

Essay #1

Alice E. Flanagan

Longwood University

SOCL 401-02: Sociological Theory

Dr. Pederson

9/30/2022

Theoretical Contributions of Karl Marx and Max Weber

Karl Marx (1818-1883) developed a theory called historical materialism. He understood history as a “progressive expansion of the material or economic forces in society, that is, the advances made by societies in organizing their material production” (Dillon, 2019, p. 36). Historical materialism increased the economic-material progress down through history, which had expanded the economic production. Historical changes evolve out of contradictions in economic and the social conditions and relations. Marx had predicted that the opposing views would lead to class consciousness, which is, the wage-workers’ recognition of their class exploitation underneath capitalism. Due to capitalism producing economic crises that threaten their foundations, which include: recessions; collapse of stock markets; severe financial losses for banks, companies, and households; large rates of unemployment; and the depletion and eroding of natural resources. Karl Marx had the belief that there were ongoing crises which would produce opposing class antagonisms, between both the bourgeoisie and the proletariats.

Max Weber (1864-1920) created the sociological task doing the study of subjectively meaningful action. Weber would interpret the understanding of social action and behavior in individual, group, organizational, national, and international groups into institutional practices. The sociologist has a responsibility to make sense of all the varying motivations that push towards social action by understanding of *verstehen*. *Verstehen* is the explanation of why individuals and institutions as a whole societies behave in the way that they do; why there is an attached meaning to some goals and no others; and why specific behavioral patterns and consequences collide together. In order to understand Weber’s methodology of subjectively meaningful action: we must adopt a nonjudgmental attitude, conduct research that targets at understanding the meaning of social action, and assess ethnographic observational studies and

historical comparative research. Weber's results for his methodology is to use qualitative data to support and complement the quantitative methods.

Contrast Views of Capitalism

Karl Marx and Max Weber are both sociologists and identified the development of capitalism in the social structure as a growth for creation that altered the quality of human interaction. Although Marx and Weber have both focused their study on capitalism, the way that they view capitalism is where the two sociologists differ. Karl Marx has a variety of reasoning behind explaining why he does not approve of capitalism. One of the reasons why Marx disapproved of capitalism is because he saw capitalism causing alienated labor. "Alienated labor is thus objectively inherent in the economic and social organization of capitalism; it is entwined with the production objectives (e.g., profit) and processes of capitalism and processes of capitalism such as the division of labor" (Dillon, 2019, p. 53). Marx viewed capitalism as a social arrangement that was leading up to social and structured inequality, poverty, and exploitation, therefore this has Karl Marx disapproving of capitalism. Marx's argument about economic inequality states that the promotion of wages does not do anything to reconstruct the structural inequality that is essential in capitalism. Dillion (2019) says, "Marx argues that historical change, that is, change in the material conditions of society and in how economic-social relations are organized, emerges out of the perceived contradictions in existing economic and social arrangements" (pg. 37). Even though capitalism was being introduced and used in the mid-nineteenth century, Marx accurately foresaw that capitalism would be a powerful global force and become the world's top economy. Karl Marx had also predicted that the contradictions would be the guide for class consciousness, which is, the wage-workers' recognition of their class exploitation underneath capitalism.

Max Weber and Karl Marx took different approaches to capitalism, where Weber viewed capitalism as a symbolic interactionist in a micro view and Karl Marx saw capitalism as a conflict approach in a macro view. On the other hand, Max Weber places a heavy emphasis on religion when he identifies his way of capitalism, on the contrary Dillon (2019) mentions, “But unlike Marx, he paid a lot of attention to the cultural and noneconomic motivations underlying social action.” Max Weber associated capitalism to the protestant work ethic of capitalism. “In analyzing religious content, Weber discussed and compared Christianity, ancient Judaism, and Islam - the world’s major God- centered religions; and Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, religions that affirm an impersonal cosmocentric force” (Dillon, 2019, p. 115). The sociologist demonstrated both culture and economics of his interpretive understanding of capitalism with his best-known book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* published in 1904-1905. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* summarizes how religious beliefs and other-worldly concerns shape this-worldly material practices. The topics of this-worldly are concerns about economic activity, material acquisition, and wealth. Other-worldly focuses their concerns on the afterlife and salvation. Weber noticed that Protestants were more likely than Catholics to have business occupations. The spirit of early modern capitalism was distinguished by hard work and asceticism, and not by greed or self-indulgence. Dillon (2019) states:

Weber argues, the earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the results and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling. The idea duty in a calling is what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture. (p. 118)

Comparison on Marx and Weber’s Capitalism

Both ideals of Marx and Weber have similarities about capitalism and how they affect the structure and functionality of society. The two sociologists accounted for the growth and development of capitalism that brought shifts into the social structure as the expansion of production that alters the quality of human interaction. Although they both mentioned how their community is divided, with Marx having his classes be the bourgeoisie and proletariat and Weber referring to his community as the upper, middle, and lower class; there is some similarity in defining the different classes. For example, the upper class, in Weber's sense, is similar to Marx's sense of the bourgeoisie. Another example is in Weber's sense that the lower class is alike with Marx's definition of the proletariat.

Marx and Weber's View on Class.

Karl Marx's perspective on capitalism as a system that is based on a structured social class inequality and will be broken down into two parts, the bourgeoisies and the proletariats. Karl Marx predicted that the bourgeoisie were the ones in the capitalist society who would be the owner of the means of production. These productions included building factories, land, oil wells, and railroads. The proletariat were the wage-workers who would work for the capitalist production demands. The proletariat's duties provided revenue for the bourgeoisie's pockets allowing them to expand on their private property. By upkeep this process, it is maintaining the capitalist system of inequality. Marx did believe that developing a communist state would be the result of overthrowing the ideal of capitalism because of communism's ideal of elimination of the social classes. Marx also argued for universal emancipation meaning that the proletarian revolution would create the emancipation of all people, not just the working class.

Initially Max Weber looks at class as groups and has the belief that individuals who have similar life chances are a result of property, income, and labor market opportunity. The major

determining factor of what economic class someone is in is based on their property ownership. Weber has the belief that social status and economic class both work closely together as an intersectionality. There are several claims that benefit from being in a higher socio-economic status, which are based on: family ancestry, education, club membership, and style of life. Weber acknowledges ownership of property and the lack of property to be a determining factor of differentiating class. Whereas Marx has established that there are two social-economic classes, on the opposing side, Weber's socio-economic class is more in-depth with having four socio-economic classes. The four social-economic classes that Max Weber has developed are: the working class, which were the laborers; the petty bourgeoisie, who were the self-employed, grocers, and craftsman; the property-less intelligentsia and specialist, whom were the white-collar employees and civil servants; and the classes that were obtained privilege through property and education.

Relevance of Class and Capitalism Today.

In today's society of capitalism from Karl Marx's point of view, we have options. Not only that there are options but thought processes, as well, Dillon (2019) states, "The ideas we have about what is normal, and about what's inane and what's cool, and whether, for example, to go to college and what to do afterwards, do not just pop into our heads out of nowhere" (p. 61). Topics that come up from our everyday experience ranging from what we think to how we think is still relevant in today's world. Capitalism in today's world is having the ability to shop wherever. An example of capitalism today would be having the ability to go grocery shopping at either Walmart, Kroger, or Food Lion. Today in terms of class, using Weber's insight, we still use the ownership of property as a determining factor of class. In today's world we still rank people whether they are in higher, middle, or lower socio-economic class. An example in today's world

is the economic inequality for the classes. Studies have found that there is an economic inequality in gender pay, where women earn approximately 60% of what men make.

References

Dillon, M. (2019). *Introduction to sociological theory : theorists, concepts, and their applicability to the twenty-first century*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.