

# Marx and weber and how their views differ on religion research paper



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Karl Marx and Max Weber were among the most influential scholars who made remarkable contribution to sociological theory in the nineteenth century. Marx and Weber are known for their analysis of capitalism and its relationship with religion. According to Marx, capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production are owned and controlled by private entities (Dillon 52).

The capitalists mainly produce for the exchange market. Capitalism is sustained by the relationship between workers, means of production, and owners of capital. This paper will shed light on the similarities and differences between the perspectives of Marx and Weber concerning religion and the rise of capitalism.

Marx attributes the emergence of the capitalist system to the historical advancement of the material aspect of the society. Marx considered economic production as the main element of the structure of the society.

Thus, the social structure can only be understood by analyzing the way the society organizes its production. In this regard, Marx argued that the society consists of the economic base and the superstructure. In the capitalist society, “ economic base is characterized with the organization of production in large companies with the aim of securing profits” (Appelrouth 97).

This leads to exploitation of workers and an increase in the earnings of the capitalists. The superstructure refers to the social institutions such as religion, education, and the political system. The economic base determines the operation of various social institutions. Consequently, the superstructure perpetuates the supremacy of the capitalists.

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According to Marx, each society evolves sequentially in five phases that have dissimilar systems of production. These include “ primitive communism, ancient, feudal, capitalism, and communism” (Hallan 69). The ancient, feudal, and capitalist societies are class-based. The ruling and the dependent are the most significant social classes in these societies. The subordinates (dependent) who are the majority created wealth for the ruling class through exploitation. Thus, Marx concluded that the society is always characterized with class conflicts.

Capitalism rose as the new mode of production after the emergence of government control and increased use of machinery in production led to the fall of the feudal system. Marx asserts that labor-power was commoditized under capitalism (Appelrouth 112). The bourgeoisie owned the capital that was used to produce various goods and services.

The proletariat, on the other hand, sold their labor and earned wages. Marx believed that capitalism is not sustainable because it is characterized with “ an increasing reserve army of the unemployed, declining rate of profit, concentration of industry into fewer firms, and increasing misery within the proletariat” (Dillon 114).

Marx considered these characteristics as the seeds of the downfall of capitalism (Yuill 126-143). Specifically, the problems associated with capitalism would lead to a social revolution by the proletariats and the capitalist system would be replaced with communism.

Marx did not analyze the logic of religion. He perceived religious beliefs as a reflection of the problems that the society faced. Marx believed that religion <https://assignbuster.com/marx-and-weber-and-how-their-views-differ-on-religion-research-paper/>

was man's creation. He asserts that " religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again" (Hallan 87). This implies that Marx considered religion as false consciousness of man.

According to Marx, religion is the product of historical injustices and systems of exploitation rather than the creation of the capitalists. Marx considered religion as part of the superstructure (Dillon 151). Thus, it helped the proletariats to cope with the exploitations and miseries of the capitalist system. Marx also considered religion as a dominant ideology that perpetuated the ruling class. Specifically, the ideas of the ruling class (capitalists) were transmitted and legitimated by the church through religion.

Weber believed that the Protestant ethic was one of the most important causes of the rise of capitalism. This belief was based on Weber's observation that most business leaders in the west were Protestants. The Protestants, particularly, Calvinists believed that only a small percentage of the population would receive salvation (Appelrouth 117).

Although the people who would be saved were predetermined, individuals considered economic success as a sign of salvation. In this regard, Calvinists focused on diligence, frugality, and embracing work as their vocation to achieve economic success. Consequently, capitalism emerged as people created wealth, which was considered as " an end in itself rather than a means to satisfy needs" (Appelrouth 118).

According to Weber, the development of capitalism in the modern society is influenced by several factors. To begin with, industrial revolution led to <https://assignbuster.com/marx-and-weber-and-how-their-views-differ-on-religion-research-paper/>

increased production using machinery. Secularization of the society and changes in systems of governance led to increased rationalization, which in turn facilitated the emergence of new economic systems (Goldstein 115-151). These include the market economy, international trade, and an expanded labor market.

According to Weber, the conditions outlined in the forgoing paragraph have always existed in the society. This suggests that capitalism is likely to have existed albeit in a primitive manner in the pre-modern society. The modern world is considered as a capitalist society since capitalism is its main mode of production (Hallan 123). Weber also believed that capitalism could have emerged directly or indirectly due to other factors that he did not mention.

Weber perceived religion as a system of social relationships that is characterized with a belief in supernatural powers that are revealed through different charismatic manifestations. Individuals articulate the supernatural powers through symbolic expressions under the leadership the clergy. According to Weber, religion enables individuals to achieve their personal interests (Goldstein 115-151).

In the ancient society, magicians helped the community to fulfill their material needs such as shelter and food. As the society developed, priests replaced magicians by introducing standardized systems of control, placation, and supplication of supernatural beings. This led to emergence of bureaucracies that facilitate social stability, allocation of various resources, and preservation of culture. According to Weber, prophets use charismatic ideas to lead the change process in the society.

The perspectives of Marx and Weber concerning the emergence of modern capitalism are similar in the following ways. To begin with, Marx and Weber agree that modern capitalism has never existed before in the history of the world.

Although Weber suggested that capitalism is likely to have existed before, he believed that the modern society has the most dominant and advanced form of capitalism (Appelrouth 119). Weber and Marx agree that technological advancements during the industrial revolution facilitated the rise of modern capitalism.

In particular, they argue that the use of machinery helped producers to increase production in the capitalists system. However, it also led to an increase in unemployment and misery among workers. The analysis by Marx and Weber indicate that accumulation of wealth or profits was the main goal of the capitalists. In addition, Marx and Weber believe that changes in the systems of governance helped to control the economy, thereby facilitating the rise of capitalism.

In religion, Marx and Weber agree that the church helped in transmitting ideologies in the society. Weber believed that prophets used religion to influence the society to embrace their charismatic ideologies. Similarly, Marx claimed that the dominant class used religion to advance their ideas in the society.

Marx claimed that the rise of the capitalist system was unavoidably predicted by history. In addition, the adoption of the capitalist mode of

production was triggered by the changes that occurred in the material basis of the society (Dillon 116).

Weber disagreed with this perspective by arguing that the rise of capitalism was not inevitably predicted by history. According to Weber, capitalism emerged by chance due to the conditions that characterized the society. In particular, Weber believes that the Protestant ethic is the main factor that motivated the society to adopt the capitalist system of production.

Marx opposed capitalism by arguing that socialism and eventually communism would be the solution to the problems associated with the capitalist system. However, Weber did not embrace any socialist idea (Hallan 136). He argued that capitalism developed because of hard work, systematic economic activity, and frugality rather than mere exploitation of workers. In this regard, Weber did not believe that capitalism should be replaced with socialism.

Marx believed that religion provided only temporary relief to misery by blunting the senses of the proletariat. He argued that religion was just an opium of the masses that enabled the proletariat to bear their suffering rather than to find solutions to their problems. Weber, on the other hand, argued that religion helped people to achieve their interests (Goldstein 115-151). For example, he noted that the magicians helped individuals to access material needs such as food.

According to Marx, religion was a means of legitimizing the status quo that exists in the capitalist system. Marx believed that capitalists use religion to justify their mode of production and accumulation of wealth at the expense

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of workers. Weber, on the other hand, perceived religion as a means of achieving social change. According to Weber, the “exemplary prophet challenges the status quo by living an exemplary life” (Dillon 121). This encourages the society to achieve the necessary change and to address the problems of the society.

Marx’s argument that the rise of capitalism was unavoidably predicted by history is valid to some extent. Undoubtedly, the society has progressively moved from primitive communism, ancient, and feudal systems of production to capitalism. Additionally, production for profit through improved efficiency continues to be the main factor that sustains modern capitalism. Although the problems of capitalism such as exploitation of workers and falling profits still exist, capitalism has not collapsed as predicted by Marx.

Moreover, the growth of capitalism in the modern society is mainly driven by the consumption among the middle class rather than the proletariat as Marx claimed. Undoubtedly, the emergence of international trade and globalization has facilitated the growth of capitalism in the modern society. However, Marx did not pay much attention to the importance of globalization and international trade. Moreover, he fails to account for the rise of capitalism only in the west rather than the entire world.

Weber’s claim that capitalism rose as a result of conditions such as industrial revolution and changes in governance is valid. These conditions continue to promote economic growth and development of capitalism. Weber’s argument that the Protestant ethic led to capitalism has both flaws and strengths. The strengths include the fact that modern capitalists still focus



on frugality, diligence, and cost benefit analysis of the most profitable investment alternatives.

However, the flaw is that religion alone through the Protestant ethic is not likely to have contributed to the rise of capitalism. Undoubtedly, capitalism existed in countries such as India where the Protestant ethic was not observed. In the modern society, there is very little connection between accumulation of wealth and salvation. Thus, religion does not play a major role in the growth of capitalism.

The perspectives of Marx and Weber concerning religion and the rise of capitalism are similar and different in several ways. Both of them agree that capitalism rose due to the desire to accumulate a lot of wealth, as well as, technological advancements and changes in governance systems.

However, Marx claimed that the rise of capitalism was unavoidably predicted by history, whereas Weber believed that capitalism developed due to the Protestant ethic. Weber considered religion as a means of achieving the needs of the society, whereas Marx believed that religion only provides temporary alleviation of the problems of the society.

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