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Analysis Essay

Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber are popularly known as the founding fathers of sociology. In the pursuit of understanding human society, three of them had different perspectives and contrasting styles. Utilizing a historical materialist and a dialectic approach, Karl Marx examined the shaping and re-shaping of human history and the basic nature of man through the dynamics of the political economy. Max Weber focused on the role of religion as a pre-cursor of capitalism, and finally, Emile Durkheim reflected upon the consequential effects of various institutions, primarily the religion, on social cohesion. Marx and Durkheim largely scrutinized the role of institutions and structural capacities in the formation of individual action whereas, on the other hand, Weber emphasized the power dynamics between human agencies and the resulting actions of individuals.

The existence of fundamentals of sociological knowledge would not be possible without the invaluable contributions of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. These contributions together constitute the classical sociological theory which is the first step of comprehending the 'modern' world. This paradigm comprised of the core issues and philosophical problems related to the existence of mankind and its development. Modern sociological theory is chiefly influenced by these three intellectual thinkers and early sociologists. Marx, Weber, and Durkheim chose a common basis from which their theories arose and this is the primary reason for their collective involvement in many research discussions and debates. Important paradigms and disciplines such as philosophy, economics, politics, human history, and nature were examined and discussed by the trio in an interlinked manner. The contours of practical sociology are driven by the association between individual and society and this was repeatedly established in the works of these three sociologists. Finding solutions to social problems and acquiring contemporary knowledge about man and his relation with society is not possible without a deep examination of the theories propounded by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim (Dillon).

The basic nature of humans as postulated by the three thinkers differed as Marx's theory focused on social critique and conflict, Durkheim mainly emphasized the social factors and Weber reflected upon the shaping of the relation among the humans and society as carved by socio-cultural, political, religious, and economic factors. All three of them have taken a definite, strong position regarding the basic nature of humans and the bilateral relationship between individuals and society.

Karl Marx opines that the first historical and unprecedented action is the generation of material life. This results in the shaping of human nature as man is in a constant state of dissatisfaction which paves the way for new needs. Furthering from this stance, Durkheim also stipulates the unlimited wants and desires of humans and stresses on the deceiving nature of satisfaction. According to Durkheim, satisfaction is a temporary state of mind for any individual and serves only as a stimulus for new needs. Durkheim prescribes the role of social control in this regard where it can impose a limitation on human desires. In the course of defining sociology, Weber promulgated his views on human behavior. Weber theorized that penetrating the subjective meaning of human behaviors, human actions can be perceived and predicted rationally.

The forward movement of society was described by Marx as the struggle for social and civic changes and for further elaboration his writings on social stratification, class struggle, and division of labor can be analyzed. Marx projected a holistic approach that viewed society and all its constituents as one big picture whereby the instances of the human life, for example, religion, family institutions, education, art and architecture, legal code of conduct acted as pieces of a puzzle and cannot thrive without inter-dependence on the other. As maintained by Marx, the primary independent variable is the modus operandi of the economic production and the resulting human behavior responding to its never-ending requirements. The basic nature of human beings is shaped by the economic situation and all the other aspects of the literary, artistic, legal, philosophical, and political nature ultimately get affected by the modes of economic production. Opposing Marx's idea of historical materialism, Weber defined the social system and its relation with the individual by paying particular attention to factors of religion and economy. Rationalization, disenchantment, and secularization were identified as the antecedents of modern-day capitalism by Weber. Finally, Durkheim advocated that in the wake of industrialization and new social division, societies succeed to maintain their integrity and cohesion by opposing structural constructs but human nature responds to the invigoration transmitted by the social institutions (Scott).

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are regarded as organic sources for developing grand theories for understanding sociology and the inter-related disciplines of social sciences (Giddens). The three sociologists explicate the basic nature of humans with different perspectives.

The theoretical underpinnings on which Marx’s view of human nature is based, construe that there is a fundamental urge in the human nature for the materialistic production which is directly associated with the attainment of satisfaction on an individual and social level. The concept of ‘human nature’ from a Marxist viewpoint comprises the attainment of common material needs of individuals and maintains that individual and collective actions must strive for the existence of a society that usurps capitalism. Under the labor processes of capitalism, Marx perceived humans to be crushed and degraded (Sayers). Marx reflected that an individual cannot thrive in society without interaction with his fellow beings and the general community.

Pursuant to his contributions in the classical sociological theory, Weber postulates that the societal structures play a dynamic role in augmenting the nature of ‘isolated’ or ‘lone’ individual and inculcate peculiar ideas and values in him which help to transition the individual’s behavior based on self-interest towards one pursuing collective benefit (Wallace). Human nature demonstrates that without substantial help from fellow humans, an individual cannot bring about large alterations in the physical world. The construction of a society and its responses towards individuals is founded on the collective abilities and inabilities of human nature as advocated by Weber.

Dwelling on the role of social institutions, Durkheim portrays an individual as a biological organism who is driven by his psychological and instinctive drives but is constrained by the socially constructed norms and values (Durkheim). Finally, Durkheim believes that human beings cannot survive without belonging in a group, which in its true essence is the society that helps in shaping human nature. Contrary to the opinions of Marx, Durkheim argued that society has taken up the form of a moral entity, and it is no longer considered as a group of humans acting in the sole interest of their betterment. The individual's reception of intellectual and moral faculties from the society assists him in a self-creation of goals and activities in the course of his life which marks him distinct from other living beings.

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