

# Classical sociology

Sociology



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## **Introduction**

In all complex societies there were scholars who developed systematic thought about morals, social organization people and nature, the cosmos and religion. Many of these systems of thought were concerned with understanding the origin of society and offered explanations of the existing social structure.” (Ray 1999: 2) This paper will examine the work of Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. Although differences exist in the direction, vision and content within the works of Durkheim and Marx they nevertheless present illuminating, powerful, political and intellectual insights to the question our essay aims to address; we shall look at both theorists response to our question in turn. (Jones 2008)

One of the most effective sociological theories of social conflict has been produced by Karl Marx.“ In the Communist Manifesto, Marx asserts that capitalism is a necessary stage prior to the establishment of communism in all modern societies (just as feudalism was a necessary forerunner to capitalism). This evolution of one form of society to another comes as a result of conflict around the system of production, and especially in the relations of production.”(Marx and Engels 1952: 73) Marx’s believed that conflict of the classes in society were reflected through industrial conflicts. Built on capitalist means of production, Marx distinguishes between three major classes which make up modern industrial society; these classes are the Bourgeoisies, who own the means of production, such as machinery and factory buildings, whose income is gained in the form of profit. Then there are the landlords/Rentiers whose source of income is rent. The classes that follow are the proletariat, the working class that acquire income through

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selling their own labour for wages. Marx's theory of class connotes that class interest is a force which transforms concealed class membership into a struggle. Because of parallel class circumstances individuals identify with one another and act similarly, they build communities based on mutual dependence and shared interests consistent with a common income of profit or wage. And from such common interests classes are constructed, and according to Marx, individuals form classes to the degree that their interests employ them in a struggle with the opposite class.

Modern industrial society presents class systems with unique 'modes of production'. " For Marx, a social class was a group of people who occupied a similar position in relation to the forces of production in society. The basis of social class, then, lay in the relations of production – the relations between employers and employees, for example." (Marx and Engels 1952: 73) Marx maintained that each phase of history is constructed of class systems battling with class struggles which make up a hierarchy (Bottomore 1966) of " Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, Lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight. A fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes." (Marx and Engels 1952: 73) " The emphasis on conflict in Marx's theory of social revolution highlights the key role of social classes, and the struggle between classes with different and opposed interests" (Marx and Engels 1952: 73)

Modern industrial society is the epoch of the bourgeoisie; this has progressively simplified the conflict of class to bourgeoisie versus proletariat. (Marx and Engels 1952) The emergence of the bourgeoisie has torn all powerful forces and reduced them to wage labours. Where the bourgeoisie have had leverage patriarchal and feudal relations come to an end. When bourgeoisie gain the upper hand, feudal bonds that tie man to his 'natural superiors' are striped and men is left at the mercy of 'cash payment' and 'self interest'. (Marx and Engels 1952) Self centred calculation of modern industrialism has drowned the 'heavily ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism.'(Marx and Engels 1952: 75) Marx further states that true essence offamilyhas been tainted by the bourgeoisie notion ofmoneyrelation. The worth of man has been reduced to mere 'exchange value'. The once honoured and revered callings, such as priesthood, lawyer, poet, physician, and man ofscienceare merely looked upon as paid wage labourers under the bourgeoisie regime. Invaluable, egalitarian freedom has been exchanged for the new unconscionable freedom called Free Trade. (Marx and Engels 1952) This new unconscionable freedom breeds exploitation which leads to alienation (or loss of control over ones product, its value and the process of its production).

According to Marx the bourgeoisie have created the very class that will be at war with them – the modern working class proletarians. The proletariat, sells his labour for a wage, in order for work to be available his labour must increase capital; to his own detriment the proletariat is a commodity (living by exchange in order to obtain goods they need). Being a commodity leaves the proletariat exposed to competition and subject to the fluctuations of the

market. “ the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. ...as the repulsiveness of work increases, the wage decreases. ...as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases.”

(Marx and Engels 1952: 76) There is persistent competition between the buyer (bourgeoisie) and the seller (proletariat); the wage labourer wants an increase in his wages whilst the capitalist fights to keep wages down.

(Hadden 1998) In competition are buyers for the market share, they also seek for skilled labour at cheap prices (Hadden 1998). When Marx referred to the reserve army of labour, he was explaining that returns are often maximised when capital travels from one industry to another, so it is the same with labour, it must move and as a result is kept stagnant in cheap and underemployed labour. (Hadden 1998) Throughout the process, the capitalist's aims for the exchange value of goods he possessed to increase. (Hadden 1998)

“ The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old.” (Marsh P74) The growth of capitalism expands inequality of life conditions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. As a result of the increased homogenisation within each class struggle, individuals are generalised to coalitions across factories. Increasingly class conflict becomes manifested at societal levels. Consciousness of class increases, policies and

common interests are organized, and the use of and struggle for political power occurs, and classes become political forces. Power over production (example capital), is a determinant of political power according to Marx. Capital bestows political power, which the bourgeois class readily uses to protect and legitimize and their property and consequent social relations. In modern industrial society or a mature capitalist society, the business of the state is that of the bourgeoisie, relations among classes have become political (Jones 2008). “ Finally, divisions between the classes widen, and the state of the exploited worker deteriorates to the point where social structure collapses and 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” (Rummel 1977:).

Emile Durkheim’s concerns were primarily about social solidarity which is social order, stability and integration. (Hadden 1998) His response to modernity was for a modern society that maintained harmony and order, (Jones 2008) he endeavoured to create a social science that ensured such a society existed. (Jones 2008) Social structures according to Durkheim are composed of norms and values. Socialisation makes up individuals within society; during the process of socialisation individuals believe that they are in total control of their own lives and make their own decisions, however, Durkheim stresses that it is not the case, choices are in reality made for the

individual. Social practices have already been established for us and we conform to the structures already established for us, individuals learn collectively held social rules conducts and behaviours which Durkheim refers to as social facts. (Jones 2008)

In order to avoid potential conflict and breakdown and maintain solidarity in society, Durkheim believed that social order had to be achieved. During pre-modern and traditional societies solidarity was automatically achieved, for uniform or mechanical solidarity was a result of the simplified division of labour. This ensured a society that held commonly accepted rules of behaviour and saw life through the same eyes thus avoiding conflict.

However, modern industrial society presents highly complex division of labour, there are many more roles to be occupied and lifestyles choices are so different that social solidarity is extremely difficult to achieve. According to Durkheim the latter is the main problem of modern industrial society. The forces that divide people are so deep that social disintegration is a real threat for society. When addressing the subject of the division of labour and social differentiation, Durkheim writes of the feared social integration found in modern industrial society. (Jones 2008)

“ There is a professional ethic of the lawyer and the judge, the soldier and the priest, etc. But if one attempted to fix in a little more precise language the current ideas on what ought to be the relations of employer and employee, of worker and manager, of tradesmen in competition, to themselves or to the public, what indecisive formulas would be obtained! Some generalizations, without point, about the faithfulness and devotion workers of all sorts owe to those who employ them, about the moderation

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with which employers must use their economic advantages, a certain reprobation of all competition too openly dishonest, for all untempered exploitation of the consumer; that is about all the moral conscience of these trades contains. Moreover, most of these precepts are devoid of all juridical character, they are sanctioned only by opinion, not by law; and it is well known how indulgent opinion is concerning the manner in which these vague obligations are fulfilled. The most blameworthy acts are so often absolved by success that the boundary between what is permitted and what is prohibited, what is just and what is unjust, has nothing fixed about it, but seems susceptible to almost arbitrary change by individuals. An ethic so unprecise and inconsistent cannot constitute a discipline. The result is that all this sphere of collective life is, in large part, freed from the moderating action of regulation.” (Durkheim 1902: 78)

Furthermore, Durkheim decried modern industrial society for encouraging individualism amongst individuals who when left to their own devices are innately anti social, self-centred, greedy, insatiable and overly competitive. “ Naturally, we are not inclined to thwart and restrain ourselves; if, then, we are not invited, at each moment, to exercise this restraint without which there is no ethic, how can we learn the habit? In the task that occupies almost all our time we follow no other rule than that of our well-understood interest, how can we learn to depend upon disinterestedness, on self-forgetfulness, on sacrifice? In this way, the absence of all economic discipline cannot fail to extend its effects beyond the economic world, and consequently weaken public morality.” (Durkheim 1902: 79) We not only are naturally dangerously individualistic according to Durkheim, institutions of



modernity are structured to applaud and boost individualism which results in moral deregulation, a condition Durkheim termed anomie. Unless the promotion of anomie is checked by counter-balancing social structural forces and encouraging social integration and cohesion, then social order and solidarity are under threat. (Jones 2008)

Despite the doom and gloom of modern Industrial society, Durkheim sees hope in the various roles we play through the division of labour resulting in differing lifestyles. The key to individual and societal survival hangs of the fact that these roles are interdependent. The only we manage to survive living our own lives is because others are living their lives also. The reason a particular task needs to be performed in this modern economy is because roles are interdependent, all other tasks depend on the role being fulfilled. We are all interdependent on each other for our survival. Organic solidarity needs to be achieved; however anomie sets in and creates conflicts and breakdown in society. The core of Durkheim's theory concerns itself with this question: how can we understand that the outcome of our destinies depends on our interdependence and as a result conduct our behaviour in a fashion that promotes organic solidarity(Jones 2008)

## **In conclusion**

Rational understanding of modern industrial society was a major issue for both Marx and Durkheim.

## Reference

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