

9. Western Social Thinkers

In this unit we are discussing about the western founding fathers of sociology who established sociology as a subject in Europe and gave new direction to sociology.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857) (Auguste Marje Francis Xavier Comte)

Introduction :

Auguste Comte is known as the father of Sociology. He was born at Montpellier city of France on January 19, 1798. Comte was born in 1798 during the ferment of the French Revolution, that vast complex of events which heralded the birth of the modern world. Due to French Revolution not only in France but also in whole Europe there was emergence of intellectual movements for freedom, equality and rights. The industrial revolution began around 1760 A.D. in Europe. Intellectual and industrial revolutions brought dynamic social changes in European society. In this period not only natural sciences but also social sciences were developed. These Social sciences started to study independently human social life and various aspects of human society. In the course of the development of Social Sciences Auguste Comte has the credit of establishing a new discipline called sociology.



Auguste Comte had keen interest to understand the human society, therefore, he established sociology and he was known as a founding father of sociology. Auguste Comte believed that sociology should be a naturalistic science and should analyze the past development as well as the future of society. First he gave the name “social physics” than he changed it to name sociology. Etymologically, the word ‘sociology’ is hybrid origin of two languages – Latin and Greek. The word

‘socius’ is a Latin term meaning Companion or associate or society. The Greek ‘logos’ means study of. Thus, literally, sociology is the study of society.

Main writings of Auguste Comte :

1. A Prospect of the Scientific Work Required for the Organization of Society.
2. Positive Philosophy (1832-42).
3. System of Positive Polity (1912)
4. Discourse on the Positive Spirit (1844).
5. Religion and Humanity (1856).

Contribution of Auguste Comte in the field of Sociology :

1. The Law of three stages of thought.
2. Hierarchy of the Social Sciences and classification of Social Sciences.
3. Sociology as a new subject.
4. Static Social Theory and Dynamic Social Theory.
5. The religion of humanity.
6. Positivism

The Law of the three stages of thought

Before we understand about positivism, first we should know about the mental status of earlier society, because every invention has specific stages or steps. Under these stages he explained the law of the three stages.

The law of the three stages is an important contribution of Auguste Comte in a new creation of social science or social thinking. In the year 1822 Auguste Comte presented the law of the three stages which explains the intellectual level of human society. Human beings and their system of thought has evolved in three major stages.

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

1. The Theological Stage :

In this stage, people thought, all phenomena were caused by supernatural forces. Comte explained three sub-stages of theological stage :

1.1. Fetishism

In this stage a fetish is an object believed to

have supernatural powers, or in particular, a man-made object that has power over others. Essentially fetishism is the emic attribution or inherent value or powers of an object. This is an elementary stage of theological stage.

1.2. Polytheism

This is the second sub-stage of theological stage. In this stage the worship of or belief in multiple deities, which are usually assembled into a pantheon of gods, along with their own religion and ritual is established. In most religions which accept polytheism, the different gods and goddesses are representations of forces of nature. The aboriginals have classified the gods and goddesses with different aspects of life.

1.3. Monotheism

This is the last sub-stage of theological stage. In this sub-stage monotheism is the belief in the existence of only one god that created the world, who is all powerful and intervenes in all activities of the world. In other words monotheism is the belief in one god. Precognitive people believe that a single theistic entity is responsible for the existence of universe.

2. The Metaphysical Stage

This is the second stage of the evolution of human thoughts. According to Auguste Comte metaphysical stage refers to explanation by impersonal abstract concepts. People often tried to believe that God is an abstract being. The belief that an abstract power or force guides and determines events in the world. Metaphysical thinking discord belief in a concrete God. The nature of inquiry is legal and rational in nature.

3. The Positive Stage

After the Theological and Metaphysical stages the third stage is the positive stage. This stage is also known as scientific stage. Positive stage refers to scientific explanation based on observation, experiment and comparison. Positivism relies upon a distinct method, the scientific method, for its justification. Positivism is purely intellectual way to looking at the world, as well, it emphasizes on observation and classification of data and facts. This is the highest, most evolved behavior according to Comte.

Comte maintained that each stage of the development of human thoughts necessarily grew out of the preceding one. Not only when the previous stage exhausts itself does the new stage develop rather certain traits still remains.

Positivism

Auguste Comte was influenced by Saint Simons views and presented positivism. Positivism also known as Science. According to positivism the evolution of knowledge has a significant condition. Sociology is a science and social facts should be studied by the scientific method. These methods are :

1. Observation Method
2. Experimental Method
3. Comparative Method
4. Historical Method

1. Observation Method

Auguste Comte had an interest to develop sociology as a science and he gave stress on observation method for the study of social phenomena. In the strict sense observation implies the use of the eyes rather than of the ears and the voice that study includes in science.

2. Experimental Method

Auguste Comte believed that in sociology it should be essential to make experiment of social phenomena repeatedly. This method includes field experiments. In field experiment, the study is conducted by comparing experimental group with the control group. If we want to make sociology as a science than it is essential to use experimental method for analyzing social phenomena.

3. Comparative Method

Auguste Comte believed that in the social sciences comparative method should be adopted to analyse the social phenomena. Because cause and effect are different of each incident. Therefore comparative discussion of those events is necessary.

4. Historical Method

Auguste Comte believed that the historical method is not scientific but sociology is a study of human society and for the understanding about social phenomena it is essential to use historical method. This method collects facts by going into the past in different periods.

All above discussion is based on the Auguste

Comte's views on sociology as a science. He has not discussed about the specific subject matter of sociology. But he tried to establish sociology as a positive science and developed a scientific method for the study of social phenomena.

In this chapter we know about the contribution of Auguste Comte in the establishment of sociology and its scientific perspective. He discussed the law of the three stages for the evolution of human thinking and explained that positivism is the view that the study of the social world should be conducted according to the principles of natural science. A positivist approach to sociology holds that objective knowledge can be produced through careful observation, comparison and experimentation.

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Introduction

Karl Marx was born on the 5th May 1818 in Jewish family in Western Germany. In 1824 his father accepted Christianity. On his father's advice, Karl Marx joined the university of Bonn as a student in the faculty of law. In the autumn of 1836 he was transferred to the University of Berlin. Karl Marx's years in the University of Berlin were spent under the impact of Hegelian philosophy. Karl Marx completed his Ph.D. from University of Jena in the year 1841 on the "Differences between the Natural Philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus." He planned to be a lecturer in philosophy. It was only his father's death in 1841, which forced Karl Marx to think in terms of non-academic career. A Cologne publicist, Moses Hess, helped Karl Marx by inviting him to write articles for a journal. Later, he became its chief editor. When it became clear to him that in Germany he could not speak and write freely, he decided to migrate to France. In 1844 Karl Marx met in Paris a revolutionary by the name of Friedrich Engels. Both are known as propounders of communist theory.



Karl Marx's brief but very productive spells in Paris ended in the beginning of 1845 when he was expelled from Paris and went to England. After a prolonged illness of lungs, his breath failed and he died in his sleep on the 14th March 1883.

Writings of Karl Marx

1. Criticism of Hegelian philosophy of right
2. On the Jewish
3. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 1844
4. The Holy Family
5. The Poverty of Philosophy, 1847
6. The Communist Manifesto, 1848
7. A Contribution to critique of Political Economy, 1859
8. The German Ideology 1845-46
9. The Goya Programme
10. Civil War in France
11. Class Struggle in France, 1850
12. Revolution and Counter Revolution
13. Das Capital, 1867

Contribution of Karl Marx to Sociology

1. Dialectical Materialism
2. Economic Interpretation of History
3. Class Struggle
4. Theory of Surplus Value
5. Analysis of Capitalism and its future
6. Concept of State
7. Concept of Democracy, Religion and Nation
8. Communism
9. Theory of change
10. Theory of Alienation

Class Struggle

Karl Marx had done intensive work to propound a theory of class struggle. His total emphasis was on the class and class struggle. All his writings related to economics, sociology and political science are used on the concept of class and class system. In his book 'Das Capital' he wrote "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle." This means that the entire history of societies is studded with different phases and periods of class struggle. This history of class-struggle begins in the slave owning society, continues through feudal society where this class struggle is between classes of the feudal lords and the landless labourers. Due to changes in the mode of production and class struggle,

a new stage of society emerged i.e. capitalism and emerged new classes capitalist and labour.

Raymond Aron has discussed about the Marxian Ideology in his book “**Main Currents in Sociological Thought**” he says that Marx’s sociology is in fact sociology of the class struggle. Raymond Aron has proposed three propositions of Marx’s class :

1. The existence of classes is connected only with certain historical phases in the development of production.
2. The class struggle leads inevitably to the dictatorship of the proletariat.
3. This dictatorship is, in turn, merely a transitional stage in the abolition of all classes, in the realization of the classless society.

Class and Class Consciousness

The word class originated from the Latin term ‘classis’ a group called to arms, a division of the people. **Lenin** has defined the class and he says that “Large group of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation to the means of production, by their role in social organization of labour, and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the difference places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.”

Some characteristics of class are given by Lenin :

1. Class is a large group of people.
2. Each group occupies a place in a historically determined system of social production.
3. Social groups have their relation to the means of production.
4. Their role in the social organization of labour.
5. Every class has the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.
6. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.

Marx does not consider social or religious base of classes. The analysis of social classes in terms of their economic structure is one of the best answers to Marx’s scientific intention. From it Raymond Aron elucidated two conclusions regarding classes :

1. A social class is that which occupies a fixed place in the process of production. A place in the process of production has two meaning : a place in the technical process of production and, a place in the legal process superimposed upon the technical one. The capitalist, owner of the means of production, is at the same time master of the organization of labour, master in the technical process and also, because of his legal position, the one who takes the surplus value from the associated producers.
2. Class relationships tend to become simpler with the development of capitalism. Indeed, if there are only two sources of income, there are only two large classes; the proletariat, consisting of those who possess only their labour power and the capitalists, those who appropriate a portion of the surplus value.

Karl Marx and Engels discussed about class in their book **German Ideology**. They said that the main characteristics of capitalist society is class. In this book Karl Marx explained about the concept of class in detail. People sharing the same relationship to the means of production comprise a class. Let us understand it through an example—all laborers have a similar relationship with the land owners. On the other hand all the land owners, as a class have similar relationship with the land and Labourers. However, for Marx, this relationship is not sufficient to determine the class as according to him it is not sufficient for class to be ‘class in itself’ but it should also be class for itself. The formation of class is not possible without class consciousness.

Karl Marx and Engels explained the class consciousness with two important concepts these are :

1. Class in itself : A social group whose members share the same relationship to the means of production.

2. Class for Itself : A social group only fully becomes a class when it becomes a class for itself.

The similar consciousness of a class serves as the basis for uniting its members for organizing social action, here, similar class consciousness towards acting together for their common interest is called class for itself. Karl Marx says that when class in itself convert into the class for itself, this process is called class consciousness.

Class formation in the Society

In the primitive times there was no class system. All goods related human needs were found in the nature and a person could fulfill all his needs from nature because the distribution of means was equal to all the people of the society. Therefore, there was no classes and no problem of exploitation. Marx says that first time classes emerged in the last stage of primitive communism. Economically, the classes emerged due to surplus production and unequal distribution. The new concept called private property emerged. Karl Marx discussed about the class system in various societies :

1. **Class in primitive communism**—Primitive communism is represented by the societies of pre-history and provides the only example of a classless society. Classes did not exist during the era of primitive communism when societies were based on a socialist mode of production and division of labour found in the society was based on sex difference.
2. **Classes in slave-owning society**—In the era of slave-owning society the formation of classes was started. The economy was based on agriculture and the concept of private property had emerged and division on the basis of religion was found. In this period on the basis of power and property the new classes emerged which were Masters and slaves. The exploitation of slaves began and slaves were fully dependent on their masters.
3. **Classes in Feudalism**—In the feudal epoch, there were two main classes distinguished by their relationship to land. They are the feudal nobility who own the land and the landless serfs who work on the land. The lords exploited and oppresses the serfs.
4. **Classes in a capitalist Society**—In a capitalist era there are two main classes : The

Bourgeoisie or capitalist class, which owns the means of production, and the proletariat or working class, whose members own only their labour which they provide to the bourgeoisie in return for wage. Large scale machine production is the specific feature of the productive forces of capitalism. Under capitalism, the producer, the proletariat, is legally free being attached neither to the land nor to any particular factory. Proletariats do not possess the means of production, they are compelled to sell their labour power and there by come under the yoke of exploitation.

Class Struggle

Most important theory of class struggle was given by Karl Marx. The concept of class struggle was derived from Augustine's theory and critically analyzed by Karl Marx. Karl Marx said that all human history, thus far is the history of class struggles.

Although Marx focused most of his attention on capitalism and modern society, he also examined how societies had developed over the course of history. According to Marx social systems make a transition from one mode of production to another—sometimes gradually and sometimes through revolution—as a result of contradictions in their economies. He outlined a progression of historical stages which began primitive communist societies of hunters and gatherers and passed through ancient slave owning system and feudal systems based on the division between land owners and serfs. The emergence of capitalist class which came to displace the landed nobility. Marx argued that just as the capitalists had united to overthrow the feudal order and supplanted a new class structure, labour will unite to overthrow the capitalist order.

Marx assumes that class struggle is not a result of class formation but in of class consciousness. Without class consciousness there will be no class struggle. Class consciousness means that false class consciousness has been replaced by a full awareness of the true situation by a realization of the nature of exploitation. Members of a class then develop a common identity, recognize their shared interests and unite, so creating class solidarity. The final stage of

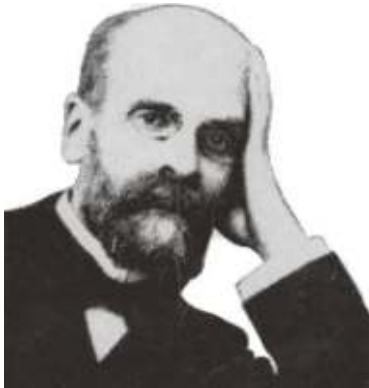
class consciousness and class solidarity is reached when members realize that only by the collective action can they overthrow the ruling class, and take positive steps to do so. According to Marx after capitalism a new system will emerge that is modern communism, and in this stage there will be no class and no discrimination between man and man. Ownership on the means of production will be all equal. Finally Marx wrote “workers of the world unite you have nothing to lose but your chains.”

Karl Marx has tried to establish the idea of classless and stateless society after capitalism. It is only imaginary, because if we analyse the history of human society there has never been a classless society. Marx always struggled in life and he established the conflict approach in society.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Introduction

Now we discuss about Emile Durkheim, who was a great thinker, philosopher, educationist and sociologist. Emile Durkheim was born on April 14, 1858 in a small town Epinal in France. He was Jew in his childhood he was a brilliant student. Durkheim belonged to the elite of the community and he was a son of a rabbi; his more remote ancestors had likewise been rabbis. He got elementary education from the local college of Epinal. After graduation he went to Paris for higher studies. In Paris Ecole Academy was very reputed for the study. That time Emile Durkheim got admission in third attempt. He studied here up to 1885, then he went to Germany. Here he was influenced by the articles of Auguste Comte and Wilhelm Wundt.



After sometime he returned from Germany to Paris. He wrote many books in his life time and November 16th 1917 he passed away.

Main works of Emile Durkheim

1. Division of Labour in Society, 1893

2. The Rules of Sociological Methods, 1895
3. The Suicide, 1897
4. The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 1912
5. Sociology of Education, 1922
6. Sociology of Philosophy, 1924
7. Moral Education, 1925
8. The Socialism, 1928
9. The Evolution of Pedagogy in France, 1938
10. Lecous de Sociologie
11. Montesquieu and Rousseau, 1953
12. Pragmatism and Sociology, 1955

Among these works some were published during his life and some were published by his wife Louisdrafu after his death.

The main concepts, theories and sociological contribution of Emile Durkheim

1. Methodology
2. Theory of division of labour in society
3. Theory of social development
4. Theory of suicide
5. Theory of religion
6. Theory of knowledge
7. Theory of values
8. Theory of morality
9. Concept of collective conscience
10. Concept of collective representation
11. Concept of social facts
12. Concept of social solidarity
13. Concept of Anomie
14. Concept of crime, punishment and law
15. Concept of functionalism

Division of Labour

Emile Durkheim was the first thinker who explained the division of labour in society on the social basis. He wrote his first book entitled “Division of Labour in Society”, which was published in the year 1893. He discussed the causes, factors and effects of division of labour. The central theme of the book is social solidarity in society. In The Division of Labour in Society, Durkheim discusses how the division of labour is beneficial for society because it increases the productive capacity, the skill of the workman, and it creates a feeling of solidarity between people. In the following section we will analyse how Durkheim studies division of Labour in terms of :

The functions of division of Labour

Emile Durkheim explains the division of Labour on the basis of social solidarity. He did scientifically analyse the forms of laws, forms of solidarity, forms of human relations, crime, punishment, social evolution and other problems.

Emile Durkheim as a functional sociologist explains the division of labour and he says that the splitting up of an activity into a number of parts or smaller processes under taken by different persons or group of persons, speeds up the performance of the activity. Let us take an example, in Indian society we have Varna system. It is based on division of labour because all Varna have their own responsibility, therefore, the society runs in a better way. The first Varna is Brahmin, their duties are related to education, Khatriya's role was to internal and external security, Vaishya's role was trade and commerce the fourth Varna is shudra, the role of shudra was to provide services to above three Varnas. This is the appropriate example of the division of labour in society.

Emile Durkheim analyzed the functions of division of labour and he said there are two meaning of functions :

1. To refer to a system of vital movement or action.
2. To refer to the relationship between these movements and the corresponding needs of the organism (e.g. digestion incorporates food essential to replenish nutritional resources of the body, while respiration introduces the necessary gases into the body of tissues, etc.) Durkheim insisted on the second stage, thus, to ask "what is the function of division of labour?" was simply to ask for the organic need which the division of labour supplied.

Concept of social solidarity

The concept of social solidarity is one of the most important contribution of Emile Durkheim in sociology. Durkheim says that it is social cohesion based upon the dependence individuals have on each other in more advanced society. Although individuals perform different tasks and often have different values and interests, the order and very solidarity of society depends on their reliance on each other to

perform their specified tasks. In Indian society, there is unity in diversity like regional, castes, language, religious and cultural, we all work together and unite. Therefore division of labour is a basis of social solidarity.

Social solidarity is a moral phenomenon. It involves in the society's moral norms. It is abstract and it is found in the minds of the people. It is an expression of collective consciousness. Durkheim believes that the changes in the social solidarity depend on the basis of size of the population and the forms of division of labour. So there are two types of solidarity in the society.

Mechanical solidarity

Mechanical solidarity is found in the simple and primitive societies. Mechanical solidarity arises out of a number of common experiences like members in a given society. There exists a great deal of homogeneity and tightly knit social bond which serves to make the individual members one with their society. In this society the needs of the people are very limited and they are controlled by the religion and public opinion. Repressive law is an indicator of mechanical solidarity. On the one hand punishment is given to the individual on the other hand, punishment strengthens the belief and values of the society.

Organic Solidarity

By organic solidarity, Durkheim, means a solidarity based on differences and complementarily of different societies based on organic solidarity are touched and transformed by the growth of industrialization. Thus, the division of labour is very important aspect of such societies. A society based on organic solidarity is thus one where heterogeneity, differentiation and variety exist. The growing complexity of societies reflects in personality types, relationships and problems. Individualism becomes increasingly valued. The kind of grip that social norms have on individuals in mechanical solidarity loosens. Individual autonomy and personal freedom become important in organic solidarity. In this type of societies restitutive laws exist. Law which appears no longer a law for punishment but for restitution or reform.

Causes of Division of Labour

Durkheim discussed the causal factors of

division of labour in his book's second section, because division of labour is a social fact and the causes also lie in the social conditions of the society. He provides main causes of division of labour these are :

The growth in the population size and density

Durkheim assumes that the main cause of division of labour in society is the growth in the population size and density. He said growth of population and shrinking of natural resources will make competition more bitter. But division of labour ensures that individuals specialize in different field of activity. Thus they can coexist and, in fact complements each other.

Due to population growth the fragmented societies have lost their importance and new society emerges, therefore, the density of population has increased. According to Durkheim there are two types of density :

1. Material density—By material density Durkheim means the sheer increase in the number of individuals in a society. In other words, population growth. In India, there are metropolitan cities where more people live in a small place.

2. Moral density—By moral density, he means the increased interactions that result between individuals as a consequence of growth in numbers. The main cause of the increase in moral density is increase in the transport and communication facility.

3. Ancestors way of life—Durkheim believes that as long as we only continue to follow in the path of our ancestors, we tend to live as they have lived and remain adamant to all innovation. When we leave the path of ancestors, we have more division of labour in society. In India, the hereditary occupation are not observed by the people and they go to other occupations, therefore the division of labour is increased.

Consequences of Division of Labour

Emile Durkheim explains the consequences of the division of labour in his book's third section. He said due to division of labour the society is directly affected and have following consequences :

1. Functional freedom and specialization—Emile Durkheim explains that due to division of labour, there is an increase in the freedom and

mobility in the work. When a man does single type of work regularly he develops specialization.

2. Development of civilization—Civilization is itself the necessary consequence of the changes, which are produced in the volume and in the density of societies. The increase in the division of labour, leads to more growth in civilization. The conclusion is that division of labour always develops the civilization.

3. Social progress—Division of labour brings social change in the society. Change is the universal truth. Therefore, due to division of labour there has been a social progress.

4. Emergence of new groups and interdependency—The main consequence of division of labour is that it formulates new groups and all new groups are dependent on other groups. These new groups fulfill the needs of other groups. All groups have their own specialization, therefore, they are interdependent on other groups. Members of society develop a strong sense of interdependence.

5. Individualistic ideology—It ensures growth of individuality and individual potential. It negates the necessity of a repressive law, since it strengthens solidarity and collectivity. On the basis of division of labour, increase the individuality and personal interest. In this situation achieved status has a more important place in the society.

6. Restitutive laws and moral pressure—Division of labour also changes the law system of the society. In mechanical society, there repressive laws are found, but in the organic society where lot of division of labour, specialization and complexity increases, the restitutive laws are found. Division of labour on one hand increase the individuality and on other hand develops the morality for collective interests. And, morality controls the individual consciousness, personal interests and freedom.

7. Organic Solidarity—Organic solidarity is established by the division of labour in society. A society based on organic solidarity is thus one where heterogeneity, differentiation and variety exist, and all parts of the society depend on the other parts and interdependency found among the various parts of the society.

The study of division of labour is very

important, this study gives us a new sociological insight to understand the society. Division of labour not just as an economic process but a social one. Division of labour arises as a result of the competition for survival brought about by growing material and moral density.

Max Weber (1864-1920)

Introduction

Max Weber was born in a protestant family in Erfurt town of Thuringa, Germany on April 21, 1864. Weber's father came from a family of merchants and textile manufacturers of western Germany. His father was a member of the National Liberal Party. In the year 1882, Max Weber went to the University of Heidelberg to study in law faculty. After two years of military service Weber returned to his parents in 1884. He joined the University of Berlin to complete his education. In the year 1886 he got a degree in law.



In 1893 Max Weber got married to Marianne Schritger. After marriage, he left the parents family. Immediately preceding his marriage Weber was appointed as a professor of law in Berlin University. Later he was appointed as a Professor of Economics at the University of Freiburg in the year 1894. Weber became ill with a psychic illness in 1897. In 1898 he suffered from a nervous breakdown and did not recover for more than five years. In 1901 he returned to Heidelberg and resumed to light schedule of work, reading professional journals and books. He travelled widely to Italy, Holland, Belgium and America. In America he visited on an academic invitation for three months. There he was impressed by American economic development and its civilization and he wrote on protestant ethics, capitalism and bureaucracy. In 1918, he was appointed as a professor of economics in Viena University. And on June 14, 1920 the famous sociologists passed away.

Main works of Max Weber

1. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalizing 1904-05

2. Sociology of Religion, 1922
3. The Hindu Social System, 1950
4. The Religion of China, 1951
5. The Ancient Judaism, 1952
6. The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, 1927
7. From Max Weber-Essays in Sociology, 1946
8. The Methodology of Social Sciences, 1946
9. The City, 1913
10. General Economic History, 1911
11. The National and Social Foundation of Music, 1912

Major contribution of Max Weber

1. Theory of social Action
2. Bureaucracy
3. Concept of Ideal Type
4. Concept of Authority
5. Social Class and Status
6. Methodology
7. Sociology of Religion

Social Action

Max Weber conceives of sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. The subject matter of sociology is social action. Max Weber analyzed social action with a scientific perspective. Max Weber believes that sociology has a scientific nature and gives explanation with the social action theory. This theory is a type of ideal type. This theory has been propounded in his book socio-economic organization.

To understand the social action theory, first we should know about the 'action' and 'behaviour'. Social action denotes social behavior. This concept is used by social psychologists and sociologists. Action is social when the actor behaves in such a manner that his action is intended to influence the action of one or more other persons. Max Weber explains that there should be four elements which are necessary for action in society :

1. Actor
2. Goal
3. Means
4. Situation or conditions

The actor is that individual who performs an act. The actor can be one or more persons. Actors have an aim or goals for which the action was done. Without

goal, an action is futile and baseless. Social action is performed on some social patterns. All these norms are called norms of the society. The means of the social action should be according to norms of the society or social situation. As per sociologists all action is not a social action. Any meaningful action is called social action. These actions are related with the past, present and future conditions of the actor.

Max Weber defines social action as “social action is that action of an individual which is influenced by the actions and behavior of other person and by which its direction is determined.” Thus social actions of individuals which are somehow influenced, guided, or determined by the actions of other individuals are called social actions.

We can understand social action with this mathematical formula.

Social action = Activity + Meaning given by actor

Max Weber focus on the interpretative understanding of social action. Therefore, sociology is interpretative sociology.

Characteristics

Max Weber explains the characteristics of social action as :

1. Social action may be influenced by an act of past, present or future. Social action is the result of modification of some actions of some other individuals by the modifying action it may occur in past, present or future. In case of past action, a man who did good deeds in past with a person, that person will try to do good with him. This action is a social action.
2. All actions are not social actions. Social actions occur in the existence of other individual. It is possible only if there is another individual whose action or behavior is promoting any given individual to act in a particular manner. It means that there can be no social action in isolation.
3. Social action should have subjective meaning to another particular social action. If two person collide accidentally and without any motive, the collision will not be a social action.

Social action considered meaningful orientation of its business to another is response to reaction from

other participants in the interaction. Means if all persons doing same action in same time but nobody is influenced by this action, this is not a social action.

Types of social action

Max Weber identified four forms or types of social action :

1. Rational action—This action may be rationally expedient if it is based on logical or scientific grounds. This action entails a complicated plurality of means and ends. The ends of action are either taken as means to the fulfillment of other ends, or are treated as if they are set in concrete. In this way action becomes purely instrumental. Example : A engineer who is building a bridge, in this case rational action is distinguished by the fact that the actor conceives his goal clearly and combines means with a view to attaining it.

2. Value oriented action—Action is rational in relation to a specific value. This action occurs when individuals use rational that is effective means to achieve goals or ends that are defined in terms of subjective meaning. When individuals are value rational, they make commitments to certain subjective goals and adopt means that are effective in attaining these ends. For example, a soldier sacrifices his life for the country. His action is not directed towards attaining specific material goals like wealth. It is for the sake of certain values like honor and patriotism.

3. Affective Action—Affective action fuses means and ends together so that action becomes emotional and impulsive like kindness, love, sympathy and anger etc. This kind of action results from the emotional state of mind of the actor. If some one has murdered any one, this action is the result of anger. Therefore, this type of action is emotional reaction.

4. Traditional Action—Traditional action occurs when the ends and the means of action are fixed by custom and tradition for example death-feast, endogamy etc. are the traditional actions.

Above type of classification of social actions are based on logic, values, emotions and tradition. Weber explains that in the western countries, actions are based on rationality and in the eastern countries the most of actions are based on values, emotions and traditions.

Important points

- Auguste Comte was the founder of sociology in the year 1838.
- The growth of social sciences emerged in Europe due to Intellectual and Industrial Revolution.
- Auguste Comte explained the law of three stages : The Theological stage, Metaphysical stage and the Positive stage.
- Comte said that if we want to make sociology as a science, we should use the methods of observation, comparative and historical method.
- Karl Marx propounded the communist ideology and conflict school.
- The basis of class is the ownership of means of production.
- Class struggle is possible when the classes have class consciousness (class for itself).
- Karl Marx says that there has always been two classes in the history of society.
- According to Karl Marx at the end of capitalism there will emerge a society which will be classless and stateless society and establish modern communism.
- Emile Durkheim was a successor of Auguste Comte.
- Emile Durkheim was the first sociologist who explained division of labour on the social basis.
- Main causes of division of labour are : population growth and its density, as per Emile Durkheim.
- Durkheim explained two types of solidarity : Mechanical and Organic.
- In the mechanical society repressive laws and in the organic society the restitutive laws are found.
- Max Weber lived in Germany.
- Max Weber said that the subject matter of sociology is social action
- For social action there are four Major elements : Actor, Goals, Means, Conditions or Situations.
- According to Max Weber types of social action are : Rational, Value oriented, Affective action and Traditional Action.
- Max Weber said that without social action, we cannot formulate the social relations.

Questions for Practice

Multiple Choice Questions :

1. In which year Auguste Comte founded sociology?
(a) 1830 (b) 1838
(c) 1842 (d) 1848
2. According to Auguste Comte among these which stage is the primary stage of thinking?
(a) Positivism (b) Metaphysical
(c) Theological (d) Above all
3. What is Positivism?
(a) Theological stage of society
(b) Metaphysical stage of society
(c) Traditional stage of society
(d) Positivistic stage of society
4. According to Comte, which factor is suitable for positivism?
(a) Fetishism (b) Polytheism
(c) Monotheism (d) Observation
5. In which year Karl Marx did his Doctorate.
(a) 1840 (b) 1841
(c) 1842 (d) 1848
6. Among these ideologies, which ideology was propounded by Karl Marx?
(a) Democratic (b) Monarchy
(c) Socialist (d) Communist
7. According to Karl Marx those people who do not have the ownership on means of production, are called :
(a) Capitalist (b) Labour
(c) King (d) Feudal lords
8. Who was the author of 'Das Capital'?
(a) Hegel (b) Marx
(c) Weber (d) Durkheim
9. Emile Durkheim got his Ph.D. on the book :
(a) Division of Labour in Society
(b) Suicide
(c) Moral Education
(d) Socialism
10. On which basis, Durkheim explains the division of labour in society :
(a) Economic (b) Social
(c) Political (d) Industrial
11. Mechanical solidarity is :
(a) Homogeneity of Unity
(b) Heterogeneity of Units

- (c) Complexity of Units
- (d) Modern Units
- 12. Functional freedom and specialization is the consequences of :
 - (a) Industrialization (b) Westernization
 - (c) Division of labour (d) Urbanization
- 13. Max Weber was a resident of :
 - (a) Germany (b) France
 - (c) America (d) England
- 14. According to Max Weber when an actor does social action, his behavior is called :
 - (a) Meaningful (b) Purposive
 - (c) Goal oriented (d) with means
- 15. Among these, which action is called affective action :
 - (a) Bridge building (b) Marriage
 - (c) Theft (d) Murder in anger

Very Short Answer Type Questions :

1. In which city of France, Auguste Comte was born?
2. Who was the founder of Sociology?
3. In which year "Positive Philosophy" was published?
4. In the theological and metaphysical stage which element are not found?
5. What is the name of the book written by Raymond Aron?
6. What is class struggle?
7. When will class struggle happen?
8. How many types of society have been explained by Karl Marx?
9. What is the year of birth and place of Emile Durkheim?
10. On which subject, Durkheim got his Ph.D. degree?
11. What do you mean by organic solidarity?
12. In which society the repressive laws are found?
13. What is the year of death of Max Weber?
14. Write a mathematical formula of social action.
15. What is value oriented action?

Short Answer Type Questions :

1. Explain the meaning of 'Sociology' as given by Auguste Comte.
2. What is fetishism?
3. Define observation?
4. What is positivism?
5. Discuss "class" as defined by Karl Marx.
6. What is class consciousness?
7. Give the name of classes in a capitalist society.
8. Explain class for itself?
9. What are the causes of division of labour in society as per Emile Durkheim?
10. Which types of society have mechanical solidarity?
11. In modern societies which form of laws are found?
12. Define social action as per Max Weber.
13. Explain any three characteristics of social action.
14. Explain rational action with examples.
15. Which type of actions are found more in the eastern countries?

Essay Type Questions :

1. Discuss the law of three stages as given by Auguste Comte.
2. Discuss the theory of class struggle as explained by Karl Marx.
3. What is the interpretation of Durkheim's Division of Labour ? Explain.
4. Explain the theory of social action of Max Weber.

Answer Key :

1. (b) 2. (c) 3. (d) 4. (d) 5. (d) 6. (d) 7. (d)
8. (d) 9. (a) 10. (b) 11. (a) 12. (c) 13. (a) 14. (a)
15. (d)