

Growth of modernity by marx and weber essay



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Modernity was a result of interrelated processes (Mitchell, 2009). The main features of modernity include rapid and continuous growth of different productive capacities which gave way to new forms of economic activities. The economic activities on the other hand gave way to new ways of handling work (Sayer, 1991).

Capitalism was the precursor in industrialization, which is extensively addressed in theories of Karl Marx and later, Max Weber. The two theorists agree that Capitalism was initially used in basic trade and agriculture in the nineteenth century, but later became the driving force of industrialization.

With the entrant of capitalism, new institutions and attitudes were adopted by the society. The new wave of reform affected both entrepreneurs as well as workers. For entrepreneurs, it was the pursuit of increased profits, while the labourers needed better pay and better working conditions (Marx, 1934). The entrepreneurs knew that labour was the key element in attaining the productivity that was needed in order to attain the profits.

Karl Marx goes down in history as among the theorists who argued that the dehumanizing nature of work conditions led to a reaction which saw workers sabotaging work, skipping duty, or simply sitting in without doing much.

This eventually gave rise to the more organized form of trade unionism that we experience today. Marx's theory would be correctly interpreted to mean that the working conditions experienced today is a product of the resistance that people in the industrialization era put up in order to deal with the dehumanizing working conditions (Marx, 1971).

However, Marx has a very interesting theory about labour. In his writings, he states that man is most natural when he is doing things that other “ animals” do. Such include eating, sleeping and procreating (Sayer, 1991). This theory suggests that man only works because it is the only way to ensure that the self survives. Accordingly, it is not in man’s nature to work, and hence any labour is enforced labour.

Among the subjects widely addressed by both Marx and Weber is the effect that division of labour had on the society. Marx who was first to write on this subject (note that Weber is largely perceived as a student of Karl Marx) argued that division of labour led to the division of the society along classes.

Marx’s argument was that different positions in the labour market came with specific types of prestige, which contributed to a deeper stratification of societal classes. “ The worker becomes poorer, the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent” (Marx, 1971).

Marx also wrote that the entrepreneurs treated workers like commodities and his observation was that with more production, the lesser the value the entrepreneur attached to the workers. To this end, Marx theorized that no matter the work that labourers did, there was no way they could manage to get off their stratified social class of unending want. In addition, he theorized that pay increases was only tantamount to rewarding the slaves better, but would do nothing to enhance the labourer’s dignity or significance (Marx, 1934).

Weber on the other hand theorized that capitalism relaxed the stratified classes. His argument was that while previously there used to be a master who ruled over the peasant, capitalism enabled the replacement of this with a boss-employee relationship. Reading Marx's arguments on different issues, one gets the impression that he would simply define the boss-employee relationship as mere semantics. (Karl, 1959).

In his writings, Marx has a very convincing theory of how man becomes a slave of his own work regardless of the payment he or she gets for the job. He theorizes that a worker becomes enslaved to his work in two ways; first, he receives work which he applies his labour to; and secondly, the work becomes a mean of subsistence to him (Sayer, 1991). This means that without the work, he loses his means of subsistence.

Yet according to the Marxist theory, this marks the culmination of slavery because the worker becomes the physical subject of his work. Weber's argument however appears more real in today's society especially considering that employees are more aware of their rights and are often times able to relate with their employers much better than a servant would relate to their master in pre-industrialization era.

Marx defines economic acquisition as a form of deviant fetishism (Veblen, 2002), something that Weber contends to. The sociological theory by Weber states that the materialism culture that took a grip on the society changed the spiritual worship attached to abstractions to worship of material things or concrete goods. To this end, Weber contends that materialism promised freedom to people who were oppressed by poverty, and in the process

replaced the promise of “ the afterlife where poverty will be no more” with real tangible solutions.

Karl Marx had stated that modernisation would eventually need a new form of rationalizing the society, especially after it emerged that religious beliefs would no longer be the assurance that people needed as an assurance for a better life. Marx however states that any good thing that modernity and labour creates would only work to the benefit of the high stratified class. “... labour produces marvels for the rich, but produces privation for the worker.

It produces Palaces, but hovels for the worker, beauty for the rich, but deformity to the worker...” (Marx, 1934). This opinion is also shared by Weber, who acknowledges that capitalism would no doubt result in changed values, consequently giving rise to the need for a replacement of the traditional morals which were codified in religion.

The main contention between Marx and Weber regarding capitalism is in the way the two theorists address the determinant quality that arose from capitalism.

Marx theorised that capitalism would replicate itself in order to survive (Veblen, 2002). However, Weber theorized that capitalism would face several challenges especially because it posed threats to traditional values. His theory indicates that individual players in the society would loose their ability to make independent choices because the pressure to succumb to societal norms would be too great.

Marx and Weber share the belief that human actions affect the development of the society (Sayer, 1991). The two agree that human actions determine the structure of the society, the changes and the transformation that happens in the same societies. The two theorists however differ on the things that have the most effect of the development of the societal. By reading theories by the Marx and Weber, one notes that Marx believe group activities have the most effect on the society.

As such, he lays more emphasis on unions, lobby groups, organisations and even political parties (Mitchell, 2009). Weber on the other hand has a different view of things. His theories suggest that individual actions are just as important in shaping societal development just as group actions are. Weber's theories and writings offer a more detailed perception of how individual response to the factors in the society interact with groups in order to develop a more wholesome society.

Weber constructs a methodology of understanding the interactions between an individual and the society that revolves around motivation (Sayer, 1991). To this, he argues that though motivation explains why individuals interact with the society, other factors such as economic situation of the individual versus the larger society, and the division of labour are all factors that create challenges in the society.

He notes that constraints brought to the society by prevailing economic conditions create pressure in the society, which can only be resolved through appropriate human actions. This in turn constructs the social environment.

This admission by Weber somehow confirms the assertion by Marx that capitalism need to reproduce itself in order to continue existing.

Another of Marx's theories that rings true to date is the theory of value, which relates to the crucial role that money plays in the coordination of the capitalist society. (Marx, 1934). Accordingly, he rules out that barter can regulate trade since commodities share only one thing in common; the value that is created through human labour.

Besides, Marx argues that barter trade would create disunity in the societal, since it would be hard to ascertain the value of each of the circulating product in any given market. To measure the exact value of the product, Marx suggests that the labour embodied in them would have to be measured. " Value is only a representation in objects, an objective expression of the relationship between men, the social relation....., and the reciprocal productive activity" (Marx, 1971).

A reflection of the theories offered by Karl Marx and Max Weber reveals that the theorists got some facts about the situations during their time and the effect that such would have on the future. Weber had the chance to review Marx's writing and come up with better theories, which he did. However, this is not to mean that Marx did not contribute to the intelligent thought as Weber did. Marx for instance theorised that human misery cannot hinder the propagation of the human race.

This remains true to date. The societies that are perceived as most disadvantaged (at least economically) contribute to give birth at higher rates than is the case in the developed societies. The theories by Marx and Weber

regarding religion and its reduced significance in light of better economic times is also true, and so is their theory regarding the need for something else to take the place of religion in the wake of increased economic fortunes in order to hold the moral fabric of the society together.

The theories by Marx and Weber could further explain the materialistic culture that serve in the world today, where the wealthy want to make more wealth. Incidentally, the gap between the poor and the rich in different countries continues to widen thus meaning that the theory by Marx regarding capitalism stratifying the society along social classes is true to some extent.

Weber's theory on the same is however not rendered completely irrelevant because there are people who are able to emerge from some of the low-income groups and rise through the economic stratifications through wealth creation opportunities presented in different economies. Though the theories do not fully make us understand sociology as illustrated by Bessant & Watts (2007), they give as a hint of why the society is in its current situation

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