

# Classical view of modern society: a comparison

Society



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As we approach the third millennia, the world grows into complexity. The world is now on the modern era with different changes from its cultural and intellectual movements. The world is facing a modern enlightenment. Nonetheless, there were also some improvements on how the modern society works but there were also a lot of varied and complex problems and challenges that emerge.

Although, many people still believe that man can solve these problems and overcome these challenges thru meaningful analysis and introspection. Some search the answer from the theories of classical philosophers. They believe that this world will not be on what it is now without these people. Yet, the question still lies on their validity of the assertions of the philosophers. Are these assertions and theories relevant and appropriate in the modern times?

However, we and these philosophers have varied experiences. Yet, their in depth knowledge of society bids us to believe them and study them. Like Marx, who died a hundred years ago, still had many followers. Marx on his early age had observed the plight of the masses against the bourgeoisie in the capitalist society. He, just like Friedrich Nietzsche, believed in the reconstruction of the society and in redefining the role of an individual. He argued that man's will was not due to his like or to his needs, rather, society dictated him on the things that he should like or he should need.

Society and man interacted, so according to him there is a need that a society, in which a man lived, should be fair and would be the instrument on predisposing justice on all the people. Marx further asserted that not a man could claim that his existence is largely due to himself, but rather all people

existed because of mutual relationship and interdependency. He believed that all humans are interconnected in various ways, such as a social network, that whatever one does would surely affect others.

However, through out his life, Marx had commented on the ambiguity and the disorderliness of the society. He had seen and observed the resistance and struggles between the different classes or strata of the society. He had observe that people with equal classes such as the bourgeoisie formed an alliances with each others to further their ends. Marx had observed that somewhat there is a line or an immense gap that had divided the people from intermingling with each other.

He asserted that there was a categorizing force that bonded people with equal social status. As a result, the proletariat class was oppressed and injustice was done to them. Oppressions, according to Marx, might trigger bloody civil revolutions, and unrest in the society would prevail. In order to prevent this from occurring, Marx proposed a communist society, as what he described in his book together with Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto.

Engels, a co-author, deemed that the The Communist Manifesto was exclusively the product of Marx's brilliance, and the book was Marx's. In the book, Marx and Engels first summoned up history. In their exposition through the dialectic philosophy, they both expressed that in the world there existed two opposing forces[1]. They had described that there existed those who oppressed and those that were oppressed. The main point on which the The Communist Manifesto revolved was the establishment of a communist society.

A communist society, as what both described is a liberated society where people are all treated equally. Moreover it is a society that does not discriminate nor classify people because social status is no longer in existence. Moreover, communism proposed a society wherein people will no longer acknowledge his or her possessions rather his or her properties belong to everyone. Marx and Engels further stressed the need for centralization and organization of all the properties and efforts of the state for a common ground.

The book proposed equal sharing and division of labors, equal allotment of profits and income. Moreover, in the long run, Communism also believed in the diminishment of the state and its ruler because Marx believed that if an ideal society (communist society) existed, the people would no longer be in need of a facilitator or an organizer to dictate or facilitate living. According to them, the state would only serve as a guide meanwhile that a communist society is not yet achieved[2].

Meanwhile, another notable German philosopher was Max Weber, who unlike Marx traced the origin of capitalism and its role to the society. If one would read the title of Weber's work and not the text, one may laugh because one cannot relate easily capitalism and the protestant ethic. However, Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was a huge success because he had found sensible reasons on how the protestant ethic might have contributed to the origin of capitalism.

Weber, who was considered one of the fathers of modern sociology, was very different as compared to Marx. Marx, although a Jew, denounced the belief in the inexistence of God. He asserted that God does not shape man

according to his form, yet man conceptualized the absolute as a model- who is perfect and divine- due to his quest of attaining also that same stature. On the other hand, Weber had researched a lot on how religion had affected the life of man. He had wrote more descriptive and analytical essays after the The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. He had shown the effects of religion to the communal and shared cause of a society[3]. He had discussed that religious background define the wants and the needs of each person.

For example, he had found out that the Hindus and the Buddhist were religious groups who taught that life is all about gaining material wealth or money. Yet they had other goals, like unity to the divine and freedom from the repeated cycle of rebirth. These assertions were parallel to the basis on how he analyzed the origin of capitalism. Weber asserted that he did not claim that all the reasons of the birth of capitalism were mainly due to the protestant. He just cited some evidences that verified and attested his claim. The Calvinist, a protestant sect, according to him had that attitude of pursuing material wealth and worldly success. This was because- according to him as Calvinist believed- was the manifestation of God's grace to the Calvinist.

The Calvinist believed that God showed many signs in this earthly being of what will be their destination in the afterlife. Calvinist believed that if God made them rich, there is a large possibility that they will not suffer eternal damnation in the future. So in connection with this, they find ways on how to improve their status in life usually wanting to beat their fellow Calvinists in terms of material wealth[4]. So Weber asserted that this kind s of attitudes triggered the start of capitalism. Weber also considered the fact that there

was also other factor which determined the start of capitalism. However, Weber considered religion to be a very immense factor in shaping society. These considerations lead him to immense study about different religions and their roles in different society.

Unlike Marx, Weber in his economic theories still saw the importance of social class and did not promote its abolition. Weber believed that man's work and capabilities were different and varied from each other so he stated that each man's achievement and wealth will surely be different from each other. He rejected the ideas of Marx, saying that such an ideal society is not achievable. It was very clear in the opening of his essay, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that he favored capitalism.

However, Emile Durkheim, a modern sociologist, in his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, argued that there are existing social facts that determined society. These social facts according to him were not related to an individual but were in existence and affect the entirety of life of an individual and the society as a whole. He is considered the father of modern sociology because of his endeavor to tackle society as purely sociology and away from psychology and philosophy. In his book, he described that religion is one of the social facts where an individual cannot go away from.

In an individual's search for identity and his role in the society, he is often confused with ethics and morality. Often, an individual was mystified on making decisions whether to do the good or to the bad. So Durkheim considered morality and ethics as one of the social facts that needed particular attention because most of an individual's action was derived from

them. In his book, he had expounded the role of religion on binding the individuals. He also described the collective morality that an individual received as he is affiliated to a certain religious group.

He further his explanation saying that a religion was not simply based on the discernment of the right from the wrong, yet individuals learned the sacrosanct and the right by participating in worship and other religious activities. He described that these religious activities were the ones that defined the morality of an individual.

Moreover, Marx, Weber and Durkheim seemed to have complementary views with regards to society and they have different ways on how they described its evolution and growth. However, all of them presented their ideas with concrete evidences and all of them deal with reality. However, Marxist view of society was very ideal and was very hard to attain. Specifically his propositions with regards to the abolition of the state and the thing which he said as common cause, those things were not achievable due to the existence of greed and self indulgence of an individual.

However, Weber described that individual's variety is the linking force that binds individuals. He discussed that there is no need to abolish the social leveling of individuals for abolishment will be an injustice to the capitalist or to those people who worked so hard in attaining their social status. Moreover, Durkheim agreed with Weber. Durkheim argued that education is the key in removing the self-indulgencies of an individual. He further asserted that education will limit the possession of an individual. Durkheim believed that proper education and discipline would hammer commitment and would foster the obligation of an individual to the society. Durkheim's assertion

was well fitted and his arguments are most valid in terms of describing the modern society.

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[2] Kostof, p. 18.

[3] M Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Routledge, New York, 1992, pg. 3.

[4]D Käsler, Max Weber: An Introduction to his Life and Work, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, pg 22.