

The development of sociology as a discipline



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [The Industrial Revolution](#) \n \t
2. [Classical sociologists](#) \n \t
3. [Auguste Comte](#) \n \t
4. [Herbert Spencer](#) \n \t
5. [Emile Durkheim](#) \n \t
6. [Karl Marx](#) \n \t
7. [Max Weber](#) \n \t
8. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
9. [References](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

“ Throughout history, sociological theory arose out of attempts to make sense of times of dramatic social change”. Discuss the development of Sociology as a discipline in the 19th century in light of this statement.

Sociology is the study of the lives of humans, groups and societies and how we interact. Dramatic social times occurred because of the massive changes in society that took place leading up to the modern world. The development of sociology as a discipline emerged in the 19th century in response to modernity. Problems that arose from modernity include industrialisation, urbanisation, rationalisation and bureaucratisation (Montagna, 2010). The difference between ‘ traditional’ and ‘ modern’ led to the term ‘ modernity’ and the modern world of the 19th century was shaped by the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution brought about massive changes in areas such as culture, industry, politics, technology, science and communication (Marshall, 1998). A 'new world' had formed and theorists needed to understand and explain how the effects of these changes impacted on society. The Industrial Revolution saw aristocratic and religious societies change to liberal and more science based societies (Marshall, 1998). The Industrial Revolution created dramatic changes in every part of social life. Machines were created which overtook manual labour. Factories and industrial towns were built and people left rural areas and their way of life to go to the cities for work. Canals and roads were built which made transportation easier and increased production of goods (The Industrial Economy, 2010). Capitalism grew with technological change as factory owners who controlled the means of production became wealthy. Changes in the political structure occurred due to the capitalists replacing agrarian land owners as leaders of the nation's economy and power structure (The Industrial Economy, 2010). Technological advances were seen with the invention of electricity, which improved the production in factories and made life easier, and the railways and steam ships, which helped improve travel. All these changes would have been overwhelming as people went from their 'old world' of working the land and having satisfaction for the work they did to the 'new world' of mass populated, industrial areas where they sold their labour.

In the wake of industrialisation, some sociologists that argued for a system of understanding sociological change were; Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber. All had different theories but all contributed significantly to sociology as a discipline.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution refers to the rapid changes in areas such as culture, industry, politics, technology, science and communication which took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century (Marshall, 1998). It defines the transformation from a predominantly rural and agrarian society to an increasingly urban one based on manufacturing and industries.

With the rise of factories and industrial areas, people were forced out of their rural surroundings and into factories to work for small wages just to survive. These people who came to the rapidly expanding urban areas provided much of the labour-force for the new manufacturing industries, and formed the basis of a new industrial working class. Women and children were also forced to work long hours, under harsh conditions and for small wages. There were little or no government regulations imposed upon factory policies which allowed the wealthy, middle-class owners to pursue whatever path was most profitable, regardless of the safety and wellbeing of their workers (The Industrial Economy, 2010). Birth rates went up during this period and it was quite common for women to have several children. This increased the burden of providing for the family and the mothers were often forced back to work after giving birth. Population increases, due to urbanisation, resulted in overcrowding which led to poor health, disease and a low standard of living. People had many things to adjust to not just a new way of living but also new technologies and innovations. These new innovations saw the decline of tradespeople as machines could produce goods at a much faster rate (The Industrial Economy, 2010).

Agriculture improved with better farming techniques, which increased production and growth for the farmers. This resulted in rising demand for goods, which stimulated urban industry and distribution. Large investments of capital, particularly in textiles, coal mining, and metal industries, enabled the growth of powerful manufacturing industries which in turn relied on, and were strengthened by, internal markets and overseas exports (Montagna, 2010).

There was also a boom in transportation. Roads were built, canals were constructed and there was the development of the railway system. These transport systems radically improved the ease and speed with which goods could be transported. Transportation became very important for the distribution of raw materials and industrial products. Technological inventions, including steam power, were crucial to the operation of trains, ships, and the larger factories (The Industrial Economy, 2010).

These radical changes were revolutionary because of the speed at which many of them occurred. The desire to understand and analyse such dramatic changes provided a catalyst for early sociologists to develop theories relating to the division of labour, capitalism, and bureaucracy and their effects on social change in society (Marshall, 1998).

Classical sociologists

Classical sociologists who helped develop sociology as a discipline were Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber. They all witnessed the transforming effects of the revolution and

they offered lasting conceptual framework for analysing the ongoing upheavals.

Auguste Comte

Auguste Comte is known as the founder of sociology. His work consisted of studies and the analysis of social order and structure. Comte was interested in social order so he set out to understand what creates it and what causes it to change. He identified three stages of human society: theological (various phenomena explained in religious terms), metaphysical (explanations were philosophical) and positivism (phenomena explained in terms of the scientific approach to the social world) (Ritzer, 2011). Comte also termed the word positivism, which is the idea that the scientific method should be implemented to the social world when conducting sociological studies (Ritzer, 2011). Comte greatly emphasized the usage of the scientific method when studying society and he believed that sociological studies should lead to social reform.

Herbert Spencer

Herbert Spencer believed that no one should guide social reform. He believed that society should simply evolve from lower or barbarian forms to a higher and civilized form. As society evolves in this fashion, the most capable individuals rise to the top and the least capable die out. Spencer termed this idea 'survival of the fittest', and his theories on social order became known as social Darwinism (Gates, 2010).

Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim developed sociology as an independent discipline and science. Durkheim developed the concept of functionalism which maintains cultural and social unity through interactions (Ferrante, 2007). His most famous work is *The Division of Labour in Society*, which described how social order was to be maintained in a society by economic regulation. Durkheim held the belief that sociology was the study of social facts. He felt that people's ideas, feelings and behaviours occurred outside the consciousness of the individual. This belief led Durkheim to create a social fact which refers to the ties that bind people together this is known as solidarity. He noticed the ties that bound people changed significantly with the increase of industrialisation. He believed the mechanism that shaped solidarity need to be analysed and explained. In his writings he is preoccupied with the ties that bind and it is shown in his popular writing *Suicide*.

In *Suicide*, Durkheim believed it was not feasible to study the immediate circumstances in to why people kill themselves because any personal circumstance can serve as a pretext for suicide (Ferrante, 2007). Durkheim believed it was the ties that bind, or fail to bind, people to others in society that lead people to kill themselves and by committing this act they are severing relationship. Durkheim introduced four types of social ties: egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic (Ferrante, 2007). Egoistic suicide occurs when the ties that bind the person to society are weak. Altruistic suicide occurs when the person's ties are so strong that they have no life apart from the group. Anomic suicide occurs when the social ties are disrupted caused by a dramatic change in economic circumstances. Fatalistic suicide occurs when

the ties to the group are so oppressive that there is no chance of escape (Ferrant, 2007).

Karl Marx

Karl Marx was a German philosopher, political theorist, sociologist and a revolutionist. Marx thought that social change was driven by conflict and that it shaped the means of production (lands, tools, equipment, factories, transportation and labour) (Ritzer, 2011). He believed this system created a confrontation between an exploiting class and an exploited class. The Industrial Revolution created this divide of classes known as the bourgeoisie (they own the means of production) and the proletariat (who sell their labour to the bourgeoisie) (Ferrante, 2007). Marx devoted his life to understanding the causes and consequences of this inequality which he connected to a fatal flaw in the organisation of production (Ferrante, 2007).

The technological changes that occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution, Marx believed, increased goods and services and created a hunger for more profit. He believed capitalism ignored human needs and forced people to sell their labour to make products that they themselves could not afford to buy (Ritzer, 2011). Marx believed that if the economic system was governed by people who had society's best interest at heart instead of the people who had were motivated by profit, that there would be more public wealth and it could be distributed amongst society according to need (Ferrante, 2007). Marx's solution was to create a revolution where capitalism would be destroyed and replaced with communism.

Max Weber

Max Weber was a German sociologist and political economist, who influenced the discipline of sociology. He had influences in areas not only in sociology but also in history, philosophy, anthropology, economics and political science (Ferrant, 2007). In Weber's work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* he writes that the Protestant (particularly Calvinist) ethic influenced people to work in the secular world (Ritzer, 2011). They developed their own businesses, engaged in trade and accumulated wealth for investment purposes. This was what Weber believed led to capitalism. His belief on idealism led him to develop an interest in power and authority especially in bureaucracy and rationalisation (Ferrant, 2007).

Weber became concerned with social actions and the subjective meaning that humans attach to their actions within certain social contexts. Weber thought there were four types of social action: traditional, affectional, value-rational and instrumental (Ferrant, 2007). Weber was most concerned with the value-rational type as he thought it could lead to 'disenchantment'. Weber thought (Jacoby, 1976) disenchantment occurred when scientific understanding became more valued than belief and where processes are oriented toward rational goals.

Weber also thought (Jacoby, 1976) that bureaucracy was the problem of the industrial society as he seen it shift from a value-oriented organization and action to a goal-oriented organization and action. Weber believed under the control of rationalisation and bureaucratisation that society would be trapped in an "iron cage" under strict rules from which there would be no escape (Jacoby, 1976).

Conclusion

Sociology as a discipline was born out of the attempt to understand the transformations that seemed to threaten the stability of society. Social thinkers argued that there was an urgent need to establish a separate science of society. They believed that such a science would be of great help in understanding the nature of society. The amount of changes that occurred during the Industrial Revolution heavily impacted on society and it was necessary to gain an understanding of these changes and how they were influencing society. People were faced with a new world and it had created disorder, misery, poverty, disease, unemployment and conflicts (Marshall, 1998). People felt despair, lacked traditional beliefs, lacked confidence and felt inferior.

Theories were developed to try and gain an insight into society and improve social life. The classical theorists Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber were seeking to explain the radical changes that occurred due to modernity and create social ideas to improve society.

References

Marshall G, (1998). A Dictionary of Sociology

Montagna J A (2010). The Industrial Revolution

Gates G (2010). Overview of Sociology

Ferrante J, (2007) Sociology: A Global Perspective

The Industrial Economy (2010)

<https://assignbuster.com/the-development-of-sociology-as-a-discipline/>

Available: http://www.ehs.org.uk/industrialrevolution/PH_indexb.htm

(accessed 9/10/10)

Jacoby H (1976). *The Bureaucratization of the World*

Ritzer G (2011) *Sociological Theory*