

The Classical Tradition:
Malthus, Marx, Weber & Durkheim

By

Frank W. Elwell
Rogers State University

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For my students

"I believe that what may be called classic social analysis is a definable and usable set of traditions; that its essential feature is the concern with historical social structures; and that its problems are of direct relevance to urgent public issues and insistent human troubles."

--C. Wright Mills (1959)

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Introduction

This book is intended to serve as a companion piece to *Macrosociology: Four Modern Theorists*¹ and as a brief guide to the macro-social theory of four 19th century social theorists. I have long been of the opinion that we spend far too much time in social theory classes focused on history and not enough on contemporary theory. I have also felt strongly that, in order to attract American students, sociologists are getting much too social psychological. Accordingly, you will find this book relatively short and focused on the macro-level theory of Malthus, Marx, Weber and Durkheim with particular attention to ideas that have proven relevant in understanding contemporary sociocultural systems. This should give students the necessary grounding; for my theory classes I will use this it as the first and only book on classical theory. The rest of the time and reading will concern itself with contemporary practitioners; social theory courses should not be history courses; the whole point is to understand what is going on out there.

These classical theorists covered in this short volume are considered central in their disciplines. Malthus is considered one of the founders of economics and demography. "Malthus' Social Theory" makes the case that his more lasting contribution has been to ecological/evolutionary theory in both biology and in the social sciences. Emile Durkheim is often referred to as the founder of modern sociology, helping to establish the discipline and many of its methods. Max Weber's writings on bureaucracy and rationalization

¹ 2005, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.

are still considered essential in understanding modern society. And of course Marx has perhaps had the most profound influence of any social scientist in history. Not only did he inspire several generations of revolutionaries, he has also exerted a more subtle (and lasting) influence on all social scientists who followed.

As sociologists, the classical theorists were reacting to the initial stages of the industrial and democratic revolutions. Writing in essentially agrarian societies, Malthus, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber picked up on many of the main trends of a rapidly industrializing society. In their writings they used their sociology to critique the society of their day, and forecast many of our modern structures and problems.

1

Malthus's Social Theory¹

Who now reads Malthus? He is usually given only passing mention in social theory texts and monographs, hardly mentioned at all in our introductory sociology texts. While Malthus is widely considered to be the founder of social demography, his population theory is rarely taken seriously. If mentioned at all, it is usually to dismiss his supposed prediction of an eventual population collapse. So, many authors conclude, Malthus is only of historical interest—an example of an early Cassandra predicting a future population explosion who has been proven wrong by subsequent events. Reading the original *Essay*, however, easily exposes that this view is quite mistaken.²

Malthus's *Essay on Population* (1798) begins by pointing out that our ability to produce children will always outstrip our ability to provide energy for their survival. Population must therefore be kept in line with what the society can produce in the way of sustenance, and every way available to keep this population in check—both preventative and positive—has negative consequences for both individual and society. Because of this simple fact, Malthus argues, we can never achieve the utopia anticipated by his contemporaries.

It is Malthus's focus on the relationships between population and food production—and the effects of this interaction on other parts of the social system—that forms the

foundation for the modern ecological-evolutionary theories of Gerhard Lenski, and Marvin Harris. The failure to include Malthus in our introductory and general theory texts leaves little foundation for modern day social evolutionary theory. As a consequence, students are left with the impression that contemporary ecological-evolutionary theory has little root in the social sciences but instead has been borrowed from the "hard" science of biology. But as acknowledged by both Darwin³ and Wallace,⁴ Malthus' population theory has profoundly affected biology as well.

And Malthus has other attributes that make him a good candidate for inclusion in our texts as well. His style of writing is surprisingly readable, his prose is lively, his arguments and examples connect with modern readers. He was a pioneer in the use of empirical data in the inductive/deductive process of theory building, a necessary discipline that is lacking in many of the early practitioners of the social sciences (Malthus, 1798/2001, p. 130 & p. 206).⁵ In addition, as part of his "social system" orientation, much of his analysis pre-figures the functional analysis of contemporary sociologists and anthropologists (see for example pp. 283-284; p. 216; p. 281; pp. 287-288; pp. 237-38). It is time to more generally recognize Malthus' contribution to social thought, time to make him a part of the social science canon.

THE 1798 THEORY

Malthus' Essay was addressed to two important works of the day. Marquis de Condorcet had recently published *Outline of the Intellectual Progress of Mankind* (1795) in which he claimed that societies pass through stages, each stage representing the progressive emancipation of man's reason from superstition and ignorance (much of Condor-

cet's vision gets passed on to his French successor--Auguste Comte). William Godwin published *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) which made similar claims regarding the perfectibility of society. In this essay Godwin claimed that man's natural goodness was repressed by corrupt institutions. These institutions would be gradually replaced by the spread of reason and greater social equality (Winch, 1987: 26). As evidenced by both Condorcet and Godwin, the idea of social progress was as widespread in Malthus's day as it is in our own. Both attribute the vice and misery of the lower classes to problems in social structure—basically government and economic institutions. For them, the solution to widespread misery was to reform elements of the social structure to conform to the enlightened principles of equality and justice. Society must be reformed so that resources can be fairly allocated to all. To this claim Malthus responds that structural reform can make some improvement (p. 222 & pp. 245-46), however he maintains that “no possible form of society could prevent the almost constant action of misery upon a great part of mankind” (p. 146).

The problems of human societies, Malthus goes on to claim, are not primarily due to flaws in the social structure (pp. 212-13). Rather, the problems are of a “nature that we can never hope to overcome,” they are the consequences of an imbalance between our ability to produce food and our ability to produce children. We are far better at making babies than we are at finding food for their survival (p. 274). This problem, Malthus writes, exists in all past and present societies, and must exist in any future society as well. Because of this natural law of imbalance, Malthus asserts, inequality is built into the very structure of human societies, and the creation of a technological or enlightened society in which resources are fairly and equitably distributed to all is simply not feasible (pp. 245-46).

Malthus' basic theory can be summarized as follows: Humankind has two basic needs: food and sex—one leading to the production of food and the other to the reproduction of children (p. 135). But the power of reproduction is “indefinitely greater” than the power of production. If unchecked, Malthus maintained, population levels would double in size about every 25 years.⁶ Malthus based this estimate on observations of actual population growth in the New World, where resources were abundant for the relatively small population size. In such an environment population grows very rapidly (p. 140). But this can only be a temporary phenomenon. Once population reaches the productive level of the land, it must necessarily be checked. Should productive capacity be suddenly increased because of the introduction of new technologies, population will again grow. But because productive capacity can never maintain this rate of growth for long—that is, double every 25 years—the growth in population must be continually checked. These checks are of two basic types: (1) *preventive* checks in which people attempt to prevent births in some manner, and (2) *positive* checks in which the life span of an existing human being is shortened in some way.

In a state of equality in which all resources were shared equally, the necessity to check population in some way would fall on all. However, those who have better access to resources (following their self-interests) will not put themselves and their families at such risk. Therefore, the fundamental self-interest of the elite in their immediate families is that inequality be established and maintained. Consequently, food and other resources are not distributed equally in any human society (p. 146). This means that the “positive checks” in the form of lowered life expectancy, has to be paid by the poor.

Central to Malthus' theory is a posited cyclical relationship between production and reproduction. An increase

in productivity will lower the costs of food, thus making it cheaper for a family to have children. More children would live (or be allowed to live); fewer efforts would be made to prevent conception. Eventually, the rise in population would increase the demand for food, driving prices up, leading to hard times for the poor and—through the more efficient operation of population checks—a leveling off of population. The high price of provision, plus the lower wages for labor (because of the surplus of workers), would induce farmers to increase productivity by hiring more workers, putting more land under the plow, and using technology to increase productivity. This increase in productivity, of course, would loosen the constraints to reproduction—it would continue the cycle (pp. 143-44). Malthus recognized that the cycle is not steady-paced. Wars, disease, economic cycles, technological breakthrough, the lag between change in the price of food and money wages, and government action (such as the Poor Laws) can all temporarily disrupt or spur the cycle (Winch, 1987: 22). The “oscillation” between the growth of subsistence and population, and the misery that it causes, has not been noted in the histories of mankind, Malthus writes, because these are histories of the higher classes (p. 144). Nonetheless, he maintains, there is a continuing cycle between population and production—a cycle that necessitates the operation of severe checks on population growth.

Malthus illustrates the unequal growth in production and reproduction with the oft-quoted model—a comparison of arithmetic and exponential growth. It is this model which is often taken to be the basic principle of population in the popular press (as well as some who should know better). Starting with a billion people (“a thousand million”), Malthus points out, if allowed to double in size every 25 years, human population would increase in the following manner: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512. The means of

subsistence, however, does not necessarily grow exponentially. Assuming an initial quantity of 1 unit, and adding an additional unit every 25 years, the means of subsistence would increase as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, etc. In 225 years, he points out, the population would be at 512 billion—511 billion more than at time 1. Yet in that same time period, the means of subsistence would only have increased by 10. In 2000 years, Malthus adds, the difference between population and production would be incalculable (pp. 142-44).

Please note that Malthus is not predicting that the human population is going to actually grow in these numbers, for that would be quite impossible in his system of constantly acting checks on population. In fact he remarks in the *Essay* that he is aware that such a disparity between production and population could never exist (pp. 212-13). He was merely using a mathematical model to illustrate the unequal powers of our ability to produce food and children. Through extrapolating what would happen if there were no checks on population, Malthus is demonstrating the sheer impossibility of unchecked population growth.⁷

Much of the literature on Malthus misses this critical point and interprets this model as illustrating an inevitable population “overshoot” of the resource base (some would claim a collapse as well). The difference between Malthus and many of his interpreters on this point lies in viewing the possibility of “overshoot” somewhere in the future. For Malthus, overshoot is almost always present in every human society (p. 195). Societies are free from overshoot only when they first settle new lands, or are recovering from severe de-population as a result of natural disasters or plague. In all other situations there is more population than can be supported by existing production and distribution systems—this portion of the population is usually called the poor. As a result, the poor suffer higher mortality rates.

The model is not a prediction of the future of population growth or of the speed of technological development—it is a model of the relationship between the two. While Malthus' illustrative model was based on an assumption of steady arithmetic growth of productive capacity, slow or moderate growth in productive capacity is not central to his theory. An increase in agricultural production—even if it were exponential—would only result in an increase in the birth rates of the poor (recall, the price of food will decline, more children will reach maturity) thus eventually necessitating the operation of the checks on population when it exceeds productive capacity. It is only by assuming productive capacity as doubling at least every 25 years at a steady pace and potentially limitless (in other words, conceiving the power of production as equal to that of reproduction) that the checks will not need to be a part of the system. Malthus is unwilling to make these assumption—to do so flies in the face of both observation and logic.

It flies in the face of actual experience since Malthus wrote the essay as well. While it is a commonplace to claim that productivity more than matched population growth since Malthus, this is simply not the case. Assuming one billion people at the time of the essay, and a 25-year doubling time for unchecked population, today's population would now be up to 256 billion. It is not nearly so high (6 billion as of this writing)—there have been severe checks on population. While food productivity has increased substantially, it has not (nor could it) increase at the same rate as unchecked population growth. Rather, in accordance with Malthus' theory, the rise in productivity in the last 200 years has been met by a substantial rise in population (a rise that has been truly exponential, though far less than potential unchecked growth).

The poor are still among us. There is great poverty and misery in the world. Checks to population are still in opera-

tion—steps taken to prevent conception, and "positive" steps of increased mortality due to disease and malnutrition. A just, equitable, and enlightened society is still beyond our grasp.

POPULATION CHECKS

The necessity of checks on population growth is based on our physical nature as entities in a natural environment. The checks, Malthus argues, are necessary to keep the population in line with subsistence from the environment. In the animal and plant world, Malthus asserts, species are impelled by instinct to propagate the species. There is only one type of check on plant and animal life—the lack of room or nourishment for their offspring. That is, the “positive check” of premature death (pp. 142-43). In human populations these positive checks, would include both famine and disease that would lead to high infant and child mortality rates (p. 161). One of the most widely used positive checks, Malthus suggests, has been infanticide committed throughout human history (p. 156). In addition, Malthus saw a good portion of the human population carried off by war, disease, unwholesome occupations, hard labor, misery and vice (pp. 188-89). Malthus labels these "positive" checks because they actively cut down existing population by reducing the human life span.⁸ These positive checks will operate on the poor and powerless much more so than the well to do and the elite—for the poor themselves were the “excess” population—the part of the population that current production practices can not adequately feed (p. 161).

But checks on human population are not confined to the positive checks of nature. For humans, reason intervenes. In a state of equality, Malthus argues, the only ques-

tion is whether or not subsistence can be provided to offspring. In the real world, however, where inequality is the rule, “other considerations occur” (pp. 142-43). In this world potential parents will ask such questions as: Will having children lower my standard of living? Will I have to work much harder to support my children? Despite my best efforts, will I have to see my children hungry and miserable? Will I lose a significant amount of independence, and be forced to accept the handout of charity to support my children? (pp. 142-43). If a couple decides not to have children they must prevent conception. These preventive checks are accomplished through thousands of independent decisions of cost-benefit that individuals make regarding children and work (pp. 142-43; p. 176).⁹

Preventive checks, Malthus recognized, come in many varieties. The ideal, for Malthus, was to practice celibacy before marriage and to delay marriage until children could be supported. But this, he asserts, forces individuals to deny a basic human need—a “dictate of nature”(pp. 142-43). Recall that one of Malthus’ main postulates is that the “passion between the sexes is necessary” and constant (p. 135). Therefore, this necessary restraint produces misery for those who practice celibacy and marry late (pp. 175-76). For those who cannot practice such ideal discipline (perhaps the vast majority of human beings, Malthus implies), the constraints on population growth lead to “vice” (pp. 142-43).

Under the category of vice Malthus includes such practices as frequenting prostitutes, “unnatural acts” (non-procreative sex), and the use of birth control (p. 195). There are several problems caused by vice. First, vice serves to increase the sum of unhappiness in both men and women (p. 195). Second, vice often leads to shortened life spans—say by increasing exposure to disease and drugs (pp. 188-89). Finally, the acceptance or approval of widespread non-

procreative sexuality will “destroy that virtue and purity of manners”—the very goal of those who profess the perfectibility of society (p. 195). Vice, Malthus argues, is a necessary consequence of constraints on population growth. Included in Malthus’ definition of vice is the practice of birth control—even birth control confined within marriage. Some birth control practices were prevalent in his day—particularly the use of sponges. Malthus alludes to these practices several times (in the language of his day). What is clear from the *Essay* is that he did consider birth control practices as an effective preventive check (just as he considered other more traditional forms of vice to be effective in preventing population increase). But he believed the widespread use of contraception would change the moral behavior of men and women, and have inevitable effects on family and community life (p. 195). Therefore, he did not consider birth control—even in marriage—as an ideal solution to the necessity of limiting population growth.

His failure to explicitly consider birth control as a viable and socially acceptable preventive check on population growth has both puzzled and angered many through the years. Malthus was urged by some during his lifetime to more explicitly include the consideration of birth control in subsequent editions of the *Essay*, and to advocate or at least sanction their use. He largely ignored such pleas (Winch, 1987).

Social movements arose in the 19th century—many calling themselves “Malthusian”—movements that warned of out of control population growth and that advocated the distribution of various birth control devices. Many today now recognize a population crisis and advocate contraception as a viable solution. Malthus also makes clear that, although he was very concerned about the effects of vice on society, of the two types of checks on population (positive

and preventive), he much preferred the preventive (p. 168). Surely birth control within marriage would be second only to abstinence as the least objectionable preventive check in Malthus' system. In addition, as Malthus well knew, birth control (even within marriage) had the potential of being a solution for many individuals that could not practice the ideal of celibacy. Still, he never became an advocate, never thought of birth control as a viable solution to the population problem. Part of this reluctance to embrace birth control undoubtedly lies in reaffirming a social ideal—in this case the traditional ideal of celibacy before a late marriage—that people can aspire to (even though it is honored more in the breach).¹⁰

But some of his reluctance to approve of birth control as a viable solution to the population problem is also rooted in his social theory. Malthus' system points to difficulties with relying on preventive checks alone to control population levels. Children are assets, the individual cost/benefit analysis is likely to favor high birth rates for poor parents (p. 139; pp. 142-43). Thus, making birth control generally available will not have a significant impact on the birth rate if it is not in the interests of the parents. And second, the foresight, opportunity, and discipline to use contraception or to put off marriage is likely in the most educated and wealthy classes, not the poor and uneducated who feel the full brunt of the positive checks (p. 159). Birth control, as well as other methods of preventive checks, operates with "varied" force among the different classes of society—the poor are checked more often by the positive checks of rising mortality—and, Malthus believes, it will always be so (p. 161).

The availability of contraception alone cannot stabilize a population. People must have an interest in preventing births. For many, in Malthus' day as well as our own, there is no such interest—in fact the cost/benefit analysis of hav-

ing children often favors large families among the poor. This means that a significant number of children are born with no corresponding increase in sustenance. Nature—in the form of pestilence and famine—accomplishes what must be done. The *Essay* goes on to systematically explore the effects of these necessary checks on the entire sociocultural system. But the dynamics between population and food production are the material foundation of all societies, and it is to this foundation that we now turn.¹¹

INEQUALITY

Malthus asserts that a working class is absolutely essential to every society—labor will always be necessary to wrest subsistence from nature.¹² He views the institution of private property and the self-interest of individuals as providing the motivation for human thought and action (p. 250). It is the goad of necessity, the desire to avoid poverty or to obtain riches that motivates much human industry (p. 283). Unequal rewards for industry and idleness are the “master spring” of human activity (pp. 193-94). The desire for riches, or the fear of poverty, also motivates humans to regulate the number of their offspring.

Produce more food and sustaining resources to greater numbers of people, and population will rise. This rise in population will eventually reach sustainable limits, and the necessity of widespread checks among a large portion of the population will again come into play (p. 222). Much of the checking of population growth, even among the poor, is done through preventive checks (p. 157). But it is the poor who bear the full brunt of the positive checks as well (p. 161). Therefore, poverty (and its consequent misery and vice), is an outgrowth of the imbalance between our ability

to produce food and our tendency to reproduce the species (p. 216).

Because of population's tendency to outstrip available food supplies, the mass of people must be subjected to physical distress (lack of food and other necessities) in order to limit population increase (either through preventive checks, or failing those, positive checks). It is because of this imbalance that “millions and millions of human existences have been repressed” (p. 188). Malthus asserts that this necessity to repress population has existed in every society in the past, exists in the present, and will “for ever continue to exist.” The necessity to repress a large number of our potential offspring is due to our physical nature—our reliance on food and the necessity of sexuality (p. 195).

Malthus consistently demonstrates the necessity of workers and proprietors in all societies beyond hunting and gathering levels (pp. 193-94; p. 222 & p. 242). Labor is the only property owned by the poor, which they sell in exchange for money—money to purchase the necessities of life. “The only way that a poor man has of supporting himself in independence is by the exertion of his bodily strength” (p. 250). But unlike the latter “Social Darwinists,” Malthus does not see poverty as a consequence of moral worth or fitness to survive. He does not believe that the poor are necessarily responsible for their condition, rather, they “are the unhappy persons who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank” (p. 216).¹³

At no point does he attempt to justify the “present great inequality of property” (p. 250). Malthus views severe inequality with horror and asserts that it is not necessary or very useful to the bulk of mankind. He further argues that we are morally obligated to alleviate the plight of the poor—though we must recognize that we can never fully do so (p. 250; p. 171). To attain the greatest good for the

greatest number of people, Malthus asserts, institutional reform must be made in recognition of the laws of nature.

WELFARE

Malthus' critique of the British Poor Laws stems from three distinct sources: (a) his functional analysis of poverty, welfare, and population growth; (b) the high value Malthus places on achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people; and, (c) the high value he places on human liberty. Malthus analyzes the functions and dysfunctions (though he does not use the terminology) of welfare and concludes that it does not significantly alleviate the misery of the poor. In fact, he asserts, it increases the number of people who become dependent on the charity of others. This does not serve to promote the happiness of the greatest possible number of people. Finally, such welfare provisions serve to limit human freedom and promote tyranny.

Malthus believes that the poor laws were instituted in society through two basic human motivations. First, he asserts that the poor are abused by elites as they attempt to further their own self-interest and hold down the cost of labor. Much of this is achieved by interfering with the labor market, either through collusion among the rich to put a cap on wages, or through the institution of welfare laws (p. 145). The poor laws are in the interests of both the rich and the state (the elite), Malthus claims, because poor laws have the effect of stimulating higher birthrates among the laboring classes—thus lowering the cost of labor for both manufacture and armies (pp. 187-88). The second motivating factor behind welfare—or the attempt to alleviate the plight of the poor—is human benevolence and a desire for social justice (p. 253). Sometimes elite self-interest is

cloaked in the language of compassion, at other times the laws are motivated purely by benevolence (pp. 169-70 & pp. 187-88).

Regardless of motivation—whether conceived in a purposeful manner to hold down the costs of labor, or conceived out of compassion to alleviate distress—the provision of welfare removes the necessity of some population checks on the poor.

The result of the removal of some of the population checks is that population rises, the labor market becomes flooded with new laborers and those willing to work longer and harder to support their increased number of offspring (p. 254). The fatal flaw of the poor laws, at least in Malthus' view (though it would not be a flaw in the view of elites), is that it encourages population growth without increasing provisions to support that growth (pp. 165-66; pp. 169-70 & p. 188). In accordance with the law of supply and demand, poor laws will contribute to “raise the price of provisions and to lower the real price of labour” (pp. 166-67). Labor, you will recall, is the only commodity that the poor have to sell in order to obtain provisions. Thus available provisions must be spread over a greater number of people, and distress becomes more widespread and severe (p. 162 & pp. 169-70).

Malthus' harsh criticisms of welfare laws are based on his desire to promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Poor laws serve to soften the fear of poverty. They diminish the power of the poor to save (through lowering the price of labor) and weaken a strong incentive to industry (p. 167). Worse, the laws remove one of the major checks to early marriage and having children (p. 168). But the only true basis for an increase in population is an increase in the means of subsistence (p. 186). If subsistence does not increase, but population does, available provisions must be spread over a greater number of

people. Thus, a higher proportion of the next generation will live in poverty as a result (p. 169 & p. 188). However noble in intentions, poor laws will always subvert their own purpose. Malthus acknowledges that it may appear hard in individual circumstances, but holding dependent poverty disgraceful, allowing the preventive checks on population to operate (Malthus is not an advocate of the positive checks—he seeks to minimize their operation), will promote the greatest good for the greatest number (p. 166).

Malthus is also concerned with the loss of human freedom that occurs with the establishment of welfare systems. One of his “principal objections” is that welfare subjects the poor to “tyrannical laws” that are inconsistent with individual liberties (pp. 168-69). If you are going to provide assistance, Malthus asserts, you must give power to a certain class of people who will manage the necessary institutions to provide the relief. These institutions will be charged with formulating rules in order to discriminate between those who are worthy of aid and those who are unworthy—thus exercising power over the life affairs of all who are forced to ask for support (p. 169). He cites a frequent complaint of the poor regarding such administrators, and observes (somewhat sociologically) that: “the fault does not lie so much in these persons, who probably, before they were in power, were not worse than other people, but in the nature of all such institutions” (p. 169). Generally, Malthus believes, a government that attempts to “repress inequality of fortunes” through welfare mechanisms will be “destructive of human liberty itself” (p. 250). He also greatly fears concentrating so much power into the hands of the state—as absolute power corrupts absolutely (p. 252).

Finally, Malthus is also concerned with the effect of dependence on the poor themselves. Hard labor, he concedes, is evil, but dependence is far worse (p. 252). In feudal society serfs were dependent on the provision of the

bounty of the great lords of the manor. Basic human dignity and liberty for the masses was non-existent. It was only with the introduction of manufacture and trade that the poor had something to exchange for their provision—their labor. This independence from the elite has greatly contributed to the civil liberties of western society (p. 252). The welfare laws, by fostering a population dependent for their subsistence on others, serves to weaken the foundation of these civil liberties.

No matter how much is collected for poor relief, the distresses of poverty cannot be removed (p. 162). To prevent the misery and distress of poverty is beyond the powers of social institutions. In our attempts to alleviate the plight of the poor through welfare laws we sacrifice the liberties and freedom of the poor, subjecting them to “tyrannical regulations” in exchange for promises of relief (p. 171). But society cannot fulfill its part of the bargain, cannot eliminate the distresses of poverty without removing necessary checks on population—thus creating more poor (pp. 169-70 & p. 171). The poor are forced to sacrifice their liberty and get little in return (p. 171). Malthus concludes that the increase in the number of people living in poverty, despite proportionately more resources devoted to welfare, is strong evidence that welfare laws only serve to worsen the conditions of the poor (p. 263).

Further, Malthus points out, the poor rates were worsening despite the fact of a significant increase in the wealth of the nation in the century before Malthus wrote his *Essay*. National wealth had been “rapidly advancing” through industrialization (pp. 260-61 & p. 263). Why wasn’t a significant portion of this great wealth used to benefit the common man? Malthus addresses the problem by reiterating the fact that the only true foundation for population is the amount of provision that can be produced from the land (p. 258). Any rise in the wages of laborers must be accom-

panied by an increase in the stock of provisions—otherwise, the nominal rise in the cost of labor will be followed by an increase in the costs of available stocks of food and other necessities of life (p. 254).

In Malthus' time, the increase of manufacturing had not been accompanied by a comparable increase in the productivity of the land, thus early industrialization had little impact on bettering the condition of the poor (p. 259 & pp. 260-61). In fact, Malthus asserts, industrialization has the effect of crowding the poor in slums, environments that are conducive to disease and the breakdown of moral behavior (pp. 260-61 & p. 263)—thus increasing the operation of positive checks on the poor. Neither welfare nor industrial manufacturing alleviates the plight of the poor because neither serves to increase the stock of provisions. Both welfare and manufacture therefore lead to lowering the cost of labor--the only commodity that the poor have to exchange for their provisions.

This analysis of welfare does not lead Malthus to advocate that the poor should be left to their plight. Rather, he suggests some institutional reforms—reforms consistent with the law of population—that will serve to make a more just, equitable society. Malthus' suggested reforms are not intended to eliminate poverty, for the law of population makes that impossible. Rather, Malthus' reforms are intended to promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people within the constraints of natural law.

Malthus' proposals are an attempt to tie population growth itself to increases in the produce of the land. First, he advocates the abolition of all parish-laws by which the poor could only get aid through their local parish church. This, he asserts, will serve to give freedom of movement to the peasantry so that they can move to areas where work is plentiful (p. 170). The abolition of parish-laws would allow the operation of a free market for labor,

the lack of which is often responsible for preventing the rise in laborer's wages in accordance with demand.

Second, Malthus advocates incentives for tilling new lands and "encouragements held out to agriculture above manufactures, and to tillage above grazing" (p. 170). Agricultural labor must be paid on a par with labor in manufactures and trade. This encouragement of agriculture, Malthus maintains, would furnish the economy with "an increasing quantity of healthy work" as well as contribute to the produce of the land. This increase of produce would provide the necessary foundation for population growth among the poor. Without the prospect of "parish assistance" the laborer would have the necessary incentive to better his condition (p. 170).

Third, Malthus advocates the establishment of "county workhouses" supported by general taxation. The intent of these workhouses is to provide a place "where any person, native or foreigner, might do a day's work at all times and receive the market price for it" (pp. 170-71). The fare should be hard, those that are able would be obliged to work for the prevailing wage. Malthus advocates the establishment of these workhouses as an attempt to eliminate the most severe distress while maintaining the necessary incentive for human industry and the operation of preventive checks on population.

Finally, Malthus states, human benevolence and compassion must augment these social policies (pp. 170-171). For Malthus, "the proper office of benevolence" is to soften the "partial evils" arising from people acting in their own self-interests. But, compassion and benevolence can never replace self-interest as the mainspring of human action (p. 253). The poor, Malthus maintains, will always be among us. But it is our moral obligation to minimize inequalities as much as the laws of nature will allow. Malthus is no believer in evolution as progress and is therefore clearly at

odds with the Social Darwinists over the proper role of government.

At several points in the *Essay* he points out that while inequality is essential to motivate human beings to activity and productivity, the inequality need not be as great as existed in his own society. While he criticized welfare his critique was of welfare's relationship with population growth. Malthus did not criticize welfare on the basis that the poor should not receive help because of some alleged unfitness--recall, he thought them merely "unlucky" (probably referring to environmental circumstance as well as choosing the wrong parents). Welfare, Malthus wrote, would temporarily remove the necessity of population checks among the poor without a corresponding increase in productivity. This, he stated, was self-defeating--the numbers of the poor would increase, production (particularly food) would not, everybody's share in a stable output would therefore decrease.

Malthus' reform proposals clearly put him at odds with the later Social Darwinists, a far cry from the "reactionary" Scrooge of myth. In later writings he also advocated universal education and a rise in the price of labor in hopes of promoting the widespread use of preventive checks among the lower classes (Winch, 1987: 65). Petersen (1990) also reports that Malthus advocated many other reforms including an extension of suffrage, free medical care for the poor, state assistance to emigrants, and direct relief (of a temporary nature) to the poor. By many accounts Malthus was an honest and benevolent "reformer, committed to the betterment of society and all the people in it" (Petersen, 1990, p. 283). Still, he maintained, there will always be a lower class, this class will always suffer from deprivation of the necessities of life, and these deprivations will lead to positive checks on population.

Malthus does not consider this necessary inequality to be a good thing. He sees the injustice of the system and

considers it a partial evil—but he also sees it as absolutely essential for the total social system. Malthus' *Essay* was designed to demonstrate the impossibility of a social utopia—but he insisted that we could (indeed, should) reduce social and economic inequality through structural reform.

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NOTES:

1 This essay is based on a previous work, *A Commentary on Malthus' 1798 Essay on Population as Social Theory*, published by Edwin Mellen Press, 2001.

2 Because of the prevalence of the misinformation about Malthus there are two points that I cannot stress enough: (1) Pre-conceived notions strongly influence a person's interpretation of

a text; and (2) Never trust secondary sources unless they are heavily documented and footnoted!

3 Charles Darwin (1876/1958), from his autobiography states that some fifteen months after beginning his inquiry he read Malthus on population, "it at once struck me that under these circumstances favorable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavorable ones to be destroyed. The results of this would be the formation of a new species. Here, then I had at last got a theory by which to work."

4 Alfred Wallace (1905) also reports in his autobiography that "perhaps the most important book I read was Malthus' Principle of Population...its main principles remained with me as a permanent possession, and twenty years later gave me the long-sought clue of the effective agent in the evolution of organic species."

5 Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to Malthus' 1798 Essay on Population as it appears in Elwell, 2001, *A Commentary on Malthus' 1798 Essay on Population as Social Theory*.

6 This, it turns out, is a very accurate estimate.

7 This is a very difficult point to get across. So ingrained is the view that Malthus predicted a population collapse far into the future that readers continually gloss over this critical point. Because of this I will emphasize it repeatedly in this appendix.

8 Admittedly, this may have been a poor choice of terminology.

9 See Chapter 4, this is the same individual cost-benefit decision making process written about by Marvin Harris.

10 Malthus, who married at 38, probably believed in the rightness of the prevailing mores of his time, probably attempted to live in accordance with their dictates (and suffered much misery as a result?).

11 This same cost benefit calculation, with a different outcome, is responsible for the demographic transition. With the transition to industrialism, particularly with the prohibition of child labor and social security, children lose their productive

value, they no longer contribute to the family's well-being. Malthus recognized that increasing a family's wealth and education would lead to the use of more preventive checks and smaller families, which is one reason he became a strong advocate for universal education in his later years. But, he maintains, this cannot be a solution to the population problem. Some will always be poor. It will be in their interest (cost/benefit) to have larger families.

Currently, population growth around the world is leveling off. This is being accomplished by the spread of preventive checks (because of changes in the cost benefit analysis for individuals, the spread of education, or government compulsion) and through higher mortality rates among the poor. It is also interesting that world population growth appears to be slowing down in tandem with world agricultural production.

12 Malthus saw society as a system, consequently the different parts of that system contributed to the social whole. The *Essay* is highly compatible with a functional perspective.

13 Malthus is not a "Social-Darwinist." Social Darwinism comes later in the 19th century, and significantly differs from Malthus' theory. I believe a close reading of the *Essay* reveals a position more akin to that of the American Republican Party in the latter half of the 20th century. Many of their arguments over welfare reform were anticipated and voiced by Malthus.

2

The Sociology of Karl Marx

Marx is a difficult theorist to write about. A good deal of the problem is that he has become a major figure in history. As such, he has inspired social movements and individual revolutionaries--some of whom have been faithful to his work, while many more have misused his name and writings. In the not too distant past the professor teaching Marx had to deal with the cold war and anti-Communist attitudes that students would bring to class. Not only would these students have many misconceptions of Marx's thought and theory--equating it with the Communist Parties of the old Soviet Union and other totalitarian societies-- many would be actively hostile to learning anything about it. Since the cold war students are usually not active anti-Communists but they still tend to equate Marx with Communism, thus assuming that his thought has been thoroughly rejected and relegated to the dustbin of history.

In this chapter I do not want to deal with the issue of historical Communism. Marx died well before the revolution in Russia. While he inspired many of the revolutionaries, he bears little of the responsibility for the totalitarian regime that emerged (to explain the Soviet government, look to the Czarist regimes). Marx is not Stalin.

A related problem with writing about Marx is the multiple roles he played during his lifetime. Marx is a socialist prophet, a political organizer,¹ and a social theorist. As a

prophet he forecast the eventual revolution of the working class, the destruction of capitalism, and the establishment of a stateless, socialist society.² As a political organizer (and propagandist) Marx wrote to inspire men and women to immediate action rather than thought. While he wove his prediction and calls to action into his analyses of capitalist society, the revolution and its socialist aftermath are clearly the most speculative parts of his theoretical structure--prophesized perhaps more in hope and faith than in rigorous analysis. Rejecting this vision of an inevitable and workable socialist society, there is still much of value and use in Marx's analysis of Capital.

This chapter will focus almost exclusively on Marx as a social theorist. As a theorist, his writings have had an enormous impact on all of the social sciences. His most significant contribution is in *establishing a conflict model of social systems*. Rather than conceiving of society as being based on consensus, Marx's theory posits the domination of a powerful class over a subordinate class. However, this domination is never long uncontested. *It is the fundamental antagonism of the classes which produces class struggle that ultimately change sociocultural systems.*³ The engine of sociocultural change, according to Marx, is class struggle. Social conflict is at the core of the historical process.

A second significant contribution is that Marx locates *the origin of this social power in the ownership or control of the forces of production* (also referred to as the *means of production*). It was Marx's contention that the production of economic goods--what is produced, how it is produced, and how it is exchanged--has a profound effect on the rest of the society. For Marx, the entire sociocultural system is based on the manner in which men and women relate to one another in their continuous struggle to secure needed resources from nature.

A third contribution to the social sciences lies in Marx's *analysis of capitalism and its effects on workers, on capitalists themselves, and on the entire sociocultural system*. Capitalism as an historical entity was an emerging and rapidly evolving economic system. Marx brilliantly grasped its origin, structure, and workings. He then predicted with an astonishing degree of accuracy its immediate evolutionary path.

Each of these contributions go beyond the narrow confines of formal Marxist theory. One need not accept Marx whole cloth in order to integrate his insights into a coherent world-view. Much of his thought is essential in understanding sociocultural systems and thus human behavior.

SOCIAL THEORY

Mankind's needs for food, shelter, housing, energy are central in understanding the sociocultural system. "The first historical act is," Marx writes, "the production of material life itself. This is indeed a historical act, a fundamental condition of all of history" (1964, p. 60). Unless men and women successfully fulfill this act there would be no other. All social life is dependent upon fulfilling this quest for a sufficiency of eating and drinking, for habitation and for clothing. This is as true today as it was in prehistory. Do not be fooled, Marx is telling us, we are as dependent upon nature as ever. The quest to meet basic needs were man's primary goal then and remain central when we attempt to analyze the complexities of modern life.

However, men and women are perpetually dissatisfied animals. Our struggle against nature does not cease when we gratify these primary needs. The production of new needs evolve (secondary needs) when means are found to satisfy our primary needs.

In order to satisfy these primary and secondary needs, Marx argued, men and women form societies. The first of these societies, communal in nature, were based on a very limited division of labor. These classless societies in which men hunted and women and children gathered vegetables, tubers and grains were egalitarian in nature.

With the domestication of plants and animals, the division of labor begins to emerge in human societies. That division leads to the formation of antagonistic classes, the prime actors in human history. From this point on, humans engage in antagonistic cooperation in order to meet their primary and secondary needs. "By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature" (*Capital*, vol. 1, p. 174).

All social institutions are dependent upon the economic base, and a thorough analysis of sociocultural systems will always reveal this underlying economic arrangement. The way a society is organized to meet material needs will profoundly affect all other social structures, including government, family, education and religious institutions. "Legal relations as well as the form of the state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called development of the human mind, but have their roots in the material conditions of life... The anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy" (Marx, 1962, vol. 1, p. 362).⁴

The means of production is the most powerful factor influencing the rest of the social system. Like all the great macro social theorists, Marx regarded society as a structurally integrated system. Consequently, any aspect of that whole, whether it be legal codes, systems of education, art, or religion, could not be understood by itself. Rather, he believed that we must examine the parts in relation to one another, and in relation to the whole.

FORCES AND RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

The *forces of production* are the technology and work patterns men and women use to exploit their environment to meet their needs. These forces of production are expressed in relationships between members of the society. The *relations of production* are the social relations people enter into through their participation in economic life. They are socially patterned, independent of the wills and purposes of the individuals involved.

While industrialism is a particular means of production, capitalism represents a particular relation of production. How much independence does Marx accord the two factors? In Marx's analysis the two are independent but in close interaction with one another (Braverman, 1998). While Marx did give primacy to the means of production, he never conceived of it as a simple case of the means of production determining the relations. Rather, there is an ongoing and continuous interplay between technology and the relations of production throughout social evolution.⁵

The close interactions of the forces and the relations of production are especially apparent in Marx's analysis of the transition between economic systems--a subject of critical importance to Marx.⁶ The rise of capitalism precedes the industrial revolution by at least a century.⁷ At first, capital production was closer to the handicrafts of feudal society than to industrial methods (Braverman, 1998). The structure of the capitalist system, with its drive toward profit and expansion, stimulates technological development, the factory system, and a more detailed division of labor. In turn, this industrial development clearly has had effect on the continuing development of capitalism itself. "Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in

changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist" (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 92).

For Marx, the forces and relations of production were the most important factors in understanding any social system. But it is not the case that Marx simply explains everything with reference to economic production. "The political, legal, philosophical, literary, and artistic development rests on the economic. But they all react upon one another and upon the economic base. It is not the case that the economic situation is the sole active cause and that everything else is merely a passive effect. There is, rather, a reciprocity within a field of economic necessity which in the last instance always asserts itself" (Marx, 1962, vol. II, p. 304).⁸

CLASS

Men and women are born into societies in which their relation to the means of production has already been determined by birth. This relationship to the means of production gives rise to different class positions.⁹ Just as a person cannot choose her parents, so too she has no choice as to her social class. Once a man is ascribed to a specific class by virtue of his birth, once he has become a master or a slave, a feudal lord or a serf, a worker or a capitalist, his behavior is prescribed for him.

By being born into a specific class his attitudes, beliefs, behaviors are all "determined." The class role largely defines the person. In his preface to *Capital* Marx wrote: "Here individuals are dealt with only as fact as they are personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class interests." Social classes

have different class interests flowing from their position in relation to the mode of production.

These class interests are primary determinants of attitudes, ideologies, political views and behavior. In saying this, Marx does not deny the operation of other factors in affecting human beliefs and behavior. But his theory is that an individual's objective class position, whether an individual is aware of their class interests or not, exerts a strong influence on human behavior.

RULING AND OPPRESSED CLASSES

According to Marx, "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles".¹⁰ All social systems are fundamentally divided between classes who clash in the pursuit of their individual interests. There are but two classes of concern in every society, the ruling and the oppressed class. Relationships between people are shaped by their relative position in regard to the forces of production, that is, by their differing access to needed resources.

The ruling class dominates the sociocultural system. "The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas; the class which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force."¹¹ Marx goes on to say that "(t)he class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production"(1964, p. 78). This is not done through conspiracy, but as a dominant and pervasive viewpoint, Because it controls the means of production, the ruling class is able to dominate (seemingly) non-economic institutions as well. Through influence (if not outright control) over key institutions such as the government, media, foundations and higher education the viewpoint of economic elites becomes the widely accepted

view of the society. This viewpoint, of course, emphasizes maintaining the status quo.¹²

The oppressed class, those who do not control the means of production, normally internalize these elite ideologies. However, under certain conditions, the oppressed class can generate and widely internalize ideologies that undermine the power of the dominant class. Marx terms these conditions as "revolutionary," conditions we will turn to in the next section.

EVOLUTION AND REVOLUTION

According to Marx, every economic system produces counter forces that, over time, lead to a new economic form. The process begins in the forces of production with technological development. Over time, these changes in technology become so great that they are able to harness new resources to satisfy human needs. As a consequence it sometimes happens that "the social relations of production are altered, transformed, with the change and development...of the forces of production."

In the feudal system, for example, the market and guild system emerged, but were incompatible with the feudal way of life. The market created a full-time merchant class, and the guilds and towns created a new working class, independent of the land. As a consequence, a new class structure emerged with wealth increasingly based on the new economic form. This created tensions with the old feudal institutions; the newly wealthy merchants wanted power and prestige to further their economic interests.

The emerging bourgeoisie become revolutionary in character because their interests are thwarted, they expect to gain by a change in property relations. This revolutionary class begins to view existing property relations (feudal-

ism) as a "fetter" (a restraint or shackle) upon the further development of their interests (trade and the production of goods through the factory system).

New social relationships based upon the new forces of production begin to develop within the old social order. The merchant class, which amassed great wealth, began to challenge the hold of the classes that had dominated the feudal order. Conflict resulted, feudalism was eventually replaced by capitalism, land ownership as the basis of wealth was replaced by trade and eventually the ownership of capital. "The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter sets free elements of the former."

The potential for class conflict is present in any society with a division of labor. The emergence of a self-conscious revolutionary class--a class that recognizes that its condition is due to the systematic domination and exploitation of elite--depends on (a) the emergence of a critical mass of people within the exploited class; (b) a developed network of communication, organization; and (c) an ideology that identifies a common enemy as well as a program of action.

THE NATURE OF CAPITALISM

As an economic system ideal capitalism consists of four major characteristics:

1. Private ownership of capital to produce goods and services in all potentially profitable markets.
2. Individuals striving to maximize profit.
3. Market competition between companies which assures high quality and the lowest market price.
4. Government enforcement of economic contracts and allowing the private accumulation of capital (refraining from expropriating all through taxation).

The way of maximizing profits, according to Marx, is to produce and sell goods and services for more than it costs to manufacture and provide those goods and services. And the way to do that, Marx adds, is through the creation of surplus value.

SURPLUS VALUE

It all begins with labor power, specifically the purchase and selling of labor power. This, according to Marx, is fraught with consequences for the entire sociocultural system. The value of all goods and services (all commodity value) is created by human labor. Capitalism is a system built around the drive to increase capital. In order to expand his capital, the capitalist invests some in the purchase of labor. He then attempts to get more value out of this labor than he has invested in it. The more surplus he can expropriate from his workforce, the greater the profitability, the greater his capital.

According to Marx all commodity value is created by human labor. Suppose, for example, that a person in business for herself making picture frames pays \$10 for the material to make each frame, and sells each for \$20. Suppose further that she can comfortably make one frame in one hour. She needs \$40 a day for the necessities to live on (food, clothing, shelter), so she only needs to work 4 hours a day to make a living. This is called simple commodities production.

Now, suppose this same individual decides to become a capitalist. She hires a man at \$5 per hour. This man can also make one frame per hour. The material for each frame still costs \$10, she still sells each for \$20. Minus the material and labor costs, her profit is now \$5 per frame. This profit is possible only because there is a difference between

the cost of the labor (\$5 per hour) and the amount of value added by that labor to the raw materials (\$10). In this case, the worker adds \$10 to the value of the materials in the course of his hour's work, but is only paid \$5 for his efforts. This surplus value of \$5 per hour created by the worker is taken by the owner, and is called profit.

Continuing the example, in order for the capitalist to live she still needs at least \$40 a day. To get this in profit she will have to work her employee at least 8 hours a day. In order for the employee to live he also needs \$40, and therefore he has to work the capitalist's required 8 hours a day. Where she had to work only 4 hours a day to live through simple commodities production, he has to work 8 hours a day under capitalist production to do the same. *This is because his labor is now supporting both himself and the capitalist.*

Under the system of capitalism, of course, the capitalist has great incentive to increase her profit. Assuming a constant demand for her picture frames, she can increase her profit in several ways.¹³ She can hire more workers to make more picture frames. She can pay her workers less per hour, while still requiring them to make the same number of frames. She can get her workers to work faster or more efficiently by dividing and simplifying the tasks that go into making the frame. Or finally, she can introduce tools and machinery to increase their output. Again, she has great incentive to take any or all of these steps. The worker, of course, has interests and therefore incentive to minimize expenditure of energy and effort, and to maximize rewards (or, to minimize the exploitation). Therein lies the conflict.

EXPLOITATION AND ALIENATION

It is through work that human beings realize the self, through work that we become fully human. We differ from all other life on earth in that we realize our imaginations in action on the external world. For humans the work process is a unity of imagination and action.¹⁴ Man is above all else “homo faber,” man the maker. Capitalism, in its quest for greater profit, destroys this unity. It does this by breaking the labor process down into more and more simplified tasks, removing control of the work process from the worker, and separating intellectual from manual labor. In this process it is greatly aided by the employment of machinery—capital or “dead labour” that has been converted into an “automaton.”

Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour-process, but also a process of creating surplus-value, has this in common, that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ the workman. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires technical and palpable reality. By means of its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confront the labourer, during the labour-process, in the shape of capital, of dead labour, that dominates and pumps dry, living labour-power. The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is, as we have already shown, finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that

mechanism, constitute the power of the 'master' (Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, pp. 393-394).

Laborers become unskilled servants of the capitalist's machinery to create more surplus value. Rather than realize the self, they become mere instruments of the capitalist in the production process.

Alienation is defined as the social-psychological feeling of estrangement from work, from our fellow human beings, and from the self. Marx believes that this alienation is rooted in the capitalist mode of production itself. Work becomes an enforced activity, something done for the paycheck alone; a place where the individual must deny the self, separating her physical activity from her mental life—not living as a full human being.¹⁵ The more time that the worker spends on the job, the poorer her inner mental life, the less human she becomes. She becomes alienated not only from herself in the process of production, but from her product as well.¹⁶

This is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something alien, not belonging to him, activity as suffering (passivity), strength as powerlessness, creation as emasculation, the personal physical and mental energy of the worker, his personal life. . . as an activity which is directed against himself, independent of him and not belonging to him" (Marx, 1964b, p. 125).

Since humans are above all else creative beings who realize themselves through work, alienation from work leads to alienation from the self, from fellow human beings, and finally from life itself.¹⁷

In the creation of surplus value and the degradation and alienation of labor the capitalist is greatly aided by science and technology.

Modern Industry rent the veil that concealed from men their own social process of production, and that turned the various, spontaneously divided branches of production into so many riddles, not only to outsiders, but even to the initiated. The principle which it pursued, of resolving each process into its constituent movements, without any regard to their possible execution by the hand of man, created the new modern science of technology. The varied, apparently unconnected, and petrified forms of the industrial processes now resolved themselves into so many conscious and systematic applications of natural science to the attainment of given useful effects" (Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, pp. 456-457).

Capitalism and its drive to increase profit thus becomes associated with the advancement of science and the application of technology in creating new products and in the production process. Capitalism thus becomes committed to automation and technology to increase production and to lower the costs by replacing workers and simplifying the remaining work tasks.

THE DIALECTIC

Like all hitherto existing economic systems, Marx maintained, capitalism carries the seeds of its own destruction. The structure of the capitalist system itself has several internal contradictions, which become exacerbated with its continued development. The literature enumerates at least four such contradictions:

1. Competition, the lifeblood of capitalism, implies winners and losers. Over time, competition (and government *laissez faire*) causes the rise of monopoly capitalism, which seek to control the market in terms of cost and quality.

2. The lack of centralized planning under capitalism results in the overproduction of some goods and the underproduction of others, thus causing economic crises such as inflation and depression.
3. The control of the state by the wealthy eventually tends to overreach, the effect of which is the passage of laws favoring their interests and incurring the wrath of a growing number of workers.¹⁸
4. The quest for profit leads corporations to adopt ever more sophisticated technology, to reorganize labor into ever more detailed divisions of labor for the sake of efficiency, and to squeeze wages to the lowest amount possible. As capitalism develops it must create enormous differences in wealth and power. The social problems it creates in its wake will mount. The vast majority of people fall into the proletarian class, the wealthy become richer but ever fewer in number.

With its continued development, these contradictions become worse. Over time, capitalism brings into being a working class (the proletariat) who have a fundamental antagonism to the owners of capital.

Because of the dynamics of capitalism, society will be polarized into a few wealthy capitalists, and a great mass of workers. The capitalist, constantly in search of expanding his capital, is prone to exploiting new markets, the adoption of ever more sophisticated technology and employing an ever more detailed division of labor.¹⁹ In an attempt to maximize profits, capitalists will automate factories, send jobs overseas, break jobs down to simple unskilled components requiring little training or skills. Workers will be forced to accept lower wages or worse, become structurally unemployed.²⁰ Thus they will be pauperized by an eco-

nomistic system that views all labor as simply a cost and all costs are to be controlled.²¹

Existing property relations (capital goods in the hands of private interests) will restrain the further development of productive technology. Needed social goods and services will not be created because there will be no profit in it for the capitalists. The masses will be impoverished amid exorbitant wealth for the few--and the unfulfilled potential to supply the many.

The proletariat becomes more progressive, the middle class is eliminated through the growth of monopolies, and the state is blocked from providing real structural change because of the dominance of the capitalists and their organization, money, and power. Eventually, Marx says, these contradictions of capitalism will produce a revolutionary crisis.

PROPHECIES OF REVOLUTION AND SOCIALISM

Capitalism will then have produced a class of oppressed people (the proletariat or the workers) who are bent on destroying it. With the development of communication, the spread of a counter ideology which identifies the existing corporate structure as the enemy, the workers will organize and revolt. Taking control of the means of production for the good of all, this revolt will mark the end of classes and the end of history as we know it. "The prehistory of human society will come to an end." A socialist system will be established in which the means of production will be employed to provide for human happiness rather than profit.

Contrary to his calls for immediate political action (as in such political tracts as *The Communist Manifesto*),²² Marx was not predicting any imminent revolution. His analysis of the rise of capitalism makes clear that any over-

throw of capitalist society could only occur after capitalism fully develops the means of production (industrialism) therefore setting the material conditions for socialism.²³ "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society" (1964, p. 52). As an historian and sociologist who studied it extensively, Marx recognized that capitalism was a relatively new economic system and that the industrial mode of production was just beginning. As the quote makes clear, Marx expected the transition to socialism to be a long-term evolutionary process.

It is after the establishment of socialism where the state withers away since there are no class interests. "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." All of which is a mirror of the communal society of hunting and gathering societies that we began with. Marx's vision of life after socialism is sketchy. It appears that the detailed division of labor would not be eliminated, only limited. Man will work in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and read Plato at night. Industrial technology will be harnessed to provide happiness rather than profit--though some capital would clearly have to be reinvested back into the mode of production. Clearly, Marx's hopes, dreams, and values have influenced his long-term predictions of the evolution of capitalism. Still, there is much to commend in his theoretical structure and analysis.

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NOTES:

1 "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it." (Marx, 1845).

2 Many of his followers admire him deeply, considering his thought an exemplary expression of humanism and compassion for his fellow human beings. Some have characterized him as the "last of the old testament prophets." In his role as a prophet, he expressed a deep conviction that humankind would someday create a paradise on earth, one in which we would live in brotherhood, sharing our talents and our wealth. Not only did he have a belief in the possibility of such a utopia, he considered it inevitable. His belief, of course, bears striking similarities to the Christian belief in the establishment of an earthly paradise (though absent the Second Coming).

Kurt Vonnegut in one of his later books has a main character hauled up before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Asked how he could be a Marxist in America, the character replies: "Why, the Sermon on the Mount, sir. The Sermon on the Mount."

It is my belief that Marx's hopes and longings for a better world ultimately distorted his analyses. I find his analysis of the conditions of a Capitalist society to be compelling. I find his predictions of the ever more detailed division of labor, the replacement of workers by technology, the growth of the "industrial reserve army," the growth in number of the proletariat and their gradual impoverishment to be incisive. I believe his forecasting that the Capitalist class will become fewer in number, but far wealthier and more powerful is prescient. However, his predictions of an eventual proletarian revolution are far less compelling. His vision of a socialist utopia, if not an absurdity, at least a very unlikely outcome of his analysis.

3 "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (1962, vol 1, p. 34).

4 The "so-called general development of the human mind" is a reference to August Comte's evolutionary theory which centered upon the evolution of ideas.

5 "In the social production which men carry on as they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society--the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness" (1964, p. 51).

6 It is of critical importance because Marx's prediction of the inevitability of socialism was predicated on the full development of industrialism under capitalism. This is why the Soviet Union was not widely hailed as a fulfillment of Marx's prediction.

7 It should be noted that both the rise of capitalism and the industrial revolution are historical processes and not single events. We treat them as such only as a matter of convenience.

Neither has a clearly defined, "natural" starting point or end point.

8 "According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determinant element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. . . . Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract and senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure. . . also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggle and in many cases preponderate in determining their form" (Marx, 1962, II, p. 488).

9 Social mobility, though recognized by Marx, plays no role in his analysis.

10 By this statement Marx specifically excludes primitive communal societies (prehistoric) and the predicted Communist societies after the socialist revolution.

11 In this connection it could be asserted that the business class rules American society. We come to think naturally in their categories: The point of human existence is to accumulate possessions. The goal of the economic system is to grow. Progress is our most important product. The point of education is to promote economic development. The business of America is business.

12 [We go astray] "if . . . we detach the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute to them an independent existence, if we confine ourselves to saying that in a particular age these or those ideas were dominant, without paying attention to the conditions of production and the producers of these ideas, and if we thus ignore the individuals and the world conditions which are the source of these ideas" (1964, p.p. 79-80).

13 While we are assuming a constant demand, this is never a safe assumption in the real world. In the never-ending quest to accumulate capital, such uncertainty is not profitable. Capitalist enterprises therefore attempt to control and stimulate demand through advertising.

14 "We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labour that remind us of the mere animal. We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will" (*Capital*, vol. I, p. 174).

15 "Work is external to the worker. . . . It is not part of his nature; consequently he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself. . . . The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless" (Marx, 1964b, pp. 124-125).

16 "The object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer. . . . The more the worker expends himself in work the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less he belongs to himself" (1964b, p. 122).

"However, alienation appears not merely in the result but also in the process of production, within productive activity itself. . . . If the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation. . . . The alienation of the object of labor merely summarizes the alienation in the work activity itself" (1964b, p. 124).

17 "What is true of man's relationship to his work, to the product of his work and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men. . . . Each man is alienated from others . . . each of the others is likewise alienated from human life" (1964b, p. 129).

18 "The State is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests" (1964, p. 78).

19 "With accumulation, and the development of the productiveness of labour that accompanies it, the power of sudden expansion of capital grows also....The mass of social wealth, overflowing with the advance of accumulation, and transformable into additional capital, thrusts itself frantically into old branches of production, whose market suddenly expands, or into newly formed branches....In all such cases, there must be the possibility of throwing great masses of men suddenly on the decisive points without injury to the scale of production in other spheres....This increase is effected by the simple process that constantly 'sets free' a part of the labourers; by methods which lessen the number of labourers employed to the increased production. The whole form of the movement of modern industry depends, therefore, upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands" (*Capital*, vol. I, pp. 592-593).

20 "But if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus-population becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation (*Capital*, vol. I, pp. 592).

21 "The more extensive, finally, the Lazarus-layers of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism" (*Capital*, vol. I, p. 611).

22 "Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains" (Marx, 1848).

23 "The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter sets free the elements of the former" (1964, p. 133).

3

Verstehen:

The Sociology of Max Weber ¹

According to the standard interpretation, Weber conceived of sociology as a comprehensive science of social action (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977).² His initial theoretical focus is on the subjective meaning that humans attach to their actions and interactions within specific social contexts. In this connection, Weber distinguishes between four major types of social action:

1. zweckrational
2. wertrational
3. affective action
4. traditional action

Zweckrational can be defined as action in which the means to attain a particular goal are rationally chosen. It can be roughly translated as "technocratic thinking." It is often exemplified in the literature by an engineer who builds a bridge as the most efficient way to cross a river. Perhaps a more relevant example would be the modern goal of material success sought after by many young people today. Many recognize that the most efficient way to attain that

success is through higher education, and so they flock to the universities in order to get a good job (Elwell, 1999).

Wertrational, or value-oriented rationality, is characterized by striving for a goal that in itself may not be rational, but which is pursued through rational means. The values come from within an ethical, religious, philosophical or even holistic context--they are not rationally "chosen." The traditional example in the literature is of an individual seeking salvation through following the teachings of a prophet. A more secular example is of a person who attends the university because they value the life of the mind--a value that was instilled in them by parents, previous teachers, or chance encounter (Elwell, 1999).

Affective action is based on the emotional state of the person rather than in the rational weighing of means and ends (Coser, 1977). Sentiments are powerful forces in motivating human behavior. Attending university for the community life of the fraternity, or following one's boyfriend to school would be examples.

The final type Weber labels "traditional action." This is action guided by custom or habit. People engage in this type of action often unthinkingly, because it is simply "always done." Many students attend university because it is traditional for their social class and family to attend--the expectation was always there, it was never questioned (Elwell, 1999).

Weber's typology is intended to be a comprehensive list of the types of meaning men and women give to their conduct across sociocultural systems (Aron, 1970). As an advocate of multiple causation of human behavior, Weber was well aware that most behavior is caused by a mix of these motivations—university students, even today, have a variety of reasons for attending. In marketing themselves to students, university advertising attempts to address (and encourage) all of these motivations (though a look at some

university brochures would indicate a clear attempt to focus on the zweckrational appeal to career aspirations).

But Weber went further than a mere classification scheme. He developed the typology because he was primarily concerned with modern society and how it differs from societies of the past (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977). He proposed that the basic distinguishing feature of modern society was a characteristic shift in the motivation of individual behaviors. In modern society the efficient application of means to ends has come to dominate and replace other springs of social behavior. His classification of types of action provides a basis for his investigation of the social evolutionary process in which behavior had come to be increasingly dominated by goal-oriented rationality (zweckrational)—less and less by tradition, values or emotions.

Because of this focus, Weber is often thought of as an "idealist," one who believes that ideas and beliefs mold social structure and other material conditions (Harris, 1999). But he committed himself to no such narrow interpretation of sociocultural causation. He is far subtler than that. Rather, Weber's system is one in which material interests and ideas are in constant interaction with one another.

Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 280).

Weber believed that the shift in human motivation is one of both cause and effect occurring in interaction with changes in the structural organization of society. The major thrust of his work attempts to identify the factors that have brought about this "rationalization" of the West (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977). While his sociology begins with the individual mo-

tivators of social action, Weber does not stay exclusively focused on either the idealist or the social-psychological level. While he proposed that the basic distinguishing feature of modern society is best viewed in terms of this characteristic shift in motivation, he rooted the shift in the growth of bureaucracy and industrialism.³

IDEAL TYPE

Weber's discussion of social action is an example of the use of an ideal type. An ideal type provides the basic method for historical-comparative study. It is not meant to refer to the "best" or to some moral ideal, but rather to typical or "logically consistent" features of social institutions or behaviors. There can be an "ideal type" brothel or a religious sect, an ideal type dictatorship or an ideal democracy (none of which may be "ideal" in the colloquial sense of the term) (Gerth and Mills, 1946). An ideal type is an analytical construct that serves as a measuring rod for social observers to determine the extent to which concrete social institutions are similar and how they differ from some defined measure (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977).

The ideal type involves determining the features of a social institution that would be present if the institution were a logically consistent whole, not affected by other institutions, concerns and interests. "As general concepts, ideal types are tools with which Weber prepares the descriptive materials of world history for comparative analysis" (Gerth and Mills, 1946).⁴ The ideal type never corresponds to concrete reality but is a description to which we can compare reality.

"Ideal Capitalism," for example, is used extensively in social science literature. According to the ideal type, capitalism consists of five basic features: (a) private ownership

of all potentially profitable activity; (b) pursuit of profit; (c) competition between private companies; and (d) government enforcement of contracts and non-interference in economic affairs. In reality, all capitalist systems deviate from the theoretical construct we call "ideal capitalism." Even the U.S., often considered the most capitalistic nation on earth, strays measurably from the ideal. For example, federal, state and local governments do operate some potentially profitable activities (parks, power companies, and the Post Office come to mind). Many markets in the U.S. are not very competitive, being dominated by large monopolies or oligopolies (and here, the list is endless). Finally, various levels of government do, occasionally, regulate the economy. Still, the ideal construct of capitalism allows us to compare and contrast the economic systems of various societies to this definition, or compare the American economy to itself over time.

BUREAUCRACY

Weber's focus on the trend of rationalization led him to concern himself with the operation and expansion of large-scale enterprises in both the public and private sectors of modern societies (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977). Bureaucracy can be considered to be a particular case of rationalization, or rationalization applied to human organization. Bureaucratic coordination of human action, Weber believed, is the distinctive mark of modern social structures. In order to study these organizations, both historically and in contemporary society, Weber developed the characteristics of an ideal-type bureaucracy:

- Hierarchy of authority
- Impersonality
- Written rules of conduct

- Promotion based on achievement
- Specialized division of labor
- Efficiency

According to Weber, bureaucracies are efficient goal-oriented organizations designed according to rational principles. Offices are ranked in a hierarchical order, with information flowing up the chain of command, directives flowing down. Operations of the organizations are characterized by impersonal rules that explicitly state duties, responsibilities, standardized procedures and conduct of office holders. Offices are highly specialized. Appointments to these offices are made according to the specialized qualifications of the applicants rather than their class, race, sex, or family backgrounds.⁵ All of these ideal characteristics are intended to promote the efficient attainment of the organization's goals (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977).⁶

Some have seriously misinterpreted Weber and have claimed that he liked bureaucracy, that he believed that bureaucracy was an "ideal" organization. Others have pronounced Weber "wrong" because bureaucracies do not live up to his list of "ideals." Others have even claimed that Weber "invented" bureaucratic organization. But Weber described bureaucracy as an "ideal type," not as an ideal social institution in the colloquial sense of the term. Rather the ideal bureaucracy is a measuring rod by which to compare actual bureaucracies.⁷

Weber's studies of bureaucracy still form the core of organizational sociology. The bureaucratic coordination of the action of large numbers of people has become the dominant structural feature of modern societies.

From a purely technical point of view, a bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior

to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for the heads of the organization and for those acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks (Weber, 1921/1968, p. 223).

It is only through this organizational device that large-scale planning and coordination, both for the modern state and the modern economy, become possible.⁸ The consequences of the growth in the power and scope of these organizations is key in understanding the modern world.

AUTHORITY

Weber's discussion of authority relations also provides insight into what is happening in the modern world. On what basis do men and women claim authority over others? Why do men and women give obedience to authority figures? Again, he uses the ideal type to begin to address these questions. Weber distinguished three main types of authority:

1. Traditional Authority
2. Rational-legal Authority
3. Charismatic

Rational legal authority is anchored in impersonal rules that have been legally established. Modern states,⁹ as well as other social relations in modern societies are characterized by this type of rational legal authority (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977). Traditional authority often dominates pre-modern societies. It is based on the belief in the sanctity of tradition, of "the eternal yesterday" (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977). Because of the shift in human motivation, it is often diffi-

cult for modern students to conceive of the hold that tradition has in pre-modern societies.

Unlike rational-legal authority, traditional authority is not codified in impersonal rules but is usually invested in a hereditary line or invested in a particular office by a higher power (Coser 1977). Finally, charismatic authority rests on the appeal of leaders who claim allegiance because of the force of their extraordinary personalities. Again, it should be kept in mind that Weber is describing an ideal type; he was aware that in empirical reality mixtures will be found in the legitimization of authority (Coser 1977). The appeal of Jesus Christ, for example, one of the most important charismatics in history, was partly based on tradition as well. State leaders, such as Reagan and Kennedy, often have some charismatic appeal in addition to their rational-legal and traditional bases of authority.

CAUSALITY

Weber firmly believed in the multi-causality of social phenomenon. He expressed this causality in terms of probabilities (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977; Gerth and Mills, 1946). Weber's notion of probability derives from his recognition of the system character of human societies and therefore the impossibility of making exhaustive predictions. Prediction becomes possible, Weber believed, only within a system of theory that focus our concern on a few social forces out of the wealth of forces and their interactions that make up empirical reality (Freund, 1968, pp. 7-8). Within such constraints, causal certainty in social research is not attainable (nor is it attainable outside the laboratory in natural sciences). The best that can be done is to focus our theories on the most important relationships between social forces, and to forecast from that theory in terms of probabilities.

In this connection, it is often said that Weber was in a running dialogue with the ghost of Karl Marx. But contrary to many interpretations, Weber was not attempting to refute Marx, he was very respectful of Marx's contributions to understanding human societies. But he did disagree with Marx's assertion of the absolute primacy of material conditions in determining human behavior (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977). Weber's system invokes both ideas and material factors as interactive components in the sociocultural evolutionary process. "He was most respectful of Marx's contributions, yet believed, in tune with his own methodology, that Marx had unduly emphasized one particular causal chain, the one leading from the economic infrastructure to the cultural superstructure" (Coser, 1977, p. 228). This, Weber believed, could not adequately take into account the complex web of causation linking social structures and ideas.

Weber attempted to show that the relations between ideas and social structures were multiple and varied, and that causal connections went in both directions. While Weber basically agreed with Marx that economic factors were key in understanding the social system, he gave much greater emphasis to the influence and interaction of ideas and values on sociocultural evolution ((Aron, 1970; Coser 1977). Gerth and Mills (1946) summarized Weber's posited relationship between material conditions and ideas in the following passage:

There is no pre-established correspondence between the content of an idea and the interests of those who follow from the first hour. But, in time, ideas are discredited in the face of history unless they point in the direction of conduct that various interests promote. Ideas, selected and reinterpreted from the original doctrine, do gain an affinity with the interests of certain members of special

strata; if they do not gain such an affinity, they are abandoned (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. 63).

It is in this light that the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism must be read.

THE PROTESTANT ETHIC

Weber's concern with the meaning that people give to their actions allowed him to understand the drift of historical change. He believed that rational action within a system of rational-legal authority is at the heart of modern society. His sociology was first and foremost an attempt to explore and explain this shift from traditional to rational action (Aron, 1970). What was it about the West, he asks, that is causing this shift? In an effort to understand these causes, Weber examined the religious and economic systems of many civilizations.

Weber came to believe that the rationalization of action can only be realized when traditional ways of life are abandoned (Coser, 1977). Because of its erosion, modern people may have a difficult time realizing the hold of tradition over pre-industrial peoples. Weber's task was to uncover the forces in the West that caused people to abandon their traditional religious value orientation and encouraged them to develop a desire for acquiring goods and wealth (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977).¹⁰

After careful study, Weber came to the hypothesis that the Protestant ethic broke the hold of tradition while it encouraged men to apply themselves rationally to their work (Gerth and Mills, 1946).¹¹ Calvinism, he found, had developed a set of beliefs around the concept of predestination. Calvin's followers believed that one could not do good works or perform acts of faith to assure your place in heaven. You were either among the "elect" (in which case

you were in) or you were not. However, wealth was taken as a sign (by you and your neighbors) that you were one of the God's elect, thereby providing encouragement for people to acquire wealth.¹² The Protestant ethic therefore provided religious sanctions that fostered a spirit of rigorous discipline, encouraging men to apply themselves rationally to acquire wealth (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977).

Weber studied non-Western cultures as well. He found that several of these pre-industrial societies had the technological infrastructure and other necessary preconditions to begin capitalism and economic expansion, however, capitalism failed to emerge (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. 61). The only force missing were the positive sanctions to abandon traditional ways. Through comparative analysis Weber attempted to identify “not only the necessary but the sufficient” conditions that fostered capitalism (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. 61).

We have no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism . . . could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation. . . . On the contrary, we only wish to ascertain whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and the quantitative expansion of that spirit over the world (Weber, 1904/1930, p. 91).

While Weber does not believe that the Protestant ethic was the *only* cause of the rise of capitalism, he believed it to be a powerful force in fostering its emergence (Aron, 1970; Coser 1977; Gerth and Mills, 1946).¹³

Having contributed to the emergence of capitalism, these religious motivations (wertrational) become undermined by the new economic system.

Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world [the Spirit of Protestantism], material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism—whether finally, who knows?—has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer. The rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, also seems to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs (Weber, 1904/1930, pp. 181-182).

Success comes to be stripped of all ethical and religious meanings, and comes to center on the accumulation of material possessions and wealth as an end in itself.¹⁴ The economic system thus becomes one that is increasingly based on the rational calculation of means to achieve success, on zweckrational.¹⁵

OLIGARCHY

Weber noted the dysfunctions of bureaucracy in terms of the impact that it had on individuals. Its major advantage, efficiency in attaining goals, makes it unwieldy in dealing with individual cases. The impersonality, so important in attaining efficiency of the organization, is dehumanizing. But the concern over bureaucracy's threat to the members of a particular organization has served to overshadow its effects on the larger society. Weber was very concerned about the impact that rationalization and bureaucratization had on sociocultural systems.

By its very nature bureaucracy generates an enormous degree of unregulated and often unperceived social power. Because of bureaucracy's superiority over other forms of organization, they have proliferated and now dominate

modern societies. Those who control these organizations, Weber warned, control the quality of our life, and they are largely self-appointed leaders.

Bureaucracy tends to result in oligarchy, or rule by the few officials at the top of the organization.¹⁶ In a society dominated by large formal organizations, there is a danger that social, political and economic power will become concentrated in the hands of the few who hold high positions in the most influential of these organizations.

The issue was first raised by Weber, but it was more fully explored by Robert Michels a sociologist and friend of Weber's. Michels was a socialist and was disturbed to find that the socialist parties of Europe, despite their democratic ideology and provisions for mass participation, seemed to be dominated by their leaders, just as the traditional conservative parties. He came to the conclusion that the problem lay in the very nature of organizations. Michels (1915) formulated the 'Iron Law of Oligarchy': "Who says organization, says oligarchy."

According to the "iron law" democracy and large-scale organization are incompatible. Any large organization, Michels pointed out, is faced with problems of coordination that can be solved only by creating a bureaucracy. A bureaucracy, by design, is hierarchically organized to achieve efficiency—large numbers of people cannot make decisions that have to be made every day in an efficient manner. The effective functioning of an organization therefore requires the concentration of much power in the hands of a few people.

Certain characteristics of both leaders and members of organizations reinforce the organizational characteristics that promote oligarchy. People achieve leadership positions precisely because they have unusual political skill; they are adept at getting their way and persuading others of the correctness of their views. Once they hold high office, their

power and prestige is further increased. Leaders have access and control over information and facilities that are not available to the rank-and-file. They control the information that flows down the channels of communication. Leaders are also strongly motivated to persuade the organization of the rightness of their views, and they use all of their skills, power and authority to do so. By design of the organization, rank and file is less informed than their "superiors." Finally, from birth, we are taught to obey those in positions of authority. Therefore, the rank and file tends to look to the leaders for policy directives and are generally prepared to allow leaders to exercise their judgment on most matters.

Leaders also have control over very powerful negative and positive sanctions to promote the behavior that they desire. They have the power to grant or deny raises, assign workloads, fire, demote and that most gratifying of all sanctions, the power to promote. Most important, they tend to promote junior officials who share their opinions, with the result that the oligarchy becomes a self-perpetuating one. Therefore, the very nature of large-scale organization makes oligarchy within these organizations inevitable. Bureaucracy, by design, promotes the centralization of power in the hands of those at the top of the organization.

SOCIETAL OLIGARCHY

While it is easy to see oligarchy within formal organizations,¹⁷ Weber's views on the inevitability of oligarchy within whole societies are a bit subtler. Bureaucracy has come to dominate the social structure of modern society. Bureaucracies are necessary to provide the coordination and control so desperately needed by our complex society (and huge populations). But while modern societies are dependent on formal organization, in the long-run bureauc-

racy tends to undermine both human freedom and democracy. While government departments are theoretically responsible to the electorate, this responsibility is almost entirely fictional. It often happens, in fact, that the electorate (and even the Congress) does not know what these bureaucracies are doing. Government departments have grown so numerous, so complex, that they cannot be supervised effectively.

The modern era is one of interest-group politics, in which the degree of participation of the ordinary citizen in the forging of political positions is strictly limited. Our impact on political decision making depends, to a large extent, on our membership in organizational structures. The power of these groups, in turn, depend in large part on such organizational characteristics as size of membership; and commitment of membership to the goals of the organization; and wealth of the organization. But it is through organization that we lose control of the decision making process.

Those on top of bureaucratic hierarchies can command vast resources in pursuit of their interests. This power is often unseen and unregulated, which gives the elite at the top of these hierarchies vast social, economic, and political power. Huge corporations, economic bureaucracies that have tremendous impact over our lives, an impact over which we have little control, further compound the problem.¹⁸ Not only do these economic bureaucracies affect us directly, they also affect our governments--organizations supposedly designed to regulate them.

RATIONALIZATION

The rationalization process is the practical application of knowledge to achieve a desired end. It leads to efficiency, coordination, and control over both the physical and the

social environment. It is a product of "scientific specialization and technical differentiation" that seems to be a characteristic of Western culture (Freund, 1968). It is the guiding principle behind bureaucracy and the increasing division of labor. It has led to the unprecedented increase in both the production and distribution of goods and services. It is also associated with secularization, depersonalization, and oppressive routine. Increasingly, human behavior is guided by observation, experiment and reason (zweckrational) to master the natural and social environment to achieve a desired end (Elwell, 1999).

Freund (1968) defines it as "the organization of life through a division and coordination of activities on the basis of exact study of men's relations with each other, with their tools and their environment, for the purpose of achieving greater efficiency and productivity" (p. 18). Weber's general theory of rationalization (of which bureaucratization is but a particular case) refers to increasing human mastery over the natural and social environment.¹⁹ In turn, these changes in social structure have changed human character through changing values, philosophies, and beliefs. The bureaucratization process has encouraged such superstructural norms and values as individualism, efficiency, self-discipline, materialism, and calculability (all of which are subsumed under Weber's concept of zweckrational). Bureaucracy and rationalization were rapidly replacing all other forms of organization and thought. They formed a stranglehold on all sectors of Western society.

The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other kind of organization. The fully developed bureaucratic mechanism compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of organization" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 214).

Rationalization is the most general element of Weber's theory. He identifies rationalization with an increasing division of labor, bureaucracy and mechanization (Gerth and Mills, 1946). He associates it with depersonalization, oppressive routine, rising secularism, as well as being destructive of individual freedom (Gerth and Mills, 1946; Freund, 1968).

FORMAL AND SUBSTANTIVE RATIONALITY

Since it is clear that modern societies are so pervasively dominated by bureaucracy it is crucial to understand why this enormous power is often used for ends that are counter to the interests and needs of people (Elwell, 1999). Why is it that "as rationalization increases, the irrational grows in intensity" (Freund, 1968, p. 25)? Again, the rationalization process is the increasing dominance of zweckrational action over rational action based on values, or actions motivated by traditions and emotions. Zweckrational can best be understood as "technocratic thinking," in which the goal is simply to find the most efficient means to whatever ends are defined as important by those in power.

Technocratic thinking can be contrasted with wertrational, which involves the assessment of goals and means in terms of ultimate human values such as social justice, peace, and human happiness. Weber maintained that even though a bureaucracy is highly rational in the formal sense of technical efficiency, it does not follow that it is also rational in the sense of the moral acceptability of its goals or the means used to achieve them. Nor does an exclusive focus on the goals of the organization necessarily coincide with the broader goals of society as a whole. It often happens that the single-minded pursuit of practical goals can actually undermine the foundations of the social order (El-

well, 1999). What is good for the bureaucracy is not always good for the society as a whole--and often, in the long term, is not good for the bureaucracy either.

An extreme case of rationalization was the extermination camps of Nazi Germany. The goal was to kill as many people as possible in the most efficient manner, and the result was the ultimate of dehumanization--the murder of millions of men, women and children. The men and women who ran the extermination camps were, in large part, ordinary human beings. They were not particularly evil people. Most went to church on Sundays; most had children, loved animals and life. William Shirer (1960) comments on business firms that collaborated in the building and running of the camps: "There had been, the records show, some lively competition among German businessmen to procure orders for building these death and disposal contraptions and for furnishing the lethal blue crystals. The firm of I. A. Topf and Sons of Erfurt, manufacturers of heating equipment, won out in its bid for the crematoria at Auschwitz. The story of its business enterprise was revealed in a voluminous correspondence found in the records of the camp. A letter from the firm dated February 12, 1943, gives the tenor:

To: The Central Construction Office of the S.S. and Police, Auschwitz
Subject: Crematoria 2 and 3 for the camp.
We acknowledge receipt of your order for five triple furnaces, including two electric elevators for raising corpses and one emergency elevator. A practical installation for stoking coal was also ordered and one for transporting ashes (Shirer, 1960, p.971).

The "lethal blue crystals" of Zyklon-B used in the gas chambers were supplied by two German firms which had acquired the patent from I. G. Farben (Shirer, 1960). Their

product could do the most effective job for the least possible cost, so they got the contract. Shirer (1960) summarizes the organization of evil. "Before the postwar trials in Germany it had been generally believed that the mass killings were exclusively the work of a relatively few fanatical S.S. leaders. But the records of the courts leave no doubt of the complicity of a number of German businessmen, not only the Krupps and the directors of I.G. Farben chemical trust but smaller entrepreneurs who outwardly must have seemed to be the most prosaic and decent of men, pillars--like good businessmen everywhere--of their communities" (pp. 972-973). In sum, the extermination camps and their suppliers were models of bureaucratic efficiency using the most efficient means available at that time to accomplish the goals of the Nazi government.

But German corporations went beyond supplying the government with the machinery of death, some actively participated in the killing process. "This should occasion neither surprise nor shock. I.G. Farben was one of the first great corporate conglomerates. Its executives merely carried the logic of corporate rationality to its ultimate conclusion...the perfect labor force for a corporation that seeks fully to minimize costs and maximize profits is slave labor in a death camp. Among the great German corporations who utilized slave labor were AEG (German General Electric), Wanderer-Autounion (Audi), Krupp, Rheinmetall Borsig, Siemens-Schuckert and Telefunken" (Rubenstein, 1975, p. 58).

I.G. Farben's synthetic rubber (Buna) plants at Auschwitz are a good example of the relationship between corporate profits and Nazi goals. I.G. Farben's investment in the plant at Auschwitz was considerable--over \$1,000,000,000 in 1970s American dollars. The construction work required 170 contractors and subcontractors, housing had to be built for the corporate personnel, barracks for the workers. SS

guards supplied by the state would administer punishment when rules were broken. The workers at the plants were treated as all other inmates in the camp. The only exception was one of diet, workers in the plants would receive an extra ration of "Buna soup" to maintain "a precisely calculated level of productivity" (Rubenstein, 1975, p. 58). Nor was any of this hidden from corporate executives; they were full participants in the horror. With an almost inexhaustible supply of workers, the corporation simply worked their slave laborers to death.

The fact that individual officials have specialized and limited responsibility and authority within the organization means that they are unlikely to raise basic questions regarding the moral implications of the overall operation of the organization. Under the rule of specialization, society becomes more and more intricate and interdependent, but with less common purpose. The community disintegrates because it loses its common bond. The emphasis in bureaucracies is on getting the job done in the most efficient manner possible. Consideration of what impact organizational behavior might have on society as a whole, on the environment, or on the consumer simply does not enter into the calculation.

The problem is further compounded by the decline of many traditional institutions such as the family, community, and religion, which served to bind pre-industrial man to the interests of the group. Rationalization causes the weakening of traditional and religious moral authority (secularization); the values of efficiency and calculability predominate. In an advanced industrial-bureaucratic society, everything becomes a component of the expanding machine, including human beings (Elwell, 1999). C. Wright Mills, whose social theory was strongly influenced by Weber, describes the problem:

It is not the number of victims or the degree of cruelty that is distinctive; it is the fact that the acts committed and the acts that nobody protests are split from the consciousness of men in an uncanny, even a schizophrenic manner. The atrocities of our time are done by men as "functions" of social machinery—men possessed by an abstracted view that hides from them the human beings who are their victims and, as well, their own humanity. They are inhuman acts because they are impersonal. They are not sadistic but merely businesslike; they are not aggressive but merely efficient; they are not emotional at all but technically clean-cut (Mills, 1958, pp.83-84).

The result is a seeming paradox—bureaucracies, the epitome of rationalization, acting in very irrational ways. Thus we have economic bureaucracies in pursuit of profit that deplete and pollute the environment upon which they are based. We have political bureaucracies set up to protect our civil liberties that violate them with impunity. Agricultural bureaucracies (educational, government, and business) set up to help the farmer that end up putting millions of these same farmers out of business. Service bureaucracies designed to care for and protect the elderly that routinely deny service and actually engage in abuse. Weber called this formal rationalization as opposed to substantive rationality (the ability to anchor actions in the consideration of the whole). It can also be called the irrationality of rationalization, or more generally, the irrationality factor (Elwell, 1999). The irrationality of bureaucratic institutions is a major factor in understanding contemporary society.

WEBER AND MARX

Weber believed that Marxist theory was too simplistic, reducing all to a single economic cause (Gerth and Mills,

1946). However, Weber does not attempt to refute Marx, rather he can be interpreted as an attempt to round out Marx's economic determinism (Gerth and Mills, 1946).

Weber's views about the inescapable rationalization and bureaucratization of the world have some obvious similarities to Marx's notion of alienation. Both men agree that modern methods of organization have tremendously increased the effectiveness and efficiency of production and organization and have allowed an unprecedented domination of man over the world of nature. They also agree that the new world of rationalized efficiency has turned into a monster that threatens to dehumanize its creators. But Weber disagrees with Marx's claim that alienation is only a transitional stage on the road to man's true emancipation" (Coser, 1977, p.232).

Weber believed that the alienation documented by Marx had little to do with the ownership of the mode of production, but was a consequence of bureaucracy and the rationalization of social life. Marx asserted that capitalism has led to the "expropriation" of the worker from the mode of production. He believed that the modern worker is not in control of his fate, is forced to sell his labor (and thus his self) to private capitalists. Weber countered that loss of control at work was an inescapable result of any system of rationally coordinated production (Coser, 1977). Weber argued that men could no longer engage in socially significant action unless they joined a large-scale organization.²⁰ In joining organizations they would have to sacrifice their personal desires and goals to the impersonal goals and procedures of the organization itself (Coser, 1977). By doing so they would be cut off from a part of themselves, they would become alienated.

Socialism and capitalism are both economic systems based on industrialization—the rational application of science, observation, and reason to the production of goods

and services. Both capitalism and socialism are forms of a rational organization of economic life to control and coordinate this production. And the production of goods is becoming central in social life.²¹ Socialism is predicated on government ownership of the economy to provide the coordination to meet the needs of people within society. If anything, Weber maintained, socialism would be even more rationalized, even more bureaucratic than capitalism.²² And thus, more alienating to human beings as well (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. 49).

SOCIOCULTURAL EVOLUTION

According to Weber, because bureaucracy is a form of organization superior to all others, further bureaucratization and rationalization may be an inescapable fate. Weber feared that our probable future would be even more bureaucratized, an iron cage that limits individual human potential rather than a technological utopia that sets us free (Aron, 1970; Coser, 1977).²³

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals or, if neither, mechanized petrification embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has obtained a level of civilization never before achieved' (Weber, 1904/1930, p.181).

But while Weber had a foreboding of an "iron cage" of bureaucracy and rationality, the quote also makes clear that he recognized that human beings are not mere subjects molded by sociocultural forces. We are both creatures and creators

of sociocultural systems. And even in a sociocultural system that increasingly institutionalizes and rewards goal oriented rational behavior in pursuit of wealth and material symbols of status there are other possibilities. New prophets, new ideals or a rebirth of older human traditions may yet arise.

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NOTES:

1 I originally created this essay as part of a web site on Weber (pronounced "Vay-bur") in 1996 for my students in social theory. My interpretation is fairly standard, it is based on information and insights from secondary and primary sources. My intention in summarizing this information is simply to present Weber in a fairly coherent and comprehensive manner, using language and structure for the generalists amongst us.

2 "Within the realm of social conduct one finds factual regularities, that is, courses of action which, with a typically identical meaning, are repeated by the actors or simultaneously occur among numerous actors. It is with such types of conduct that sociology is concerned, in contrast to history, which is interested in the causal connections of important, i.e., fateful, single events (Weber, 1921/1968).

3 "This whole process of rationalization in the factory and elsewhere, and especially in the bureaucratic state machine, parallels the centralization of the material implements of organization in the hands of the master. Thus, discipline inexorably takes

over ever larger areas as the satisfaction of political and economic needs is increasingly rationalized. This universal phenomenon more and more restricts the importance of charisma and of individually differentiated conduct" (Weber, 1921/1968, p. 1156).

4 "An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. . . . In its conceptual purity, this mental construct . . . cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality" (Weber, 1903-17/1949, p. 90).

5 "When fully developed, bureaucracy stands . . . under the principle of *sine ira ac studio* (without scorn and bias). Its specific nature which is welcomed by capitalism develops the more perfectly the more bureaucracy is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation. This is the specific nature of bureaucracy and it is appraised as its special virtue"(Weber, 1946/1958, pp. 215-16).

6 "Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs--these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic organization" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 214).

7 Actually, while Weber recognized their technical efficiency, he also recognized their corrosive nature on humans as well as on traditional societies, as this quote makes clear. "No machinery in the world functions so precisely as this apparatus of men and, moreover, so cheaply. . . . Rational calculation . . . reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself into a somewhat bigger cog. . . . The passion for bureaucratization drives us to despair" (Weber, 1921/1968, p. liii).

8 "The needs of mass administration make it today completely indispensable. The choice is only between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration" (Weber, 1921/1968, p. 224).

9 "The state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 78).

10 "A man does not 'by nature' wish to earn more and more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose. Wherever modern capitalism has begun its work of increasing the productivity of human labour by increasing its intensity, it has encountered the immensely stubborn resistance of this leading trait of pre-capitalistic labour" (Weber, 1904/1930, p. 60).

11 "Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health. . . . is worthy of absolute moral condemnation. . . . [Time] is infinitely valuable because every hour lost is lost to labour for the glory of God. Thus inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work. For it is less pleasing to God than the active performance of His will in a calling" (Weber, 1904/1930, pp. 157-158).

12 [For the Calvinist] "The world exists to serve the glorification of God and for that purpose alone. The elected Christian is in the world only to increase this glory of God by fulfilling His commandments to the best of his ability. But God requires social achievement of the Christian because He will that social life shall be organized according to His commandments, in accordance with that purpose" (Weber, 1904/1930, p. 108).

13 "The religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means of asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful

conceivable lever for the expansion of . . . the spirit of capitalism" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 172).

14 "In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport" (Weber, 1904/1930, p. 182).

15 "Capitalism is today an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalist rules of action" (Weber, 1904/1930, p. 54).

16 "The principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority mean a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 197).

17 After all, it is something we each experience on an almost daily basis.

18 "The apparatus (bureaucracy), with its peculiar impersonal character. . . is easily made to work for anybody who knows how to gain control over it. A rationally ordered system of officials continues to function smoothly after the enemy has occupied the area: he merely needs to change the top officials" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 229).

19 "To this extent increasing bureaucratization is a function of the increasing possession of goods used for consumption, and of an increasingly sophisticated technique for fashioning external life—a technique which corresponds to the opportunities provided by such wealth" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 212).

20 "When those subject to bureaucratic control seek to escape the influence of existing bureaucratic apparatus, this is normally possible only by creating an organization of their own which is equally subject to the process of bureaucratization" (Weber, 1921/1968, p. 224).

21 "Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world [the Spirit of Protestantism], ma-

terial goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism—whether finally, who knows?—has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer. The rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, also seems to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs (Weber, 1904/1930, pp. 181-182).

22 [Socialism] "would mean a tremendous increase in the importance of professional bureaucrats" (Weber, 1921/1968, p. 224).

23 "Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness, no matter which group may triumph externally now" (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 128).

4

The Sociology of Emile Durkheim

I have often thought of Durkheim's reputation as being somewhat over inflated in sociology. I have had many arguments with colleagues on this score. They point out several contributions he has made to the field:

- Distinguishing and elaborating the field of sociology from the other social sciences.
- His emphasis on empirical data to lend support to his theoretical speculations.
- Functionalism
- His focus on the division of labor and its consequences for social life.
- The collective conscience or the need for a common core of values and beliefs.
- His sociology of religion which is still considered seminal.

Some of these accomplishments I find in earlier theorists. August Comte, for example, writes of the division of labor and how its development leads to a shift in social bonds from similarity to interdependence. Karl Marx, it seems to me, has a far better grip on how destructive of social solidarity the detailed division of labor can be.¹ T. Robert Malthus writes of the effect of population (and other compo-

nents of the social system) on various parts of the social system and on the whole in a distinctly functionalist manner. Malthus also uses available government data on birth and death rates almost 100 years before Durkheim.² While Durkheim is the first to be accorded academic status as a sociologist, I just don't believe his contributions and insights rank him in the same league as such titans as Marx and Weber.

Still, the influence of Durkheim on sociology in the last half of the twentieth century is formidable—particularly his functionalism and use of empirical data to support his arguments. For this reason, and the fact that he had such a direct influence on Merton, I include a short summary of his work in this volume. A basic understanding of Durkheim is essential for understanding sociology today.

SOCIAL ORDER

According to Durkheim, social facts (or social phenomena or forces) are the subject matter of sociology. Social facts are "sui generis,"³ and must be studied distinct from biological and psychological phenomenon. They can be defined as patterns of behavior that are capable of exercising some coercive power upon individuals.⁴ They are guides and controls of conduct that are external to the individual in the form of group norms, mores and folkways. Through socialization and education these rules become internalized in the consciousness of the individual. These social constraints and guides become moral obligations to obey social rules.

The central issue in Durkheim's work concerns the source of social order and disorder. According to Durkheim, the desires and self-interests of human beings can only be held in check by forces that originate outside of the

individual. "The more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs" (Durkheim, 1951, p. 248). Durkheim characterizes this external force as a collective conscience, a common social bond that is expressed by the ideas, values, norms, beliefs and ideologies of the culture, institutionalized in the social structure, and internalized by individual members of the culture.⁵ He elaborated the cause and effects of weakening group ties on the individual in his two works, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897).

In *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim identifies two forms or types of solidarity, which are based on different sources.⁶ Mechanical solidarity is "solidarity which comes from likeness," Durkheim writes, and "is at its maximum when the collective conscience completely envelops our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it." This occurs, Durkheim claims, in early societies in which there is not much division of labor.⁷ Such societies are relatively homogenous, men and women engage in similar tasks and daily activities, people have similar experiences. In such societies the few distinct institutions express similar values and norms that tend to reinforce one another.

Mechanical solidarity, Durkheim adds, means that "ideas and tendencies common to all members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those that pertain personally to each member." The norms, values and beliefs of the society (or the collective conscience) are so homogenous and confront the individual with such overwhelming and consistent force, that there is little opportunity in such societies for individuality or deviance from this collective conscience. The collective conscience and individual consciences are virtually identical.

According to Durkheim, traditional cultures experienced a high level of social and moral integration, there was little individuation, and most behaviors were governed

by social norms, which were usually embodied in religion. By engaging in the same activities and rituals, people in traditional societies shared common moral values, which Durkheim called a collective conscience (modern sociologists would refer to them as the norms and values of society, which are internalized by individuals). In traditional societies, people tend to regard themselves as members of a group; the collective conscience embraces individual awareness, and there is little sense of personal options.

The second form of solidarity Durkheim terms "organic." Organic solidarity develops as a by-product of the division of labor.⁸ As a society becomes more complex, individuals play more specialized roles and become ever more dissimilar in their social experiences, material interests, values, and beliefs. Individuals within such a sociocultural system have less in common; however, they must become more dependent upon each other for their very survival.⁹ The growth of individualism is an inevitable result of the increasing division of labor, and this individualism can develop only at the expense of the common values, beliefs and normative rules of society--the sentiments and beliefs that are held by all.¹⁰ With the loosening of these common rules and values we also lose our sense of community, or identity with the group. The social bond is thereby weakened and social values and beliefs no longer provide us with coherent, consistent, or insistent moral guidance.

Although the diversity of norms and values has the potential to liberate the individual from tradition and the hierarchies of family, church, and community, the diversity also creates problems. According to Durkheim, if an individual lacks any source of social restraint she will tend to satisfy her own appetites with little thought of the possible effect her actions will have on others.¹¹ Instead of asking "is this moral?" or "does my family approve?" the individ-

ual is more likely to ask "does this action meet my needs?" The individual is left to find her own way in the world--a world in which personal options for behavior have multiplied as strong and insistent norms have weakened.

SUICIDE

Durkheim insisted that the study of society must not rely on psychological factors alone (reductionism). Rather, social phenomenon must be considered as a different class or level of fact. To demonstrate the power of these social facts in determining human behavior, Durkheim studied suicide. Suicide was an action that was widely perceived as one of the most intensely individual acts, one that is purely determined by psychological and biographical factors.

For example, we believe we can understand why Bryan Cadwallader committed suicide by examining the poor fellow's biography and psychology.¹² After all, Bryan was the youngest of eight and the baby of his family. He was improperly toilet trained. His father and he never properly bonded. He was prone to athlete's foot and bad breath. His children hated him. His wife ran off with a traveling balloonist. And his dog had bitten him the day he killed himself.

But facts like these cannot explain variations in suicide rates among different racial, ethnic, religious, and occupational groups. Durkheim reasoned that while suicide occurs in all societies, the suicide rate for various groups are often both different than other groups within the same society and stable over time. These differences and stability in group rates indicated that there was something other than psychology involved in the decision to commit suicide. Why is it that Protestants are more prone to suicide than Catholics? Why are there stable rates of suicide, year after

year, within the same groups and societies? Why do rates differ between age groups within the same society? It is simply impossible, Durkheim insisted, to explain or interpret the characteristics and behaviors of human groups on a psychological or biological basis. Much of who and what we are, of how we behave and what we believe, is due to social forces.

In order to explain differential rates of suicide in various religious and occupational groups, Durkheim studied the ways these groups brought about social cohesion and solidarity among their members. He hypothesized that a significantly higher rate of suicide in a particular group was an indication that the social cohesion of that group was weak, and that its members were no longer protected during personal crises. Through an examination of government data, Durkheim demonstrated that suicide varies with the degree of social integration.

Durkheim described two types of suicide based on the source of this perceived lack of cohesion. *Egoistic suicide* occurs among some men and women who are not sufficiently integrated into social groups. Because they do not belong, or belonging, they do not interact and participate, when they are confronted with personal crisis they must face it alone. They have not internalized the regulation and guidance, nor do they have the social support needed to handle the stress.

The second type of suicide based on the lack of group cohesion Durkheim labels *anomic suicide*. Anomic suicide is likely to occur when the group fails to give the individual enough regulation and guidance. Protestantism, for example, "concedes a greater freedom of individual thought than Catholicism...it has fewer common beliefs and practices." Because of this, Durkheim reasoned, we should see higher rates of suicide among Protestants as a response to these weaker rules of conduct and emphasis upon autonomy and

individualism. Because of the increasing division of labor, as well as social trends that weaken the traditional ties of community and family, this type of suicide is associated with modernity.

A third major type Durkheim labeled *altruistic suicide*. This type of suicide occurs when the individual is tightly integrated into a group, and the group requires that individual to give up her life. It occurs among soldiers for their friends, nationalists for their countries, true believers for their cause. While he was aware of the dangers of the breakdown of social order, he also realized that too much social control of individual behavior could be dangerous as well (Coser, 1977).

ANOMIE

Durkheim characterized the modern individual as suffering from social norms that are weak or often contradictory. Durkheim defines anomie as a condition of relative normlessness in a whole society or in one of its component groups. When these social regulations break down the controlling influence on individual desires and interests is ineffective; individuals are left to their own devices. Without normative regulation and moral guidance, deviance and stress are the result.

Durkheim identifies two major causes of anomie: the division of labor, and rapid social change. Both of these are, of course, associated with modernity. In the literature the focus tends to be on rapid change experienced by individuals either up or down the social structure. Here let us focus again on the division of labor. The individual in modern society is confronted with a variety of groups that have different values and goals, each of which competes for the individual's allegiance.

Compare the norms on premarital sexuality for females in more traditional societies (say America in 1900) with those of contemporary American society. (The double-standard on sexual behavior for males and females is part of our traditional morality; that is, boys have always been given mixed messages.) In a traditional setting, the strength of the bond is more intense between a young woman and the relatively few groups she belongs to. The message from all groups, family, church, school, and peers is virtually the same: "Don't do it." Compare this uniformity of message with the conflicting messages received by girls in modern American society. In most families, the message from the parent(s) is: "Don't do it"; although the message may be mixed if a teenager has older siblings. If she belongs to a traditional church, the message is the same. Movies, television, and music video messages, however, amount to "Everybody's doing it" (and are more beautiful and happier as a result). Media ads are encouraging: "Just do it!", connecting the product they are trying to sell with promises of sexual fulfillment. The school she attends as well as "Dear Abby" are telling her: "Don't do it; but if you do, use a condom." And finally, her peer group, particularly if she has a boyfriend, is encouraging her to: "Do it." Consequently, the young woman is left to her own devices; her personal desires and natural curiosity are not disciplined by consistent or strong group norms. Durkheim refers to this social condition as anomie--a condition in which individuals are given weak, inconsistent, or incoherent normative rules to follow.

A key point of Durkheim's concept of anomie is this: An increasing division of labor weakens the sense of identification within the wider community and weakens social constraints on human behavior. These conditions lead to social "disintegration"—high rates of egocentric behavior, norm violation, and consequent de-legitimation and distrust

of authority. In the final analysis Durkheim's whole sociology revolves around this issue.

His is not a straight-line evolutionary theory, however. In his conception, anomie and unrestrained egoism are as harmful to the individual as they are to the sociocultural system, and institutions (and individuals) react to the social disorder that result. Durkheim believed that the functional needs of society necessitated the emergence of new forms of social integration. Even modern sociocultural systems with a high degree of a division of labor still need a common faith, a common collective conscience to integrate people into the society.

FUNCTIONALISM

For Durkheim, society formed a unified system, with the various parts of the system fitting very closely together. Society is like an organism, all of its parts tightly mesh. The extreme system character envisioned by Durkheim can be seen in the following quote:

But if there is one fact that history has irrefutably demonstrated it is that the morality of each people is directly related to the social structure of the people practicing it. The connection is so intimate that, given the general character of the morality observed in a given society and barring abnormal and pathological cases, one can infer the nature of that society, the elements of its structure and the way it is organized. Tell me the marriage patterns, the morals dominating family life, and I will tell you the principal characteristics of its organization" (Durkheim, 1961, p. 87).

Therefore, there are two legitimate aims of social investigation. The first is to identify the historical causes or origins of a social phenomenon. The second is to identify

its functions for the social system as a whole. "The determination of function is . . . necessary for the complete explanation of the phenomena. . . . To explain a social fact it is not enough to show the cause on which it depends; we must also, at least in most cases, show its function in the establishment of social order" (Durkheim, 1950, 97).

Determining the functions of social institutions and patterns of social facts played a key role in all of Durkheim's sociology.¹³ For example, Durkheim saw crime as a normal occurrence in any social system and as serving some positive functions for the society as a whole. First, crime and the reaction to crime, he asserts, provides society with a point of normative consensus. By condemning the crime we are reaffirming bonds among the non-criminal population, asserting that the group condemns and punishes the criminal action. A second function of crime is the drawing of boundaries for human behavior. By defining such boundaries, and punishing those who cross them, we are strengthening the collective conscience.¹⁴ A third function of crime is to provide a certain amount of flexibility within the society. "Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently flexible to take on a new form, and crime sometimes helps to determine the form they will take. How many times, indeed, it is only an anticipation of future morality—a step toward what will be" (Durkheim, 1950, p. 71).

RELIGION

To discover the essence of religion¹⁵ and the functions it served, Durkheim studied animism, totemism (religious beliefs based on the worship of sacred objects which are often thought to possess supernatural powers) and other "primitive" beliefs.¹⁶ All religions divide social life into

two spheres, he concluded, the sacred and the profane. There is nothing intrinsic about a particular object which makes it sacred, he says. An object becomes sacred only when the community invests it with that meaning. Religion is "an eminently collective thing" (Durkheim, 1954, p.47). It functions to bind a community together.

Thus there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies, and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results. What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians celebrating the principal dates in the life of Christ, or of Jews remembering the exodus from Egypt or the promulgation of the decalogue, and a reunion of citizens commemorating the promulgation of a new moral or legal system or some great event in the national life?" (1954, p. 427).

Durkheim then goes a step further. Religion is not only a social creation; it is the power of the community that is being worshiped. The power of the community or society over the individual so transcends individual existence that people collectively give it sacred significance. By worshipping God people are worshipping the power of the collective over all, they are worshipping society.

It was religion, according to Durkheim, which is one of the main forces that make up the collective conscience, re-

ligion which allows the individual to transcend self and act for the social good. But traditional religion was weakening under the onslaught of the division of labor; what could replace religion as the common bond?

The great things of the past which filled our fathers with enthusiasm do not excite the same ardor in us...In a word, the old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born...But this state of incertitude and confused agitation cannot last for ever. A day will come when our societies will know again those hours of creative effervescence, in the course of which new formulae are found which serve for a while as a guide to humanity; and when these hours shall have been passed through once, men will spontaneously feel the need of reliving them from time to time in thought, that is to say, of keeping alive their memory by means of celebrations which regularly reproduce their fruits. We have already seen how the French Revolution established a whole cycle of holidays to keep the principles with which it was inspired in a state of perpetual youth....There are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones. As to the question of what symbols this new faith will express itself with, whether they will resemble the past or not, and whether or not they will be more adequate for the reality which they seek to translate, that is something which surpasses the human faculty of foresight and which does not appertain to the principal question" (1954, pp. 475-476).

While men are losing faith in the old religions, new religions will be born.¹⁷ For all societies feel the need to express their collective sentiments, ideas and ideologies in regular ceremony. While the forms and particular symbols may change, religion is eternal.

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NOTES:

1 Both Braverman (1974) and Marvin Harris (1981) comment on this extensively.

2 See Frank Elwell, 2001, Malthus' 1798 Essay as Social Theory for an extensive discussion of both of these points.

3 sui generis (soo-eye JEN-uh-er-is) adjective meaning of its own kind; unique.

4 "The determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of individual consciousness" (Durkheim, 1950, p. 110).

5 "Society is not at all the illogical or a-logical, inherent and fantastic being which has too often been considered. Quite on the contrary, the collective consciousness is the highest form of psy-

chic life, since it is the consciousness of consciousness. Being placed outside of and above individual and local contingencies, it sees things only in their permanent and essential aspects, which it crystallizes into communicable ideas. At the same time that it sees from above, it sees farther; at every moment of time it embraces all known reality; that is why it alone can furnish the minds with the moulds which are applicable to the totality of things and which make it possible to think of them" (Durkheim, 1954, p.444).

6 "Social life comes from a double source, the likeness of consciences and the division of labor. The individual is socialized in the first case, because, not having any real individuality, he becomes, with those whom he resembles, part of the same collective type; in the second case, because, while having a physiognomy and a personal activity which distinguishes him from others, he depends upon them in the same measure that he is distinguished from them, and consequently upon the society which results from their union" (1960, p. 226).

7 "The other [mechanical solidarity] is strong only if the individual is not. Made up of rules which are practiced by all indistinctly, it receives from this universal, uniform practice an authority which bestows something superhuman upon it, and which puts it beyond the pale of discussion (Durkheim 1960, pp. 228).

8 "The co-operative society [organic solidarity], on the contrary, develops in the measure that individual personality becomes stronger. As regulated as a function may be, there is a large place always left for personal initiative"(Durkheim 1960, pp. 228-229).

9 "Because the individual is not sufficient unto himself, it is for society that he works. Thus is formed a very strong sentiment of the state of dependence in which he finds himself. He becomes accustomed to estimating it at its just value, that is to say, in regarding himself as part of a whole, the organ of an organism. Such sentiments naturally inspire not only mundane sacrifices which assure the regular development of daily social life,

but even, on occasion, acts of complete self-renunciation and wholesale abnegation" (Durkheim, 1960, p. 228).

10 "Even where society relies most completely upon the division of labor, it does not become a jumble of juxtaposed atoms, between which it can establish only external, transient contacts. Rather the members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which the exchange is made. Each of the functions they exercise is, in a fixed way, dependent upon others, and with them forms a solidary system. Accordingly, from the nature of chosen task permanent duties arise. Because we fill some certain domestic or social function, we are involved in a complex of obligations from which we have no right to free ourselves. There is, above all, an organ upon which we are tending to depend more and more; this is the State. The points at which we are in contact with it multiply as do the occasions when it is entrusted with the duty of reminding us of the sentiment of common solidarity" (1960, p. 227).

11 "The more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs" (Durkheim, 1951, p. 248).

12 Bryan Cadwallader is a fictional character. This is whimsy.

13 "When . . . the explanation of a social phenomenon is undertaken, we must seek separately the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfills. We use the word "function," in preference to "end" or "purpose," precisely because social phenomena do not generally exist for the useful results they produce. We must determine whether there is a correspondence between the fact under consideration and the general needs of the social organism, and in what this correspondence consists, without occupying ourselves with whether it has been intentional or not" (Durkheim, 1950, p. 95).

14 "Crime brings together upright consciences and concentrates them" (Durkheim 1960, p. 103).

15 "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and for-

bidden--beliefs and practices which unite in one single community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim, 1954, p. 47).

16 "At the roots of all our judgments there are a certain number of essential ideas which dominate all our intellectual life; they are what the philosophers since Aristotle have called the categories of the understanding: ideas of time, space, class, numbers, cause, substance, personality, etc. They correspond to the most universal properties of things. They are like the solid frame which encloses all thought; . . . They are like the framework of intelligence. Now when primitive religious beliefs are systematically analyzed, the principal categories are naturally found. They are born in religion and of religion; they are a product of religious thought" (1954, p. 9).

17 "We must discover the rational substitutes for these religious notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas" (Durkheim, 1961, p. 9).