make sense of this ever-changing stream of events in their totality, we must focus on specific aspects of it- those which are important to us at a given time. Ideal-types are not meant to provide an accurate representation of reality- they are arrived at by the accentuation of certain characteristics. As some are highlighted, others are thrust into the background. Nor are they meant to depict that which is "ideal" in the sense of being "perfect" "good" or "desirable".

The advantage of the use of ideal-type constructs lies in their precision and clarity. If the researcher formulates these constructs carefully, he will be able to determine how far empirical reality deviates from this hypothetical "utopia". So the creation of ideal-types is not carried out as an end in itself- they are formulated to help in the solution of particular problems- especially in order to discover what is distinctive and unique about a particular phenomenon. They are sharpened and modified as the researcher continues his investigations.

Let's get back to Weber's fourfold typology of social action- again, remember that all of these are ideal-types as discussed above, not necessarily to be found in their pure form anywhere in reality:

1. Affectual action is dictated by the individual's emotional state, rather than by the rational calculation of means and ends. Like the third type (value-rational action) it is carried out for its own sake- not to further any other goal. An example of this might be a mother who rushes into a burning building to save her child.
2. Traditional action serves no conscious goal, but is dictated by deeply-entrenched custom or habit. Weber explains that this applies to the great bulk of activities which people carry out in their everyday lives- "We always have dinner at six o'clock". Traditional action does not have the coherent, defined form of value-rational action.

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Max Weber on 'Ideal-Types' continued:

3. Value-rational action is centered around the belief that an action is worthwhile for its own sake. This action is rational not because it attempts to attain a practical goal, but because it is faithful to a value such as honour or integrity. Because it is directed towards the fulfillment of an over-riding ideal, no other considerations are deemed to be important. Such action is exemplified by the maxim, "The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord".
4. Goal-oriented action (also called *instrumental or purposive-rational action*) is carried out in order to achieve a practical goal- perhaps one which is oriented around the desire for money, success, recognition, etc. The individual clearly perceives his purpose, and after weighing the alternatives, has rationally chosen the best means to attain it. E.g.- an ambitious young man (or woman) after calculating the costs and benefits involved, decides that the best route to professional advancement is to marry the boss's daughter- not because he loves her (that would be an example of affectual or value-rational action) but because it is the most direct and efficient way of achieving his goal.

Don't forget that in practice, most behaviour is difficult to classify so precisely because it involves a mixture of two or more types of action. For example- the goal-oriented young man who marries the boss's daughter may realize that this is in his own interest, but he may be in love with her as well. Goal-oriented or instrumental behaviour is the easiest to understand directly, with a minimum of interpretive work on the observer's part, because it is most like a mathematical formula- "If action 'X' is carried out, result 'Y' can be anticipated". Nevertheless, even in such cases, we can never be absolutely sure about the meaning of an action for another individual (or even for ourselves- sometimes our own motivations are unclear to us as well). The most we can do is speak in terms of probabilities when carrying out the interpretive work of understanding behaviour within a social context. In Weber's view, then, Auguste Comte's aim- "know in order to predict, predict in order to control"- is impossible to achieve.

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Max Weber on The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber asks why it is that the business leaders of modern Europe are overwhelmingly Protestant. In other words, what is the relationship between religion and economics?

On a deeper level, Weber is also asking: What kind of people are we going to be in the modern world- a world which places more and more emphasis on success and accumulation, and correspondingly less emphasis on deeper values. But we will return to the second question later.

First of all- why is Weber even interested in the relationship between ideas (religion) and economics? In large part this fascinated him because he wished to 'round out' (but not reject entirely) Marx's rather one-sided concern with the economic 'base' as the causal factor in social change. You will remember that Marx tended to see all 'superstructural' phenomena (religion, politics, literature, art, etc., as having little or no independent existence apart from the so-called 'real' material, economic conditions which made them possible- "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life".

Weber did not want to fall into the trap of 'idealistic' determinism (certainly he considered this to be a weakness in Hegel's perspective on history, who as you know saw everything as emanating from 'reason' or 'spirit'- created as if in a vacuum with no social or economic context whatsoever). Yet although he did not think Marx was wrong to be concerned with the real, material conditions of man's existence, he was also intrigued by the role which ideas might play in bringing about social change. Economic interests, therefore, are not the only ones which motivate our actions, and neither are they invariably the most important ones. Weber was thus anxious to reject any one-sided approach to the study of society- as he expressed it, any form of rigid determinism "tends to invalidate itself".

In examining the relationship between religion and economics, then, Weber is certainly not trying to say that Protestantism causes capitalism. Rather he is concerned with demonstrating what he calls an 'affinity' between the two. What is the nature of this affinity?

At first glance it might seem that Protestantism is well-suited to business activity because the demands it imposes on the individual are not as rigorous as those of Catholicism- that Protestantism is somehow more 'lenient' or 'worldly'. But Weber's investigation into the belief-systems of the early Protestant sects (especially Calvinism, as will be demonstrated shortly) shows that this is not the case. The movement towards Protestantism was in fact much more demanding, and required stricter codes of behaviour, especially as far as relaxation and enjoyment were concerned.

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Weber on The Protestant Ethic continued:

In elaborating the connection between Protestantism and Capitalism, Weber discusses two contrasting, ideal-typical forms of economic orientation (action)- economic traditionalism vs. economic rationalism (also known as the "spirit of capitalism".) These two orientations are best exemplified by a group of people (a famous family of money-lenders- the Fuggers) and a well-known historical figure- Benjamin Franklin.

Traditionalism is not incompatible with a desire for wealth, as the Fuggers illustrate. Their attitude towards work and wealth was "get as much as you can and enjoy it"- inherited wealth is best, but if you must work, work only as hard as is necessary to get what you want. The traditional worker (employee) had the same attitude as well. He did not think in terms of earning more and more money, but simply of maintaining his accustomed way of life. He would have preferred to work less and earn less, if he could manage in this way. Weber points out that this did not mean that people in traditional societies were not greedy, or that capitalism did not exist before the advent of Protestantism. He speaks of so-called "adventurer capitalism"- fortunes made through foreign conquest or piracy, for example. But this is quite different from modern capitalism, which is rational, well-organized, and founded on the idea of work as a duty- "the calling".

Benjamin Franklin is (in Weber's view, at any rate) the chief exponent of the modern "spirit of capitalism". For Franklin, work is a necessity- even the rich should work, in his opinion. But- and this must be emphasized- Franklin is not a Calvinist. The Calvinists, as we will soon see, are an example of value-rational action (please refer back to July 24-27 notes) and Franklin, at least as Weber portrays him, is an example of purposive-rational, instrumental action. He had a set of rules for every aspect of money-making and economic conduct- and money was one of Franklin's chief preoccupations, as Weber ably illustrates. You will no doubt be familiar with some of these sayings- "Waste not, want not", "Early to bed, early to rise", etc. And Franklin advocated a corresponding set of desirable virtues as well- for example, it is wise to be frugal, punctual (especially in the repayment of debt) dependable, brave, clean, loyal, upright, and so on. But for Franklin, all virtues are defined in terms of their use-value- never in their absolute sense. He preaches an ethic of self-mastery in every aspect of life- efficient use of time, money and talent. If you are efficient, reliable, frugal (even honest) you will become rich. But for Franklin, the appearance of virtue was just as good

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Weber on The Protestant Ethic continued:

as the actual practice of it- if the illusion would allow for the attainment of one's goals. Franklin went so far as to say that "virtues are only virtues insofar as they are useful to the individual" Furthermore, he deplored the natural inclination towards the pursuit of pleasure, which he claimed was typical of the peasant class (and therefore of traditional societies). What Franklin did in his private life was another matter, of course, but we won't get into those embarrassing inconsistencies here. Suffice it to say that Franklin is an example of what happens to the Protestant Ethic when it loses its religious foundation- as it inevitably does. But first, let's look at how it got started.

The Influence of Ascetic Protestantism

As has been mentioned, the notion of the "calling" is of primary importance in ascetic Protestantism. The "calling" is founded on the belief that the individual must fulfill his duty to God in the moral conduct of his everyday life. This contrasts with the Catholic ideal of "monastic isolation", which rejects the material world. Instead the "calling" centers around a kind of "worldly monasticism"- living in the world, but living as a monk would. Luther first had this idea- we can fulfill our duties and glorify God through our work- again, by living in the world and making it a better place, not by rejecting it. The notion of the "calling" was refined not by Luther, but by later Protestant sects- ascetic (self-denying) Protestantism. There were 4 main streams: 1) Calvinism 2) Methodism 3) Baptism 4) Pietism. Weber concentrates on Calvinism, which will be of greatest interest to us here.

What is most important in Calvinism? There are three basic aspects to this belief-system:

1. First, the idea that the universe exists to further the glory of God- we are here to fulfill His purposes.
2. Second, the idea that God's wishes are beyond human comprehension.
3. Third, (this is most most important and tied in with #2) is the Calvinist belief in predestination. Predestination refers to the assumption that from the moment of one's birth, God has decided one's eternal fate- that is, whether one is to be saved or damned to hell for all eternity. There is nothing the individual can do to affect his fate- no earthly actions can influence the outcome, since it would be presumptuous of human beings to assume that they can change God's actions in any way. Furthermore, for God to change his mind about the salvation of any individual would imply that He had been wrong in the first place, and thus, by definition, could not be God, who is infallible in all things.

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Weber on the Influence of Ascetic Protestantism continued:

What was the effect of this belief-system on those who subscribed to it? Weber speaks of the loneliness of the individual believer. He is thrown back upon himself in the search for the certainty of salvation, and inevitably experiences great anxiety about his fate. For the Calvinist, salvation is an "inexplicable gift of grace" from an omniscient, unreachable God who is immune to all human entreaties.

It would thus seem, as Weber points out, that fatalism would be the logical consequence of a belief in predestination. But as we will see, because of their emphasis on the idea of proof, or a sign of salvation, the psychological result was entirely the opposite. The Calvinist could not live with the terrible burden of uncertainty and loneliness caused by his belief in predestination, so rather than fatalistically accept the inevitable, he searched for a sign that he was one of the elect. Where is such a sign to be found?

The Calvinist came to the conclusion that the accumulation of wealth could be taken as an objective sign that the individual is one of the elect. It cannot change one's ultimate fate, since that has been predetermined, but the sign at least helps to alleviate the anxiety of the believer. Therefore the Calvinist worked at his calling with exceptional diligence, and reinvested the profits amassed as a result of his labour into his business, which would then flourish. Believers were warned against any type of self-indulgence which would turn their thoughts away from God, and thus the Calvinist had no option but to save his earnings. This was in sharp contrast to the traditional mode of life, which, as we have seen, stressed consumption rather than production. The ethos of the traditional business enterprise was consistent with a leisurely and congenial way of life which soon collapsed under new demands for self-discipline and frugality, generated by the actions of a relatively small group of Calvinist believers. Those who could not or would not conform to the demands of the new marketplace were forced out. It was a dreary existence, to be sure, but that was of little consequence to the Calvinist, who considered his earthly life to be of secondary importance compared to the hoped-for eternity in paradise.

It must be emphasized that the Calvinist did not practice ascetic self-denial in order to become a better, more effective Capitalist—rather his behaviour is value-rational (as opposed to the instrumentality of Benjamin Franklin) because the Calvinist is acting in accordance with the dictates of his faith, and not in an effort to attain a practical goal. The fact that this way of life happened to make him a successful businessman is, from his point of view, largely irrelevant, since his only real concern is with pleasing God and alleviating his anxiety about his ultimate fate. Nevertheless, because this ethos is so in ^{tune} with the demands of an increasingly rational and calculable world, which values efficiency and productivity above all else, it could not help but take hold and perpetuate itself.

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The Protestant Ethic and Rationalization

We've seen that the Calvinist belief in predestination, and the attempt to alleviate anxiety about one's ultimate fate led to a reorganization of personality, which in Weber's view, enhanced the development of rational capitalism. The Calvinist was sober, methodical and above all self-disciplined in every aspect of his life. This ethic of self-denial, as we have seen, ensured his success in the business world, but at the expense of any possibility for real happiness. For the true believer, however, this was alright- the certainty of salvation (measured by the ever-increasing accumulation of wealth) was all the happiness he ever hoped for or expected. The Calvinist "wanted to work in a calling", as Weber said, because to do so was in accordance with values which were important to him- the dictates of his religion.

But what happens when capitalism becomes firmly established, and no longer needs the religious foundation which Calvinism provides? We've seen some evidence of the result in the writings of that supreme pragmatist, Benjamin Franklin. Never was there a man so greatly interested in money- and so little interested in the true meaning and practice of the "virtues" meant to help one acquire it. But how specifically did asceticism help to create a different world- the beginning of the modern rational world we know today? What is the legacy of the Calvinist? We can distinguish three inter-related themes, which Weber does not discuss explicitly, but which can be inferred from his analysis:

1. Knowledge
2. Impersonality
3. Control

Let's look at each one of them separately, beginning with knowledge, and then link them together.

For Weber, to act in a purposive-rational, goal-oriented way is to act on the basis of knowledge. This is nothing new, of course. Weber reminds us that even people in earlier societies who performed "religious" rituals or incantations were orienting their behaviour towards the achievement of some goal- whether it be a better harvest, more rainfall, etc. They were simply using the best means available to them under the circumstances. But in modern western society the emphasis on knowledge has exceeded that of all past epochs. This is because the rise of science and technology has made knowledge almost the only basis for individual rational action. Like the Calvinist (who also valued knowledge greatly, only we have more of it) we must be willing to submit to ever-more-rigorous training in a specialized field- a process of increasing self-mastery.

This is fine, up to a point, and Weber is not recommending ignorance, BUT there is a price to be paid. Weber warns us that we must also reckon with what he calls the growing "disenchantment" of the world. What does he mean by this? Weber is here referring to the decline of magical or religious views of the world. The "religious" world-view, which predominated in earlier societies, has given way to a "scientific"

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The Protestant Ethic and Rationalization continued:

outlook which teaches man that everything is open to rational explanation. And in our arrogance we also tend to believe that everything is open to human mastery and control as well- even the mysteries of nature. What all of this means is that if God is not dead, we have at least banished him from the scene. What place does God have in a rational, calculable world where we dismiss everything that we cannot see or measure or prove? There is no room for faith in such a world, because faith means believing in things when commonsense tells you not to. The Calvinist had faith, of course (his search for knowledge did not take him away from God) and his faith told him how to live his life- but we have no such guide, because science cannot offer guidance on moral issues. As Weber says, "Science tells us what we can do, but not what we should do." Nor can it offer any explanation for apparently random and incoherent human suffering- the age-old questions of "Why did this terrible thing happen to my wife (or my child)? Why did it happen to me?"

Knowledge also means that we have become more self-interested and calculating in our relationships with other people, too, and more inclined (as Benjamin Franklin was) to use them to achieve our own goals. The Calvinist would not have done this, because his faith forbade such actions- but remember, we live in a world largely without faith, one in which there are very few consequences for such behaviour, and where the question of greatest importance is, invariably, "What's in it for me?"

2. Impersonality is a vital component of purposive-rational, goal-oriented behaviour. Such detachment, in Weber's opinion, is a legacy of the Calvinist's mistrust of all intimate relationships, which can only serve to turn man's thoughts away from God, and are "of no use towards salvation". Modern life demands that we treat others in an impersonal way too- what could be more impersonal than a marketplace based on money transactions (which reduce everyone to the same level) or the bureaucratic organization? Impersonality has simply become the only possible way of life in a world dominated by the need for efficiency and productivity. If modern man entered into all his relationships with the intensity which characterized his predecessors, his carefully constructed economic, legal and bureaucratic spheres would collapse. Modern man must sacrifice the values of love and friendship in order to serve the goals of the "rational" society which he himself has created. Yet these goals are irrational from the point of view of his own happiness
3. Control (especially self-control) is yet another legacy of the Calvinist who certainly wrote the book on it. As has been said, the demands of the modern world also require us to control ourselves, nature, and other men as well- the need for stability and continuity is paramount. Yet (especially within the bureaucracy) this tends to reduce individuals to the functions they perform, and compromise personal and intellectual freedom. Taken together, these three factors (the requirements for knowledge, impersonality and control) have resulted in the creation of what Weber describes as an "iron cage"- a web of repression which threatens to overwhelm us, but is of our own making. h2.

July 30, 2012

Max Weber: Science and Politics

In his two essays, Science as a Vocation and Politics as a Vocation, we find elaborations of some of Weber's most important ideas on modernity, and possible answers to his central question, "What kind of people are we going to be?" Some of these issues and answers were already discussed in The Protestant Ethic, but some have not been touched on as yet.

Weber links both science and politics with the fate of what he calls "the disenchanting world". We've talked about this before- the fact that in a world dominated by reason and science, faith inevitably declines. The significance of this is simply that the world loses its transcendent meaning. This loss must be addressed not only by scientists and politicians, but by all of who live in a rationalized world. As we have seen, the Calvinist work ethic was a source of meaning to the early ascetic Protestants, who wished first to glorify God on earth, and secondly to alleviate their anxiety about salvation. For the Calvinists, then, meaning was a given- but it is problematic for modern man, who must create meaning through his own actions, and his commitment to certain values. Yet we need only remember the example of Benjamin Franklin to realize how easily values can be abandoned when they serve no discernible practical purpose.

Weber's main agenda in writing Science as a Vocation is to elaborate the limits of scientific knowledge. We have already discussed his rejection of positivism as a tool for the study of society, and his assertion that "Science tells us what we can do, but not what we should do". But Weber reminds us that in the past, no one doubted the value of science and reason, and their power to liberate humanity. Although he does not explicitly say so, Weber is obviously referring here to the naive Enlightenment belief that through reason, mankind would forever progress onward and upward, and that we would easily learn how to act rightly in life. But he mockingly asks- who now believes in this, aside from a few "big children?" For Weber, science is of extremely limited value because it can give no answer to the only question which is truly important (first posed by Tolstoy) "What shall we do and how shall we live?"

This does not mean, however, that scientific work is of no importance- simply that we must recognize its limitations. It must be emphasized that Weber uses the word "scientific" in the broadest possible sense, not simply to mean work carried out in a laboratory, but also to mean the extreme emphasis on knowledge of all sorts which rules our lives in modernity. As I've said before, Weber is not recommending ignorance or a return to the past which would be impossible- but he cautions us that science is mute on the question of values, that is, the difference between right and wrong. There is no mathematical formula, there is nothing in the periodic table of the elements, which can give us the answer to questions of morality and ethics. All science can do is tell

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us that if we wish to achieve result Y, we should follow procedure X. In other words, it enables us to control our own actions and the world around us, at least to some degree. In addition, it imposes mental discipline and clarity- all of which are valuable goals, but not tools which enable us to select the "right" course of action.

Weber further explains that such choices are all the more agonizing because frequently our course of action is not clear- there are no "best" ends, only relatively good ones, and no "best" means for achieving them. Weber uses the example of prolonging life through artificial means to illustrate the dilemma (one that is even more relevant now than it was in his day). If we see prolonging human life, at whatever cost, as an ultimate value, then we would be likely to conclude that heroic measures must be taken to attempt to save a dying person. But our problems are not over yet. On the one hand, this orientation can be justified by asserting that there may still be some slight hope of recovery, or that the individual's relatives, who claim that they wish to spare him further suffering, may really want to get their hands on his money. We may also say that only God and not man has the right to decide when human life begins and ends. (This argument, of course, has been used both for and against those who believe in prolonging human life through artificial means- some believe we are "playing God" when we turn off the respirator, and others believe we don't have the right to turn it on in the first place.)

Whatever stand we take, it is clear that no scientist, no teacher, and no political leader can give us the answer to this question- when we serve one God, we reject another. This, for Weber, is the inescapable characteristic of modern life- the plurality of values and the difficult choices we must make, and the fact that no decision can be reached through so-called "scientific" means. Choices can only be made from within ourselves, through a process of critique and reflection- we ultimately choose our own values.

This means that not only scientists and politicians, but all of us, must be aware of one thing above all else- that actions have consequences. We must take responsibility for the consequences of these actions even when it is inconvenient for us to do so. This is a theme which Weber explores further in Politics as a Vocation. Self-responsibility is rendered even more difficult and problematic by what Weber calls the "paradox of consequences"- that is, the realization that we can never know the repercussions of our actions in advance, and furthermore, that good intentions do not necessarily produce good outcomes. Quite often the reverse is true- we may engage in an action with the best will in the world, and the results may be disastrous. On the other hand, plans formulated with evil or self-serving intentions may have unexpected beneficial consequences.

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In Politics as a Vocation, Weber discusses two ideal-typical forms of ethical action, which he believes can (if reconciled) allow us to find meaning and morality in a rationalized world. These two forms of action are 1) Ethic of Conviction 2) Ethic of Responsibility. Let's discuss the ethic of conviction first, which will already be familiar to you as a result of your reading of The Protestant Ethic. It is exemplified by the maxim, "The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord".

The ethic of conviction (or ultimate ends) thus is value-rational-oriented to a belief in the value of a given behaviour for its own sake, regardless of the consequences for oneself or others. It is subscribed to by the uncompromising man of principle, who has singleness of purpose inspired solely by a devotion to what he sees as his "duty". Such an attitude may be admirable- but it may also degenerate into fanaticism and zealotry. Weber is very much aware of the dangers of the unconditional morality of all-or-nothing. He points out that when "true believers" meet with opposition, they often blame their failure on human stupidity (which will be overcome when they achieve their goals in some utopian future society) or advocate extreme violence in the service of their "cause".

This is not to say that all those who would fit the definition of such ethically-oriented behaviour are indeed dangerous zealots. Weber reminds us that we must have convictions, for those who do not are "morally dead". However, he also points out that the ethic of conviction is perhaps more suited to the monastery than the real world, and therefore recommends that it be tempered by reconciling it with the more realistic and practical ethic of responsibility.

The proponent of the ethic of responsibility does not sacrifice the "good" in the fruitless search for the "ideal". He orients his behaviour towards the possible, and is constantly aware that his actions have consequences (often difficult to anticipate) for both himself and others. This does not mean that the scientist, the politician, or the ordinary citizen who lives according to such an ethic has abandoned his ideals, but rather that he knows he must accept the world "as it is" and master the art of compromise. Weber thus exhorts us to act with both passion and responsibility. He cannot tell us which values to live by (and nor can anyone else- again, that is ultimately a personal decision). However, if we are to live meaningful lives- lives which transcend petty personal goals and self-aggrandizement- we must orient our behaviour around a self-chosen set of personal values. The trouble with all of this is- and Weber is painfully aware of it- in a world where the most important question is "What's in it for me?", values are easy to jettison when they do not serve our purposes. The reconciliation of the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of conviction may offer a way out of the "iron cage" of modernity- but Weber is not optimistic about the prospects of many of us living up to such "heroic" ethics- especially when the rewards of pure expediency are so great.

Max Weber on Power and the Three Types of Authority

Weber defines "power" as the probability that an actor will be able to realize his own objectives even against opposition from others. This definition is, of course, very broad, because if we accept it, then we also accept that almost every social relationship is also a power relationship.

What is authority? According to Weber, it is power which has been legitimized. Remember that we are most likely to obey rules (in a consistent, stable way) if we believe they are tied to a legitimate order. Weber therefore distinguishes 3 types of legitimacy upon which a relationship of domination may rest. All of these (as usual) are ideal-types:

1. Traditional authority
2. Bureaucratic authority
3. Charismatic authority

It is useful to contrast traditional authority with bureaucratic authority. Traditional authority is based on the sanctity of age-old rules and powers. It is not based on a specific legal code or set of rules- instead, "we do it this way because we always have". E.g.- the authority of village elders, or that exercised in patriarchal societies, where the head of the family possesses authority which is transmitted from generation to generation through rules of inheritance. This "pure" type of traditional authority, as indicated above, offers a contrast with the "pure" type of rational bureaucratic authority. In traditional societies, tasks of members are ambiguously defined, and privileges and duties are subject to modification according to the whims of the ruler. Recruitment of employees is based on blood relationship to the ruler (nepotism) or other personal affiliations, rather than on the specific abilities of applicants. Furthermore, in traditional societies there is no rational process of "law-making"- laws are seen as an expression of "truths" or "values", or again, the inclinations of the ruler. In traditional societies leaders ~~may~~ of course be harsh and arbitrary- but Weber reminds us that such power relationships may also be based on shared feelings of love, respect and trust- as he puts it, "after the fashion of the family". The parties involved may thus react to each other as people- they are aware of each other as individuals and thus take account of the virtues and idiosyncracies which each possess.

Now let's contrast traditional (patrimonial) authority with bureaucratic authority. Weber notes that bureaucratic authority (and bureaucratic administration) is distinguished by its rationality- that is, its efficiency which is intended to maximize results. In contrast to

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Weber's Three Types of Authority continued:

traditional authority, bureaucratic authority is rule-oriented. The administrative staff carries out their duties on a regular basis, in accordance with the needs of a well-defined hierarchy. Rules are in written form, and employees are chosen not because of their personal affiliations with a ruler (as is the case in patrimonial or traditional society) but because of their competence. So a bureaucracy stresses achievement over ascription as a means of obtaining social and economic advantages. Education has simply replaced "proof of ancestry" as a prerequisite for high office.

Thus bureaucratic administration is rational on its dependence on specialized technical knowledge. Written rules spell out how authority is to be delegated, the specific duties associated with each position in the hierarchy, and how these duties are to be carried out. This is necessary in order to eliminate ambiguity and maximize efficiency. Bureaucratic authority, in contrast to traditional authority, is not derived from the personal feelings of subordinates for their superiors. It is thus not related to the personal qualities of a particular individual, but rather to respect for the office he holds. It must be this way, as Weber points out, because a bureaucratic organization needs continuity and stability- the organization must go on, even if particular members retire or die. Traditional society offers no such guarantees- if the leader dies, chaos may result.

Yet there are heavy costs associated with this type of administration, in terms of personal happiness, autonomy and creativity. As Weber explains, "Bureaucracy develops more perfectly the more it is 'dehumanized'..." Individual differences and emotional considerations of loyalty and friendship are not brought to bear in the workplace, and innovation, which may be disruptive, is discouraged.

Charismatic authority is quite different from the bureaucratic type- according to Weber, "charisma" refers to a "gift of grace" or gift from God"not accessible to the ordinary person. Such leaders are able to galvanize followers with the promise of extraordinary change, or their ability to divine the "true" destiny of a people-traits which are particularly compelling in times of trouble or uncertainty. Like traditional authority (but to an even greater degree) charismatic authority is unstable- leaders may die or fall from grace.

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Max Weber on Class, Status, Party

Weber agreed with certain fundamental features of Marxist thought, as far as stratification is concerned. For Weber, as for Marx, control over property is a decisive factor in the determination of the life-chances of either an individual or a class. This notion of life-chances is crucial to Weber's definition of a class, and in fact it is one with which Marx would probably agree as well, although he never explicitly made use of the term.

Weber thus defines a class as a number of people sharing certain life-chances- in other words, "the typical chances for a supply of goods, external living conditions, and personal life experience". For example- being born into a wealthy family affects one's chances of acquiring an advanced education (to some extent, at any rate) and level of education largely determines occupational standing.

Marx, too, would assume that class membership affects one's life-chances. But for Marx, the emphasis is on only one element- the ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. Weber believed this was fine as far as it goes- but too simplistic. He wanted to add other elements to the purely economic dimension of stratification- not just class (in terms of economic position) but also status and party (that is, prestige and power). Of course, these dimensions do interact- control of the economy does tend to generate honour and political power. But they can function independently of each other to some degree, and Weber felt that ignoring all other considerations besides the purely economic could not help but produce a distorted view of social reality.

Weber begins by adding to Marx's basic two-class model (owners and workers). He distinguishes 4 main social classes:

- 1) The workers (as a whole)
- 2) The petit bourgeoisie (small businessmen)
- 3) The propertyless intellectuals (technicians, white collar workers, civil servants) with differences dependent on amount of training.
- 4) The privileged class (through property ownership and education)

It is obvious from this list that while Marx ignored status distinctions among various types of workers, Weber did not. For Weber differences in education, training and property ownership aside from one's role in the means of production are also important in class identification and placement. Weber saw that property differences generate classes, power differences generate political parties (although power can take many forms) and prestige differences generate status groupings. Thus, because of Weber's interest in subjective elements which cannot be easily measured or observed empirically, he is concerned with more than just ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. He is concerned with attitudes, and not only with how people produce their means of subsistence but with how they consume as well. (Style of life)

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Max Weber on Class, Status, Party continued:

For Weber, then, it is status which truly creates a community- all the (both tangible and intangible) elements which enable us to feel that we have 'something in common' with others. This is not necessarily a function of income or a shared position in relation to the means of production. Weber points out that the "old rich" may consider the "nouveau riche" to be vulgar upstarts, and other examples of such status distinctions leap to mind as well. Doctors and plumbers both make a great deal of money, but (rightly or wrongly- and this is not meant to disparage plumbers) they do not generally move in the same social circles. These issues must be taken into account, in Weber's opinion, because they offer valuable insight into how certain status groupings view themselves- and how they are viewed by others.

This speaks to another weakness in Marx's theory of class and class action. How can we conceive of "two great opposing classes" or of the proletariat "uniting" in opposition to the bourgeoisie when in fact not all members of the so-called proletariat (or the bourgeoisie) would necessarily feel that they have much in common with each other? How is collective action possible under such circumstances?

The third form of association Weber discusses is the party. Although economic classes, status groups and political parties are all related to the distribution of power in a community (because again, for Weber power can take many forms) parties differ from classes and status groups in several ways. Parties are only possible within communities which have some rational order (hierarchy) and a staff of persons ready to enforce it. For parties aim precisely at influencing this staff, and if possible, to recruit from it party followers". (Weber, Class, Status, Party, pg. 194)

It should be understood here that party here refers to any group or association (faction) which has the aim of securing control of an organization in order to implement definite goals. Thus any organization into which members are freely recruited for a particular purpose may be considered a party. So the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, or the Three Stooges Fan Club all fall into this category- in spite of the fact that their goals are (we hope) quite dissimilar. Economic & status differentials may work together to influence membership interest and recruitment.

To sum up- we can see that for Marx, the essential question was who controls the means of production? For Weber, on the other hand, it was also necessary to ask who controls the other means of dominating human beings? We must also explore other structures of social power- a concern with the separation of the worker from the means of production is important, to be sure, but so is that which lies beneath the surface- a sense of shared community with others- or the lack of it.

Georg Simmel- Metropolis and Mental Life

Like Max Weber (who was a very close friend) Simmel's goal as a sociologist was to observe and understand the relationship between the individual and society, rather than to attempt through his writings any large-scale structural change, which he did not think was possible (or even likely to be an improvement on the status quo). This does not mean, however, that Simmel was an organicist- nor, of course was Weber- far from it.

Simmel did not perceive the individual as somehow "subordinate" to the collectivity, and furthermore he rejected the idea that society is "held together" by harmony, consensus, and so-called "shared" values. This may be true at times, but for Simmel, interaction (or "sociation" as he called it) is characterized by both harmony and conflict, attraction and repulsion, love and hatred. The hallmark of human relations is thus a profound ambivalence, on both the micro and macro levels.

As indicated above, this attitude distinguishes Simmel quite sharply from the organicists, who tend to see conflict as destructive. But Simmel points out that an entirely harmonious group could never exist in reality. For one thing, it would never change, and would therefore never exhibit any kind of life process. It would be similar to living in a cemetery- which is nice and quiet- but rather dull. Furthermore, Simmel wished to distinguish between appearance and reality- a relationship which appears on the surface to be wholly negative could actually be shown to have latent positive functions. Of course, the reverse could be true as well. In fact, for Simmel, any kind of relationship is better than none at all- even one which is conflict-ridden "sews together" the threads of the social fabric- in its own way. The only thing which would be completely negative, in Simmel's view, is total withdrawal from a relationship. Even if it seems too painful to continue, it is important to try, because conflict might serve as a "safety valve" for negative thoughts and feelings which participants may not be able to express in any other way. In addition, conflict may ultimately serve to strengthen the positions of one or both parties thus enhancing their dignity and self-esteem. Remember, too, that conflict with a shared enemy can be beneficial for the group in the sense of strengthening their internal bonds- it brings members closer together. But what is most important for Simmel is that we can never truly distinguish a society in conflict from one in a state of harmony. They are not distinct realities- as if we can or must choose between one or the other- they are simply different aspects of the same reality.

Simmel views the relationship between the individual and society in a similar way- it is dual in nature, a duality which is eloquently expressed in his essay "Metropolis and Mental Life". We are incorporated within society and yet stand outside it, we exist for society and yet also for ourselves.

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Metropolis and Mental Life continued:

So rather than trying to resolve an impossible question- are we products of society, or do we act on society and change it- Simmel sees a unity here. Man cannot be seen as either social or individual, or even partly social and partly individual. Rather, he is both at the same time. He is determined at the same time as he is determining, he is acted upon at the same time as he is self-acting. This unity of opposites allows the emergence of individuality and autonomy (just think, for example, of the possibilities embedded in the division of labour) but also impedes them.

It is, in fact, the struggle of the individual to preserve his individuality and autonomy in modernity which forms the core of Simmel thesis in "Metropolis and Mental Life". You will no doubt remember that these themes preoccupied Weber - and to some extent, Durkheim and Marx as well. Simmel actually uses the city as a synonym for modernity and rural life as a symbol of traditionalism. He compares and contrast the two throughout, in much the same way that Weber would have done.

Simmel tells us at the outset that the individual must struggle to maintain his freedom and uniqueness in the face of what he describes as "overwhelming forces of social organization, technology and cultural tradition". As usual, we see a unity of opposites- city life (modernity) threatens our individuality and autonomy in some ways, while enhancing it in others. The division of labour, the preoccupation with time which reaches its apex in the city (modernity) the dominance of the money-based economy, and the often overwhelming sense of alienation or estrangement from others- all of these can cut both ways. For example, cities do promote individuality by supporting an extreme degree of specialization in the division of labour. At the same time, they threaten individuality and one's sense of uniqueness by making people feel like mere cogs in the "vast overwhelming organization of things and forces". Didn't Weber make much the same observation about bureaucracies?

Simmel speaks not only of the division of labour, but also of the predominance of money, development of the intellect, and routinized structure of urban life. All these things generate alienation, isolation, and a blasé attitude, while at the same time, they provide the opportunity to choose (often absent in traditional society) growth of the mind, and thus, progress- of a sort. But as always, we must ask- at what cost?

