

Understanding the rise of the environmental movement through

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Understanding the rise of the Environmental Movement through the use of Max Weber's 4 types of ' Social Action' Sociology101 – Laura Meehan

Historically, while industrialization and production have flourished, there has been little concern regarding the environment's well being. However, now more than ever, there has been a growing awareness and acceptance of environmentalism, as people begin to realize that the large-scale environmental destruction we have caused, cannot be mended or manipulated by technological fixes.

This somewhat ' new' movement to enter into the political arena claims it is necessary that the foundations of modern industrial society have to be challenged and restructured, as well that we must transform our social actions in order for it to succeed. Through the use of Max Weber's 4 types of ' social action', we are able to better understand and analyze the reasons for change, progress, and setbacks within the environmental movement. To begin with, in sociology, ' social action' refers to " all human behavior when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it" (Anderson, Karen L. 2012), " Thinking About Sociology: A Critical Introduction" (p. 155).) Additionally, as defined by Weber himself, social actions "[are] interpreting the meanings which men give to their actions and so understand the actions themselves. " (Matthews, Eric (1978), " Selections In Translation" (p. 7).) Point in fact, there are four types of ' social actions': 1. Goal rational: social action motivated by specific goals, 2. Value rational: social action motivated by weighing goal and how it is achieved, 3. Affectual action: social action motivated by emotions, and 3. Traditional action: action motivated by a tradition or custom.

Therefore with specific regards to the environmental movement, value rational and affectual actions are the most relevant social actions. Generally speaking, value rational is the absolute essence of this movement as it strives for more ethical approaches to consumption, while focusing not only on the goal, rather how it is achieved. A perfect example to compliment this is to take a glance at how companies are turning to ' fair trade' products, which are organized to help producers in developing countries make better trading conditions and promote environmental sustainability.

Pursuing this further, another ideal example of how the environmental movement encompasses a value rational action is the ' 100km diet'. This ' diet' refers to only eating food grown or produced within 100 kilometers of your locale, and amongst other goals, promotes environmental sustainability. The diet reduces the amount of " food miles"-which is the distance food is transported from the producer to the store, including the emissions created-that each person's meal goes through. It undoubtedly captures the principle of value rational action, as it is entirely focuses on how ' the goal' is achieved.

Consequently, the environmental movement also clearly demonstrates social actions motivated by emotions, or therefore, affectual action. Many parents have joined the movement in hopes that they will be able to give their children, grandchildren, and future families the same or better quality of life in which they've experienced in their lifetime. This action is directly driven by their emotions; the very thought of their children suffering in the future's

daunting changing environments pulls on their heart strings, and they join the movement to avoid a negative future.

However in contrast, without allude to the less pertinent role of ‘ goal action’ as well as ‘ traditional action’, we would not be able to fully comprehend the restrictions as well as the difficulties the movement is faced with. First off, the issue regarding the restriction of the movement’s progress is owing to the fact that a large portion of post-industrial society is still focused on the capitalist mode of production. More specifically, they are focused on increasing production and feeding the starving mouths of consumerism.

Capitalism urges surplus production, which can leave devastation destruction to the land in which it occupies; deforestation, toxic waste and pollution, oil spills, and much more. Pursuing this further, this portrays how the very basis of capitalism, is goal rational; governments or corporations have a set economic goal in mind, and will essentially put their ethics on a shelf, in order to achieve their goal. This can stunt or sometimes bring the movement’s progress to a halt, as it can be a very grueling change as the environmental movement tries to hift the social action from a goal rational society to a value rational society. Similarly, the changes in which occupy the environmental movement are also limited by a multiplicity of people whom are reluctant to alter their lifestyles, as they are comfortable with the way they’ve always done things. This would clearly outline an individual, or group of individuals, in which fall under traditional action. They are comfortable with the lifestyle and traditions they have, and they are not willing to change, with the reason that it is ‘ the way things have always been done’.

This has been a great restriction for the movement, and may partially be driven by the fear of change and what will come. In final analysis, Weber's four types of social action are useful conceptual tools for explaining and understanding contemporary social reality, as they allow us to analyze particular patterns that constitute the institutions, organizations, structures, and norms of society. " Social action (which includes failure to act and being acted upon) can be related to the past, present or anticipated future behavior of other people. (Matthews, Eric (1978), " Selections In Translation" (p. 26).) Attempting to understand an individual or group's actions and the results, is necessary to formulate an explanation of how society works, as well as how social change transpires. It can give insight on why a group or individual acted in a certain way, or predict how they may react in any future or hypothetical situations. In the same way, the more precise the ideal type, the more useful it is to devise classifications of groups or individuals and to produce hypotheses regarding the implication of their social actions. The more radically these ultimate values diverge from our own, the more difficult it is for us to understand them be re-living them through an act of empathetic imagination. " (Matthews, Eric (1978), " Selections In Translation" (p. 11).) What is being outlined by Weber, is that social actions are not only useful in an analytical sense, however they allow us to reason another's actions from a different standpoint than that of our own.

Consequently, another feature of these conceptual tools is to note how the actions of individuals must be analyzed to determine their consequences, since there may be unintended consequences to individual or group social action, or of the combined effects of each of these actions, which in turn can

assist us in explaining contemporary social reality. In conclusion, social actions allow us to see a different perspective and understand why a group or individual acts the way they do, what motivates them, and how it can influence their social reality.

Through the use of Max Weber's 4 types of 'social action', we are able to clearly comprehend, analyze and predict reasons for change, progress, and setbacks within the environmental movement. Bibliography Matthews, Eric. "The Nature of Social Action." Weber: Selections In Translation. 1st ed. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Pg. 7, 11 & 25. Print. Anderson, Karen L. "Chapter 6." Thinking About Sociology: A Critical Introduction. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press Canada, 2012. Pg. 155. Print.