

Ainsley Patrick

2/5/18

Dr. Kaitland Byrd

SOC 3004

### **Marx and Weber on Societal Concerns**

Karl Marx and Max Weber remain generally regarded as key theorists in the field of sociology. However, they differ on their appraisals of overall society and the functions within. Marx tends to remain more idealistic while Weber leans towards a more individualistic and cultural evaluation of social functioning. Marx focuses on the study of class struggles while Weber focuses on understanding the intentions of various social actions. Both theorists made important contributions to the field that continue to impact the way we view, evaluate, and participate in current sociological analysis.

Class impacts individuals' perceptions of overall society. Marx maintains a unique perspective, arguing that "The history of all hitherto history of society is the history of class struggles" (1848:1). He focuses on two major classes: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Marx indicates that whoever holds the means of production is the class that holds the power in society, in this case, the bourgeoisie. As a result of the bourgeoisie holding power, the proletariat are forced to sell their labor as a means of survival. Therefore, individuals in the proletariat lose their species being, or their self-identity. Without species being, proletariat remain alienated and in the lower class. On the contrary, Weber views class as a continuum, not two extreme poles. This view allows for the creation and acceptance of a middle class. Weber believes that class is the result of intended action and not a sole result of chances in the market. He states, "Class

situation' and 'class' refer only to the same (or similar) interests which an individual shares with others" (302). Weber indicates that different classes exist based on interests including property classes, social classes, and commercial classes. All of these classes serve as a common area of interest for individuals. In addition, Weber sees that class is not a bound social form and the individuals can move classes based on their abilities and knowledge. He views class as a major predictor of life chances. Class is determined by life chances coupled with one's knowledge, education, and skills.

Status indicates how society views an individual's role in society. Marx indicates that status is directly tied to class. Therefore, the higher class, the bourgeoisie, claim and hold higher status. Individuals could not escape status without escaping class. On the other hand, Weber expresses the idea that social status is not tied to class. Instead, an individual's social status is tied to his or her lifestyle. Weber states that "Both propertied and propertyless people can belong to the same status group..." (932). For example, a preacher may have high status but may make less money and reside in a lower class. In this way, status and class may fluctuate based on life chances, lifestyle choices, and intended actions. Status is a result of knowledge, abilities, and the perception of others in society. Individuals with a lower status generally have a lesser ability to exercise power.

Power is the way to accomplish tasks in a specific way. Marx argues that power resides with the individuals who hold control over the means of production in a society. He states that "In buying the labouring power of the workman, and paying his value, the capitalist, like every other purchaser, has acquired the right to consume or use the commodity bought" (3). In this way, power coincides with class and status. Therefore, the bourgeoisie, or in this case, the

capitalist, possess higher status, higher class, and more power than that of the proletariat class. Contrarily, Weber argues that power relies on the ability to obtain what one wants despite the resistance he or she may face. Therefore, power can transcend class and status based on persuasive ability. For example, a military soldier may have power to have people listen to him, even though he may have lower status than other individuals present. Weber argues that individuals of all backgrounds can possess power of different levels and kinds.

Social inequality refers to the imbalance of power and unequal access to opportunities. Marx contends that as a society grows more capitalistic, the level of social inequality will increase. This view led to the development of the Communist Manifesto. Marx's views are idealistic, therefore, he idealizes a society in which inequality and class struggles do not exist. However, Weber remains concerned about social action. He views inequality as a product of active oppression and the passive continuance of systemic inequality. For example, active oppression may include discriminatory acts towards a child at school. Systemic inequality may include institutions, such as schools, teaching that individuals with disabilities are different and less than the norm. Weber offers the example of systemic inequality: "This monopolization is directed against competitors who share some positive or negative characteristics; its purpose is always the closure of social and economic opportunities to *outsiders*" (342). By systematically removing competition, monopolies can raise prices, making products or services unattainable by some people in society. This furthers the overall distribution of social inequality. He believes that social inequality will continue to occur with the differences between people of different class, status, and knowledge.

The perspectives of Marx and Weber remain alive, although tweaked, in current society. Marx's theory is well known for the basis of the modern concept of communism. However, he is not solely responsible for the modern version of communism because his perspective was an idealist perspective and cannot exist in real society. The World Systems Theory, by Immanuel Wallerstein, came out of the ideas of Marx. This theory argues that history can be understood by understanding the economic relationships among countries. On the other hand, Weber influenced modern sociological study in multiple ways. He influenced the way researchers evaluate class, influencing the emphasis that individuals place on education, knowledge, and skills when analyzing class. Weber also impacted researchers who study the breakdown of major classes into smaller groups. In addition, he is commonly known as the father of sociology, taking a more cultural perspective of class and the inner workings of society.

## References

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