



GOVT DEGREE COLLEGE PATTAN
Study Material for Sociology Semester-II



Study Material in Sociology

Semester – II

The material is intended to help the learner and in no way is a substitute for class room teaching.



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SYLLABUS
DSC-SOC-1B
Subject: Sociology

Semester – II

Paper: Sociological Thought

Objectives:

The course introduces the students to the classical sociological thinkers, whose work has shaped the discipline of sociology.

Unit 1: August Comte

- a. Law of Three Stages
- b. Positivism
- c. Social Statics and Dynamics

Unit 2: Emile Durkheim

- a. Social Fact
- b. Suicide
- c. Division of Labour

Unit 3: Karl Marx

- a. Historical Materialism
- b. Dialectical Materialism
- c. Class Conflict and Class Struggle

Unit 4: Max Weber

- a. Social Action
- b. Ideal Type
- c. Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

References:

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Note: List of readings provided is not absolute and additions may be made to it



Unit 1: Auguste Comte

- a. Law of Three Stages**
- b. Positivism**
- c. Social Statics and Social Dynamics**

Auguste Comte: A Brief Biographical Sketch

Auguste Comte was born in the year 1798 in a middle class family in France. He became a famous French author. Without receiving college level Degree, Comte ended up becoming secretary to Claude Henri Saint-Simon who had left a profound and lasting intellectual impact on Comte and his work. Eventually both of them worked for several years together. Later in 1824 they parted their ways over an omission of Comte's name from one of the contributions published.

Auguste Comte, however, was a gifted person. Endowed with sharp memory and concentration power he used to deliver lectures without notes. He even wrote down his books collecting everything from his memory. He was quite unsuccessful professionally at the beginning of his career. Although he could not get a regular position anywhere initially and struggled a lot. Comte later did get a minor position as a teaching assistant in 1832. When he was financially stable he worked on the six-volume work for which he is best known, *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, which was finally published in its entirety in 1842 (the first volume had been published in 1830). In that work Comte outlined his view that sociology was the ultimate science. By 1851 he had completed the four-volume *Systeme de Politique Positive*, which had a more practical intent, offering a grand plan for the reorganization of society.



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In 1838 he lost hope that anyone would take his work on science in general, and sociology in particular, seriously which led him to embark on his life of “cerebral hygiene”; that is, Comte began to avoid reading the work of other people, with the result that he became hopelessly out of touch with recent intellectual developments.

Now let us discuss his contribution to the discipline of Sociology. It is true that no single individual can found a whole field of study all on his own. Sociology too had many contributors during the early time period which led to the sociological thinking. However, Auguste Comte is considered the founding father of sociology since he was the very first person who used or coined the term “Sociology” for the first time in 1839. Initially he named it “Social Physics” but due to criticisms from some scientists of his time he changed it to Sociology, a discipline which he called the ‘scientific study of society’ or ‘the science of society’. Thus he considered sociology as “the queen of all sciences”. He believed that sociology and sociologists would be able to restore order in society which was the focus of many 18th and 19th Century Philosophers. In other words, he wanted to recreate a new social order through this new scientific discipline with the use of objective laws. Sociology, for him, was the crowning glory of all the other disciplines because it explains social phenomena in terms of scientific principles and laws which were applied hitherto only in natural sciences. Comte’s work laid the groundwork for the development of Sociology as it is known today. Many of Comte's doctrines were later adapted and developed by social philosophers, especially the Functionalists.

Comte was married to Caroline Massin which lasted from 1825 to 1842. Much later in life Comte suffered a nervous breakdown and continued to suffer from mental problems, and once in 1827 he tried (unsuccessfully) to commit suicide by throwing himself into the Seine River. He died in 1857.



a. Law of Three Stages

Auguste Comte propounded many theories during his life time. Law of three stages is one of them. For him change must come through a change in ideas. This concept was enshrined in his laws of three stages or the three stages of human development in society. He believed that human society evolved through three developments of human intellect. The individual mind in particular and the human society in general passes through three successive stages of historical evolution according to Comte. Thus he proposed the law of three stages of human and social evolution as follows:

The Theological Stage:(The time period prior to 1300). This stage is also known as Fictional or Fictitious stage. It was theological because humans regarded all phenomenon as divinely caused and dominated by divine, unseen and supernatural power. During this stage the human mind invokes gods and goddesses and seeks to explain different phenomena which were occurring. No logic was applied to understand the phenomenon, its sustenance, its continuation, and its coherence. Whatever was happened, is happening, will happen is all associated to divine power. For example, all natural phenomenon, be it thunder, fire or snow etc. is attributed to a particular god. Comte divided Theological stage into three sub stages.

- i) **Fetishism:** It was the belief that some unidentified influences on human life came forward due to actions of few things which they considered are alive. Priests came into being at this stage who were astrologers and knew the art of magic.



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- ii) **Polytheism:** It was the stage when scientific explanations were not sought but this stage was the beginning of it. Religion gained social importance at this stage. People started to follow multiple gods.
- iii) **Monotheism:** At this sub stage the intellectual level got comparatively increased. This was the stage which proliferated the establishment of religious system. It helped create personal, moral and social morality.

Metaphysical Stage: (Between the time period of 1300 and 1800). Somehow human mind have managed to move forward striking a new power in conception with itself and the environment. The mind attributes all phenomena to impersonal forces rather than supernatural beings in this stage of evolution. It was characterised by the belief that abstract forces like “nature”, not personalised gods as in the earlier stage, explained everything. Things were endowed with certain power and entities which explain their behaviour. Certain things were explained within the phenomenon which makes structure behave in particular way. These powers were no more than exploitations from man’s own ideas and had no bases in social reality. It all emerged as mental construct. However, even this system of thought can’t be put to test and verification. It sought an explanation from things and the events that occurs in society in those very things. Truth here cannot be verified with scientific validation. This stage, in fact, is just an intermediary or transitional stage, to move from the theological to positivistic stage.

Positivistic Stage (Positivism): (Time period from 1800 onwards). Here at this stage the mind is freed from metaphysical and supernatural speculations. People have by now completely lost faith in absolute causes of supernatural powers or abstract forces. Rather ‘observation predominates over imagination’ at this last stage. This stage is completely characterised by the belief in science. At this



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stage humans made scientific approach to nature and society. For example if in the theological stage heavy rainfall is attributed to god Indra, in the scientific stage the law of Physics would explain the phenomena in scientific manner.

b. Positivism

Many founding fathers of Sociology believed that it would be possible to create a science of society based on the same principles and procedures as that of the natural sciences. This approach is known as positivism. Auguste Comte was the forbearer in the development of the positivistic sociology. He used the word 'Positivism' in his book "Positive Philosophy".

Positivism is 'positive' because it deals with bare facts brought to the light of the day by pure reason and logic. The positivist theory is based on the idea that just like the natural sciences involve in construction of theories based on observable data, similarly sociology can also develop theories based on direct observation of human behaviour. This approach of study helps understand the social phenomenon better by systematic observation and experimentation. It is through this positive scientific approach of interpreting different phenomena in terms of scientific principles and laws that we can make verifiable generalizations. Comte through his writings stressed that sociology should be scientific, much like the natural sciences. He felt that sociology should be rooted in positivism, that is, knowledge should be derived from observable facts, rather than from superstition, fantasy, or other non-empirical (non-verifiable) sources.

Comte believed that, Sociology would become a positive science if it is established upon objective data and empirical facts. Man is not by nature a



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positivist, he is not naturally scientific, but one gradually becomes through evolution and progress of society and mind. Positivism helps people progress and evolve. It is a sort of stage of perfection. He thought that the social world was governed by a set of laws, which made it possible for the study of society to be scientific in nature because he believed the study of sociology should always be scientific. For Comte, Positive knowledge can be gained in Sociology by employing three step methodology: Observation, Experimentation and Comparison which were applied by many successive sociologists in their studies.

Later many other classical thinkers such as Emile Durkheim and Herbert Spencer endorsed Comte's ideas of the discovery of laws of social life and scientific study of society. However contemporary sociologists use the claim of scientific status for sociology very cautiously. Positivism, nonetheless, remains relevant and important in contemporary sociology.

c. Social Statics and Social Dynamics

Auguste Comte divided Sociology into two major divisions or so to say two theoretical aspects, i.e. Social Statics and Social Dynamics. He believed that the science of society must find out both the laws of order and progress. Let us understand these two concepts separately.

Social Statics: Social Statics is concerned with the structure of society. It refers to the conception of order in society. Statics reveals the diversity of a particular society out of which the principles of social order can be discovered. Social statics, according to Comte, emphasize on how 'order' or 'equilibrium' is important in society. It is concerned with the present structure of society. It



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studies current laws, rules and present condition of society. It is the study of social structure, its elements and relations. It deals with how present laws are affecting the society. Social statics is the study of social system as they exist at a given time. It deals with nature of connection between family, division of labour, property, government, religion, nationality and so on. It deals with how social system (social structure) interact with one another. It is chiefly analytical.

Social Dynamics: Social Dynamics deals with social development. It specifically studies the social development. It is the law of social progress or social change. In other words, social dynamics focuses on whole societies as the unit of analysis and reveals how it is developed and changed through time. It is the science of the necessary and continuous movement of humanity. Social dynamics, according to Comte, studies the laws of succession or the changes over time in all social structures. Social dynamics was equated by Comte with human progress and evolution. It inquires as to how the human civilisation progresses in different stages. Social dynamics reveals that successive and necessary laws of progress for human beings and societies. Therefore, Comte believed that the study of social dynamics was more interesting sociological work than the study of social statics. It looks at how society changes over time. And how the progress of social changes are taking place. It is the study of actual societies. Social dynamics can be found in the theory of law of three stages. Comte placed greater emphasis on social dynamics. This is chiefly empirical. It studies the interconnection between how societies exist and how different types of societies change over a period of time.

However in contemporary sociology social statics and social dynamics are replaced by concepts of social structure and social change. In Comte's tradition every social system has a basic structure or order but it also undergoes and develops over time.



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Unit 2: Emile Durkheim

- a. Social Fact**
- b. Suicide**
- c. Division of Labour**

Emile Durkheim: A Brief Biographical Sketch



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Emile Durkheim was born in the year 1858, in Epinal, France into a family of rabbis. Durkheim pursued and developed a brilliant academic career as he progressed. Early on, he was interested in the study of religion which was more academic than theological. Durkheim was different from other sociologists because he examined massive empirical data to formulate his original theories on his study of suicide and religion. He rejected a traditional academic career in philosophy and sought instead to acquire the scientific methods and training needed to contribute to the moral guidance of society. Although he was interested in scientific sociology, there was no field of sociology at that time, so between 1882 and 1887 he taught philosophy in a number of provincial schools in the Paris area.

Durkheim has been seen as an inheritor of the Enlightenment tradition because of his emphasis on science and social reformism. He legitimized sociology in France, and his work ultimately became a dominant force in the development of sociology in general and of sociological theory in particular. Durkheim was politically liberal, but he took a more conservative position intellectually. Like Comte, Durkheim also feared and hated social disorder. His work was informed by the disorders produced by the general social changes such as Enlightenment, French Revolution and Industrial Revolution. In fact, most of his work was devoted to the study of 'social order'. He believed that social disorders are not a necessary part of the modern world and could be reduced by social reforms.

His interest for science was aroused further when he visited Germany, when immediately after he published many good works. These publications helped him gain a position in the department of philosophy at the University of Bordeaux in 1887. There Durkheim offered the first course in social science in a French university. Durkheim's main responsibility, however, was teaching courses in education to schoolteachers, and his most important course was in the



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area of moral education. His goal was to communicate a moral system to the educators, who he hoped would then pass the system on to young people in an effort to help reverse the moral degeneration he saw around him in French society.

The years that followed were characterized by a series of personal successes for Durkheim. Three of his famous books were his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labor in Society*, and his major methodological statement, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, in 1895, followed by his empirical application of those methods in the study *Suicide* in 1897. By 1896 he had become a full professor at Bordeaux. In 1902 he was summoned to the famous French university the Sorbonne, and in 1906 he was named professor of the science of education, a title that was changed in 1913 to professor of the science of education and sociology. The other of his most famous works, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published in 1912.

Durkheim died on November 15, 1917, a celebrated figure in French intellectual circles, but it was not until over twenty years later, with the publication of Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), that his work became a significant influence on American sociology.

a. Social Fact

Emile Durkheim developed a distinctive conception of the subject matter of sociology and then tested it in an empirical study. In his book, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim argued that it is the special task of sociology to study what he called 'social facts'. Durkheim believed that sociology is the study of 'social facts'. He explained social facts as collective ways of acting, thinking, and feeling which are external to, and coercive of the individual



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consciousness. Furthermore, social facts are first and foremost ‘things’ which are social in nature and cannot be explained in terms of psychological or physiological analysis.

Social fact emerges as key concept, running through all his studies including the study of Division of Labour. Through his book, Rules of Sociological Method, he tried to define the boundary and discipline of Sociology. Through social fact he outlined what the discipline of Sociology actually deals with. He used Social fact in sociology to differentiate it from Psychology and Philosophy.

Social fact are laws that govern and constraint the individual which is external. Social fact is then necessarily supra-individual. Durkheim believed that social fact are from the social community which prepares the members of the community to prepare the way they should act and members of particular society might adhere the normative structure of particular society and share the similar values. But those members are constrained by its very existence. For example, when one performs duty as citizen, brother, teacher etc. the commitments are certain obligations which are entrusted by laws and customs which are external to the individual.

However, in The Rules of Sociological Method, Durkheim differentiated between two types of social facts, i.e. material and nonmaterial social facts. Although he dealt with both in the course of his work, his main focus was on nonmaterial social facts, for example, culture, social institutions etc. rather than material social facts, for example, bureaucracy, law etc. This concern for nonmaterial social facts was already clear in his earliest major work, The Division of Labor in Society. His focus there was a comparative analysis of what held society together in the primitive and modern cases. He concluded that earlier societies were held together primarily by nonmaterial social facts,



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specifically, a strongly held common morality, or what he called a strong collective conscience. However, because of the complexities of modern society, there had been a decline in the strength of the collective conscience.

b. Suicide

To put it simply, Suicide is the act of taking one's own life. It figures prominently in the historical development of sociology because it was the subject of the first sociological data to test a theory by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim's famous book *suicide* published in 1897 is a landmark study in which conceptual theory and empirical research are brought together. His book is an analysis of the phenomenon regarded as pathological, intended to throw light on the evil which threatens modern industrial societies i.e. "anomie" or a relative normlessness in a whole society or in some of its component groups. Increasing number of suicides indicates something wrong somewhere in the social system of the concerned society. Durkheim has studied this problem at some length. Durkheim's study of suicide begins with a definition of the phenomenon. He then proceeds to refute the earlier interpretations of suicide. Finally he develops a general theory of the phenomenon. Durkheim refers to suicide as "every case of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative death performed by the victim himself and which strives to produce this result". It is clear from his definition that suicide is a conscious act and the person concerned is fully aware of its consequences. Durkheim used a number of statistical records to establish his fundamental idea that suicide is also a social fact and social order and disorder are at the very root of suicide.



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But Durkheim did not examine why individual A or B committed suicide; rather, he was interested in the causes of differences in suicide rates among groups, regions, countries, and different categories of people (for example, married and single). His basic argument was that it was the nature of, and changes in, social facts that led to differences in suicide rates. For example, a war or an economic depression would create a collective mood of depression that would in turn lead to increases in suicide rates. More will be said on this subject in Chapter 3, but the key point is that Durkheim developed a distinctive view of sociology and sought to demonstrate its usefulness in a scientific study of suicide.

Durkheim did not attempt to explain the inner feelings of someone contemplating suicide nor even the causes of individual suicides. Instead he examined variations in the suicide rates. He argued that different social conditions and different causes produce different patterns of suicide.

Durkheim rejected extra social factors such as heredity, climate, mental alienation, racial characteristics, imitation and psychological causation as causes of suicide. He came to the conclusion that the cause of suicide can be studied with reference to the social structure and its reunifying function which may actually aggravate or reduce suicide.

Durkheim firmly believed that suicide is not an individual act or a private and personal action. Rather it is caused by some power which is over and above the individual or “super-individual”. It is not a personal situation but a manifestation of a social condition. Durkheim has selected the instance or event of suicide to demonstrate the function of sociological theory.



c. Division of Labour

Theory of solidarity is the collective conscience which is the sum total of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of society and forming a system in its own right.

Emile Durkheim believed that the primary bond in the modern world was an intricate division of labour, which tied people to others in dependency relationships. However, Durkheim felt that the modern division of labour brought with it several “pathologies”, or we can say, an inadequate method of holding society together. Given his conservative sociology, Durkheim did not feel that revolution was needed to solve these problems. Rather, he suggested a variety of reforms that could “patch up” the modern system and keep it functioning. Although he recognized that there was no going back to the age when a powerful ‘collective conscience’ predominated, he did feel that the common morality could be strengthened in modern society and that people thereby could cope better with the pathologies that they were experiencing.

In whatever manner division of labour is to produce co-operation and solidarity and not conflict. Only the abnormal division of labour produces conflict in society or anarchy. According to Durkheim if division of labour does not result in solidarity then it is abnormal.

Division of labour in Durkheim was a distribution of co-ordinated function for maintenance of social structure. All social order was based on solidarities which societies produce in particular society. He was trying to achieve a consensus in society and maintain solidarity in society. Division of labour produces co-operation and solidarity.



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He differentiates between two form of solidarity, Mechanical solidarity and Organic solidarity.

Mechanical solidarity: it is the pre-industrial revolutionary society based on direct relation, collective notion, and consensus, new situation was throwing challenging to the old. Maintaining solidarity is important.

Organic Solidarity: the growing division of labour in society in the wake of capitalism the main feature of new situation is principally characterised by division of labour. It necessitates a new type of society. Here parts are different from each other but all parts have to perform particular function in society thus they are equally indispensable in society in their totality. He believed that a higher organic solidarity would be achieved without revolution because it is the DoL which filled a role in organic solidarity which was filled by mechanised.

Unit 3: KARL MARX

- a. Historical materialism**
- b. Dialectical materialism**
- c. Class conflict and class struggle**

Karl Marx: A Brief Biographical Sketch

Karl Marx was born in Trier, Prussia, Germany in 1818. He was from rabbinical families. Marx received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin in 1841. He was heavily influenced by Hegel and the Young Hegelians.

He rejected the abstractness of Hegelian philosophy, the naïve dreaming of utopian communists. Marx laid the groundwork for his own life's work: Practical attempts.



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Marx married in 1843 and soon thereafter was forced to leave Germany for the more liberal atmosphere of Paris. It was the unique way in which he combined Hegelianism, socialism, and political economy that shaped his intellectual orientation. Also of great importance at this point was his meeting the man who was to become his lifelong friend, benefactor, and collaborator—Friedrich Engels.

Much of Marx's compassion for the misery of the working class came from his exposure to Engels and his ideas.

During this period Marx wrote a number of abstruse works (many unpublished in his lifetime), including *The Holy Family* (1845/1956) and *The German Ideology* (1845–1846/1970) (both co authored with Engels), but he also produced *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1932/1964), which better foreshadowed his increasing preoccupation with the economic domain.

While Marx and Engels shared a theoretical orientation. After Marx's death, Engels became the leading spokesperson for Marxian theory and in various ways distorted and oversimplified it, although he remained faithful to the political perspective he had forged with Marx.

Because some of his writings had upset the Prussian government, the French government (at the request of the Prussians) expelled Marx in 1845, and he moved to Brussels. His radicalism was growing, and he had become an active member of the international revolutionary movement. He also associated with the Communist League and was asked to write a document (with Engels) expounding its aims and beliefs. The result was the *Communist Manifesto of 1848* (1848/1948), a work that was characterized by ringing political slogans (for example, "Working men of all countries, unite!").



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In 1849 Marx moved to London, and, in light of the failure of the political revolutions of 1848, he began to withdraw from active revolutionary activity and to move into more serious and detailed research on the workings of the capitalist system. In 1852, he began his famous studies in the British Museum of the working conditions in capitalism. These studies ultimately resulted in the three volumes of *Capital*, the first of which was published in 1867; the other two were published posthumously. He lived in poverty during these years, barely managing to survive on a small income from his writings and the support of Engels.

He began to gain fame both as a leader of the International and as the author of *Capital*. Marx died on March 14, 1883.

a. Historical materialism

Central to Karl Marx's thought is his theory of historical materialism. It argued that human societies and their cultural institutions like religion, law, morality etc. were the outgrowth of collective economic activity. Marx's theory was heavily influenced by Hegel's dialectical method. But while Marx agreed with Hegel's basic dialectical thesis of social change he disagreed with the notion that abstract ideas were the engine. Marx turned Hegel on his head and argued that it was material the economic forces or our relationship to the natural, biological and physical world that drove the dialectic of change in society. Moreover the engine of history rests in the internal contradictions in the system of material production or the things we do in order to produce what we need for survival.

For Marx, each economic system or as commonly called "mode of production" in human history that eventually led to its demise and replacement by another more advanced stage of economic and social life. For example the inherent



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contradictions in feudalism such as the necessity for states ruled by monarchs to trade with other states creating a ruling class which eventually led to the advance of capitalism. Though Marx saw that capitalism too has its own contradictions particularly in the over production of goods. As technology advances and the exploitation of workers continues too many goods are bound to be made. According to Marx, the problem is that overproduction produces crises for capitalism. A kind of crises that he felt would eventually prove fatal and lead to the development of socialism and finally to communism.

b. Dialectical materialism

Dialectical materialism, a philosophical approach to reality derived from the teachings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. For Marx and Engels, materialism meant that the material world, perceptible to the senses, has objective reality independent of mind or spirit. They did not deny the reality of mental or spiritual processes but affirmed that ideas could arise, therefore, only as products and reflections of material conditions. Marx and Engels understood materialism as the opposite of idealism, by which they meant any theory that treats matter as dependent on mind or spirit, or mind or spirit as capable of existing independently of matter. For them, the materialist and idealist views were irreconcilably opposed throughout the historical development of philosophy. They adopted a thoroughgoing materialist approach, holding that any attempt to combine or reconcile materialism with idealism must result in confusion and inconsistency.

Marx's and Engels' conception of dialectics owes much to G.W.F. Hegel. In opposition to the "metaphysical" mode of thought, which viewed things in abstraction, each by itself and as though endowed with fixed properties, Hegelian dialectics considers things in their movements and changes,



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interrelations and interactions. Everything is in continual process of becoming and ceasing to be, in which nothing is permanent but everything changes and is eventually superseded. All things contain contradictory sides or aspects, whose tension or conflict is the driving force of change and eventually transforms or dissolves them. But whereas Hegel saw change and development as the expression of the world spirit, or Idea, realizing itself in nature and in human society, for Marx and Engels change was inherent in the nature of the material world. They therefore held that one could not, as Hegel tried, deduce the actual course of events from any “principles of dialectics”; the principles must be inferred from the events.

The theory of knowledge of Marx and Engels started from the materialist premise that all knowledge is derived from the senses. But against the mechanist view that derives knowledge exclusively from given sense impressions, they stressed the dialectical development of human knowledge, socially acquired in the course of practical activity. Individuals can gain knowledge of things only through their practical interaction with those things, framing their ideas corresponding to their practice; and social practice alone provides the test of the correspondence of idea with reality—*i.e.*, of truth. This theory of knowledge is opposed equally to the subjective idealism according to which individuals can know only sensible appearances while things-in-themselves are elusive, and to the objective idealism according to which individuals can know supersensible reality by pure intuition or thought, independent of sense.

The concept of dialectical materialism—which is a theoretical basis for a method of reasoning—should not be confused with “historical materialism,” which is the Marxist interpretation of history in terms of the class struggle.



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There exists no systematic exposition of dialectical materialism by Marx and Engels, who stated their philosophical views mainly in the course of polemics.

c. Class conflict and class struggle

It is important to recognize that Marx viewed the structure of society in relation to its major classes, and the struggle between them as the engine of change in this structure. His theory was not about equilibrium or consensus. His theory was about a conflict view of modern (nineteenth century) society.

In relation to property there are three great classes of society: the bourgeoisie (who own the means of production such as machinery and factory buildings, and whose source of income is profit), landowners (whose income is rent), and the proletariat (who own their labor and sell it for a wage).

Class thus is determined by property, not by income or status. These are determined by distribution and consumption, which itself ultimately reflects the production and power relations of classes. The social conditions of bourgeoisie production are defined by bourgeois property. Class is therefore a theoretical and formal relationship among individuals.

The force transforming latent class membership into a struggle of classes is class interest. Out of similar class situations, individuals come to act similarly. They develop a mutual dependence, a community, a shared interest interrelated with a common income of profit or of wages. From this common interest classes are formed, and for Marx, individuals form classes to the extent that their interests engage them in a struggle with the opposite class.

At first, the interests associated with land ownership and rent are different from those of the bourgeoisie. But as society matures, capital (i.e., the property of production) and land ownership merge, as do the interests of landowners and



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bourgeoisie. Finally the relation of production, the natural opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie, determines all other activities.

As Marx saw the development of class conflict, the struggle between classes was initially confined to individual factories. Eventually, given the maturing of capitalism, the growing disparity between life conditions of bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the increasing homogenization within each class, individual struggles become generalized to coalitions across factories. Increasingly class conflict is manifested at the societal level. Class consciousness is increased, common interests and policies are organized, and the use of and struggle for political power occurs. Classes become political forces.

The distribution of political power is determined by power over production (i.e., capital). Capital confers political power, which the bourgeois class uses to legitimize and protect their property and consequent social relations. Class relations are political, and in the mature capitalist society, the state's business is that of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, the intellectual basis of state rule, the ideas justifying the use of state power and its distribution, are those of the ruling class. The intellectual-social culture is merely a superstructure resting on the relation of production, on ownership of the means of production.

Finally, the division between classes will widen and the condition of the exploited worker will deteriorate so badly that social structure collapses: the class struggle is transformed into a proletarian revolution. The workers' triumph will eliminate the basis of class division in property through public ownership of the means of production. With the basis of classes thus wiped away, a classless society will ensue (by definition), and since political power to protect the bourgeoisie against the workers is unnecessary, political authority and the state will wither away.



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Overall, there are six elements in Marx's view of class conflict.

1. Classes are authority relationships based on property ownership.
2. A class defines groupings of individuals with shared life situations, thus interests.
3. Classes are naturally antagonistic by virtue of their interests.
4. Imminent within modern society is the growth of two antagonistic classes and their struggle, which eventually absorbs all social relations.
5. Political organization and Power is an instrumentality of class struggle, and reigning ideas are its reflection.
6. Structural change is a consequence of the class struggle.

Marx's emphasis on class conflict as constituting the dynamics of social change, his awareness that change was not random but the outcome of a conflict of interests, and his view of social relations as based on power were contributions of the first magnitude. However, time and history have invalidated many of his assumptions and predictions. Capitalist ownership and control of production have been separated. Joint stock companies forming most of the industrial sector are now almost wholly operated by non-capital-owning managers. Workers have not grown homogeneous but are divided and subdivided into different skill groups. Class stability has been undercut by the development of a large middle class and considerable social mobility. Rather than increasing extremes of wealth and poverty, there has been a social leveling and an increasing emphasis on social justice. And finally, bourgeois political power has progressively weakened with growth in worker oriented legislation and of labor-oriented parties, and with a narrowing of the rights and privileges of capital ownership. Most important, the severest manifestation of conflict between workers and capitalist has been institutionalized through collective bargaining legislation and the legalization of strikes.



Unit 4: Max Weber

- a. Social Action**
- b. Ideal Type**
- c. Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**

Max Weber: A Brief Biographical Sketch

Max Weber, (born April 21, 1864, Erfurt, Prussia [Germany]—died June 14, 1920, Munich, Germany), German sociologist and political economist best known for his thesis of the “Protestant ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,” relating Protestantism to capitalism, and for his ideas on bureaucracy. Weber’s profound influence on sociological theory stems from his demand for objectivity in scholarship and from his analysis of the motives behind human action.

Weber spent most of his formative academic years in his childhood home, where he was continually subject to his parents’ conflicting interests. Since he spent his mid- and late 20s working simultaneously in two unpaid apprenticeships—as a lawyer’s assistant and as a university assistant—he could not afford to live on his own until the autumn of 1893. At that time he received a temporary position teaching jurisprudence at the University of Berlin and married Marianne Schnitger, a second cousin, who would become his biographer and the editor of his collected works. Marianne Weber was also a



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distinguished sociologist in her own right and an early figure in the field of feminist sociology.

Some of his important works are:

1. General Economic theory-1927
2. The protestant Ethic and the spirit of Capitalism-1930
3. Law in Economy and Society-1945
4. Essays in Sociology-1946
5. The theory of Social & Economic organisations-1947
6. The methodology of Social Sciences-1949
7. 'The City'-1958
8. The Sociology of Religion-1963
9. On Charisma and Institution Building-1968
10. Economy and Society-1968 (In three volumes).

Weber's contribution to the development of Sociology and social thought has been enormous. In all this writings he has tried his level best to maintain his objectivity, neutrality, analytical approach, historical insight and scientific fervour.

Max Weber has contributed greatly to the understanding of social causation; in human affairs. He has made painstaking study of concrete social situations and processes that must form the foundation of any adequate sociological theory.

a. Social Action



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The 'ideal type' is one of Weber's best known contributions to contemporary sociology. It occupies a very important place in his methodology. Weber believed, it was the responsibility of sociologists to develop conceptual tools. The most important of such conceptual tool is the ideal type.

Weber used Ideal type in a specific sense. To him Ideal type is a mental construct, like a model, for the scrutiny and systematic characterization of a concrete situation. Indeed he used Ideal type as a methodological tool to understand and analyze social reality.

Methodology is a conceptual and logical research procedure by which knowledge is developed. Historically much of the methodological concern in the social sciences has been directed towards establishing their scientific credentials.

Max Weber was particularly concerned with the problem of objectivity in social sciences. Hence he used Ideal type as a methodological tool that looks at reality objectively. It scrutinizes, classifies, systematizes and defines social reality without subjective bias. The Ideal types are nothing to do with values. Its function as a research tool is for classification and comparison

Four most important types of social action according to max weber are as follows:

1. Traditional Action:

Traditional action occurs when the ends and the means of action are fixed by custom and tradition. For example, some so-called primitive societies have very strict rites of succession for group leaders. What is important about traditional



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action is that the ends of action are taken for granted and appear to be natural to the actors concerned because they are unable to comprehend the possibility of alternative ends.

This is an action which is guided by customs and long standing beliefs which become second nature or habit. In traditional Indian Society doing 'pranam' or 'namaskar' to elders is almost second nature needing no prompting

2. Affective Action

Affective action fuses means and ends together so that action becomes emotional and impulsive. Such action is the antithesis of rationality because the actor concerned cannot make calm, dispassionate assessment of the relationship between the ends of action and the means that supposedly exist to serve these ends. Rather the means themselves are emotionally fulfilling and become ends in themselves.

This kind of action results from the emotional state of mind of the actor. If someone is teasing a girl in a bus, she may get so irritated that she may slap the offending person. She has been provoked so much that she has reacted violently. In this example, the action is defined not with reference to a goal or system of values, but by the emotional reaction of an actor placed in a given set of circumstances

3. Value-rational 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. According to Weber, when individuals are value rational, they make commitments to certain subjective goals and adopt means that are effective in attaining these ends.



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4. Rational-purposeful 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 (for example goals, values) are either taken as means to the fulfilment of other ends, or are treated as if they are set in concrete. In this way action becomes purely instrumental.

Example: If we compare two individuals who are trying to maximize their income over the course of a year, we might find that one person uses far more effective means to achieve this goal than the other. He might cheat on his tax return, take a second job or sell drugs to workmates. We would describe the individuals as more purposively rational than one who acquires and keeps less money.

b. Ideal Type

The 'ideal type' is one of Weber's best known contributions to contemporary sociology. It occupies a very important place in his methodology. Weber believed, it was the responsibility of sociologists to develop conceptual tools. The most important of such conceptual tool is the ideal type

The main problem that is addressed in this article is how to use Max Weber's concept of the ideal type in concrete sociological research. The ideal type was invented by Weber more than a century ago, but has rarely been used in empirical research. One reason for this is that Weber was not very clear on what is meant by an ideal type. Another is that students of Weber's work have not been very interested in presenting the ideal type in such a way that it can be used. Instead, it has been surrounded by an air of difficulty and unresolved theoretical questions, something that has made the average social scientist



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confused and unable to use Weber's concept in his or her own research. In this article, it is argued that despite existing difficulties, we know enough today about the ideal type to use it effectively. A practical guide for how to construct as well as use an ideal type is provided. As a background to this argument, the development of the ideal type in Weber's work is presented, drawing on a suggestion by Alfred Schutz that Weber originally designed this concept with history in mind, but then switched to sociology.

According to weber "An ideal type is formed by the one-side accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent, concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct In its conceptual purity, this mental construct.... cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality."

Ideal types are not formed out of a nexus of purely conceptual thought, but are created, modified and sharpened through the empirical analysis of concrete problems. This in turn, increases the precision of that analysis. Ideal type, a key term in Weber's mythological essays has been used by him as a device in understanding historical configurations or specific historical problems.

Certain Marxists would say that private ownership of the means of production makes inevitable the political power of the minority possessing these means. Weber would say that an economic regime of total planning makes a certain type of political organisation more probable.

In Weber's work such analysis of causal relationships was related to his interest in worldwide comparisons or in analysis of events and establishment of general proposition. That is he used Ideal types to build up a conception of a particular historical case, and used the same Ideal type conceptions for a comparative



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analysis. This interdependence of history and sociology appears most clearly in Weber's conception of the Ideal type. Besides examining any particular historical case Weber also used Ideal types to analyze the abstract elements of social reality and to explain particular kinds of social behaviour.

d. Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Max Weber's famous book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) is surely one of the most misunderstood of all the canonical works regularly taught, mangled and revered in universities across the globe. This is not to say that teachers and students are stupid, but that this is an exceptionally compact text that ranges across a very broad subject area, written by an out-and-out intellectual at the top of his game. He would have been dumbfounded to find that it was being used as an elementary introduction to sociology for undergraduate students, or even schoolchildren

Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a study of the relationship between the ethics of ascetic Protestantism and the emergence of the spirit of modern capitalism. Weber argues that the religious ideas of groups such as the Calvinists played a role in creating the capitalistic spirit. Weber first observes a correlation between being Protestant and being involved in business, and declares his intent to explore religion as a potential cause of the modern economic conditions. He argues that the modern spirit of capitalism sees profit as an end in itself, and pursuing profit as virtuous. Weber's goal is to understand the source of this spirit. He turns to Protestantism for a potential explanation. Protestantism offers a concept of the worldly "calling," and gives worldly activity a religious character. While important, this alone cannot explain the need to pursue profit. One branch of Protestantism, Calvinism, does provide this explanation. Calvinists believe in predestination--that God has already



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determined who is saved and damned. As Calvinism developed, a deep psychological need for clues about whether one was actually saved arose, and Calvinists looked to their success in worldly activity for those clues. Thus, they came to value profit and material success as signs of God's favor. Other religious groups, such as the Pietists, Methodists, and the Baptist sects had similar attitudes to a lesser degree. Weber argues that this new attitude broke down the traditional economic system, paving the way for modern capitalism. However, once capitalism emerged, the Protestant values were no longer necessary, and their ethic took on a life of its own. We are now locked into the spirit of capitalism because it is so useful for modern economic activity.

Throughout his book, Weber emphasizes that his account is incomplete. He is not arguing that Protestantism caused the capitalistic spirit, but rather that it was one contributing factor. He also acknowledges that capitalism itself had an impact on the development of the religious ideas. The full story is much more complex than Weber's partial account, and Weber himself constantly reminds his readers about his own limitations. The book itself has an introduction and five chapters. The first three chapters make up what Weber calls "The Problem." The first chapter addresses "Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification," the second "The Spirit of Capitalism," and the third "Luther's Conception of the Calling and the Task of the Investigation." The fourth and fifth chapters make up "The Practical Ethics of the Ascetic Branches of Protestantism." The fourth chapter is about "The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism," and the fifth chapter is about "Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism."