

## The Big Three & Modernization

Sociology was born in an era of change. The world was becoming mechanized, industrialized, and globalized. However, the three great sociologists from the classical era, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, all saw the effects of this change in various ways.

The change I'm speaking about here is modernization. The broadest estimate spans from 1550 to the 20th century, but a more specific period is roughly from 1712, or the invention of the steam engine, to 1930. The steam engine was the beginning of industrialization. It's the first step in mechanization, resulting in a technological revolution that expands our capacity to produce transportation, clothes, food, furniture, and buildings. Technological changes forced people to move to industrial centers where materials, factories, and jobs all coincided.

### **Marx's Modernization**

Marx's view of modernization depends on the shift he observed from feudalism to capitalism. As the material forces of society changed from farmers to factories, so did our social and economic structure. Marx's first overarching theory is regarding economic forces. Marx believes that the economy is the dominant influence in all societies; he saw economics as the driving force that determines the structure of a society. The dependent variable here or the outcome was which ideas were dominant, honor and loyalty in feudalism, or innovation and hard work under capitalism. Marx succinctly states the theory in his now famous line, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx & Engels, 1932: 89). What changes in this theory is the epoch one finds themselves in. Under feudal lords, the ruling intellectual ideas are often honor and loyalty. Under capitalism, the ruling ideas are those

of hard work, dedication, and innovation. In Marx's time, modernization acted as the independent variable; the dominant economic system shifted from feudalism to capitalism. Thus changing the ruling intellectual ideas in Marx's society.

## **Alienation**

Next is the result of capitalism becoming the modern economic system. How did Marx view modernization's effects? For Marx, the implications of modernization were capitalism's rise and the consolidation of property and power in the hands of the few. The first big argument is alienation. Marx views labor or productive activity as essential to human existence, and under capitalism, the labor becomes perverted or alienated. "For labor, *life activity, productive life*, now appear to man only as *means* for the satisfaction of a need, the need to maintain his physical existence" (Marx, 1844: 76). The stripping away and repurposing of our labor toward essentially useless products (for the worker) alienates them from the product of production. Marx finds it easy to assume that once alienation from the product is established, alienation from the process must follow. He states, "Consequently, if the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, and the activity of alienation" (Marx, 1844: 75). To Marx, work must not fulfill one's desires, which is easy to envisage; the second requirement is that it is forced labor. The worker works for the means to their existence, the means being money and the existence being food, shelter, and water. Labor is laborious, unenjoyable, tedious, and is not done for the resulting product of labor. If the labor fits these prerequisites, congratulations, your labor is alienated. The variation for all of alienation, whether it's from one's humanity or the product, is simply whether one's labor is alienated or not, which must come before any alienation from the product or person. The three

dependent variables observed here are alienation of labor, alienation from the process, and product of production. Although it's linked to an inextricably long line of processes and variables, modernization is the 'ultimate' independent variable, which allows capitalism to rise and leads to alienation.

The fourth form of alienation is predicated on the belief that "productive activity" or labor is essential to our "species-life" or the part that makes us, us. From this belief, we can see that alienated labor has alienated our species-life and productive activity into meaningless labor. The alienation of labor realized through self-consciousness makes our life activity just a means for our existence (Marx, 1844: 76). Our nature is lost, and we become alienated from ourselves and our own humanity. Labor is thus just a means for existence, but since labor is our nature or our species-life, losing that labor alienates us from ourselves, our mind, and our nature. When one confronts this reality, one also confronts the reality of every other worker in the system. Marx doesn't spend much time on this version of alienation, but that loss of self-respect and appreciation for your own labor is reflected onto other workers. The importance of other workers and their labor is lost, collaboration is never encouraged, and separation of workers is encouraged. The alienation of labor is only possible under a capitalistic system which was spurred on by modernization. Thus, the independent variable is whether one's labor is alienated which is preceded by modernization. Making it like the grandfather independent variable in this scenario.

## **Exploitation**

Finally, we arrive at Marx's most famous argument. Marx's belief is that the capitalist mode of production causes the exploitation of workers. Modernization entails this transition to

capitalism and the emergence of the bourgeoisie. Marx saw the logic of capitalism as dependent on a rampant increase in capital. In *The Communist Manifesto*, he states, “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe” (Marx & Engels: 77). The unending nature of the bourgeoisie’s desire for profits leads to an alarming relationship regarding the payment of workers. Which happens to be the dependent variable in this argument, whether and how much one is paid for their labor. The independent variable is the mode of production, a capitalist mode of production precedes exploitation. First, the concept of socially necessary products or factory-necessary products is the immediate goal of a factory or product-producing plant. Factories always want to produce enough products to sell and make enough money to continue functioning for another day. If the bourgeoisie had a love for equality and wished to spread wealth, then workers and the owner would split the rest of the day’s profits. However, this isn’t the case; any surplus product is appropriated by the owner and sold, and all profits then go to the owner or the business itself under the guise of ‘investment.’ Marx called this process exploitation even though we may view it as the economically sound strategy for an investor.

### **Capitalism’s Course**

Marx thought the two aforementioned effects of capitalism, alienation, and exploitation would lead to an exorbitant amount of wealth accumulated by capitalists, or the bourgeoisie. The independent variable is the implementation of alienation and exploitation within the business. The dependent variable is the level of wealth a capitalist has accumulated. Marx believed the process of proletarianizing would reduce the whole middle class to the same working-class skill level. He writes, “The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks

of the proletariat are more and more equalized, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labor, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level" (Marx & Engels, 1848: 81). Mergers, buy-outs, and mechanization of production processes all help consolidate the wealth into fewer companies and fewer owners. Through this workers become consolidated geographically and economically a coincidence Marx thought would lend its hand to the revolution.

Marx's final argument was of course, envisioning the end of capitalism. A revolution to overthrow the world's exploitation of the working class. However, before it happened, Marx thought the proletariat had to become self-conscious of their position in society. Little by little, conflicts between the proletariat and bourgeoisie would break out, tiny riots snowballing into larger ones. Marx writes, "Thereupon, the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts" (Marx & Engels, 1848: 81). The awareness of exploitation and alienation would slowly grow among the proletariat leading to these minute revolutions Marx mentions. A second type of conflict would arise, and the growing number of products would stand unpurchased in warehouses, filling up for no customers. For, workers are reduced to just the means of existence, never a surplus that provides them the means to purchase luxury products. That phenomenon Marx believed would lead to periodic economic crises, where the buying power of the proletariat became so minuscule that the products of labor weren't being sold, leading to business failure. Although slightly unclear the dependent variable is class conflict, whether political or economical. The independent variable is the level of exploitation and alienation. If a

capitalist system were to hold back, pay a bit better, and value skilled workers, then it may not end up in the spot described by Marx.

## **Durkheim's Modernization**

The Durkheimian view of modernization differs quite drastically from Marx's. Durkheim believed modernization and capitalism were leading to an increased division of labor and increased individuality. He states it quite openly in the *Division of Labor in Society*: "We need have no further illusions about the tendencies of modern industry; it advances steadily towards powerful machines, towards great concentrations of forces and capital, and consequently to the extreme division of labor" (Durkheim, 1893: 36). Modernization and the unstoppable forces of industrialization and mechanization, Durkheim thought, would lead to increased differentiation in jobs. This realization for Durkheim led to a term he referred to as dynamic density. Increased differentiation between jobs and increased interaction between individuals with differing occupations equals dynamic density. The other modernizing result was a change of consciousness that Durkheim explains; "There are in each of us, as we have said, two consciences: one which is common to our group in its entirety, which consequently is not ourself, but society living and acting within us; the other, on the contrary, represents that in us which is personal and distinct that which makes us an individual (Durkheim, 1893: 38). Pre-modern societies had a larger collective conscience, their basis of solidarity is similarity; modernization thus caused an increase in individuality in Durkheim's view. Dynamic density is essentially the result of modernization changing our dominant consciousness to an individualist one as opposed to a collective one.

## **The Result of Consciousness-Shifting**

A change in consciousness, Durkheim felt, affected everything social. The organization of society had been completely upended by modernization. The independent variable here is the type of consciousness a society has, which is heavily dependent on whether it's modernized or not. The low amount of differentiation between customs, traditions, beliefs, and occupations in pre-modern societies induced many of the differences between modern and pre-modern. Dynamic density, individuality, and the division of labor all stem from modernization, resulting in what Durkheim called 'organic solidarity. He felt the interdependence of society was built off our differences. "In societies with organic solidarity, less competition and more differentiation allow people to cooperate more and to all be supported by the same resource base" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 89). The division of labor also led to an increased interdependence. No longer could anyone take the role of another if the worker died; we are all specialized to such an extent that we require one another. Our solidarity, organic solidarity, is based on our interdependence. Then, from there, we can surmise that the dependent variable here is whether a society has organic solidarity or not, and the variation is determined by modernization.

### **Suicide in Modernization**

Durkheim had noticed in his time that there were stark contrasts between suicide rates among different groups, particularly religious groups. Similar to Marx's alienation, Durkheim found four different forms of suicide within society. All with varying independent variables but the same dependent variable: an increase in suicide rates. Before delving into the four forms, integration and regulation must be defined. I'll let Ritzer do it for me. "Integration refers to the strength of the attachment that we have to society. Regulation refers to the degree of external constraint on people" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 93). The first form of suicide is referred to as egoism. The

independent variable is the level of integration one feels toward society and how society feels toward them. Durkheim felt societies force us to cling to life because we put society's interests before our own. Durkheim writes, "For they cling to life more resolutely when belonging to a group they love, so as to not betray interests they put before their own" (Farganis<sup>7th</sup>, 2013: 65). What causes this type of suicide to become prevalent is an exponential increase in individuality and a decrease in integration within the group. Individuality will affect what one values. Our values are instilled through society in Durkheim's eyes, we are integrated. We cling to it as a place to find morals and the drive or reason for living. When the importance of society is lost in one's eyes, so are the goals for our actions, the things that drive us and motivate us to live. This leads to an increase in Durkheim's egoistic suicide.

Next, anomic suicide. Contrasting to egoistic suicide, it's when the group under-regulates the self. Oftentimes, this happens after a large-scale disruption, negative or positive, think 9/11, the 2008 recession, or post-war WWII. Durkheim saw a difference in humans and animals that was dependent on reflective ability. The animal only needs material conditions satisfied, and it is happy. However, humans can look beyond and imagine more for themselves. There is no physical limit to our satisfaction; as human history showcases, we have constantly increased our material existence. Yet, one may not be satisfied by the modern fares available, even if they're tenfold of a pre-modern human. What then regulates desire? In the eyes of Farganis, only society could: "Either directly and as a whole, or through the agency of one of its organs, society alone can play this moderating role; for it is the only moral power superior to the individual, the authority of which he accepts" (Farganis<sup>7th</sup>, 2013: 68). When the aforementioned disruptions occur, currents of what Durkheim called 'anomie' spread through society. Ritzer describes them

as “moods of rootlessness and normlessness” (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 95). These scenarios are all-too-common and quite imaginable. A worker or banker is cut loose during the 08 recession; maybe they even lose their home due to foreclosure. Regulation, being the independent variable, goes down. One no longer feels like society needs them, and this is what can lead to an increase in suicide rates (the dependent variable).

The third type, altruistic suicide, is the experience of being over-integrated into the group. The primary example of this type of suicide is found among first responders, the military, and most public service jobs. Oftentimes, these individuals “feel that it is “their duty to do so” (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 95). One believes in the greater good, and the knowledge that their sacrifice will mean something is often the motivating factor in this type of suicide. The independent variable here is integration; altruistic suicide occurs when one is integrated so heavily that one would do anything for the sake of the group, even the highest order, sacrificing one’s own life. The dependent variable is once again an increase in altruistic suicides.

The fourth and final type of suicide is called fatalistic suicide. Although it’s not mentioned much by Durkheim himself, this may be one of the most common types of suicide. Fatalistic suicide occurs when regulation is excessive; this is the independent variable, whether regulation is high or low. Durkheim writes, “persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline” (quoted in Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 96). We observe fatalistic suicide often in the most oppressed areas of society, prisons, work camps, and going back in history, slavery. The group regulates an individual too much, deciding when they eat, what is valuable to them, what work to do, and who to talk to. The absurd strictness and feelings of suffocation that society puts on these individuals are too uncomfortable, stressful,

and intense to disregard. Leading one to suicide.

Modernization affected every one of these types of suicides. Egoistic suicide is perhaps most directly affected due to the society-wide shift toward a more individual consciousness. The conscience shift is directly attributable to modernization, rationalizing, and intellectualizing society, has increased individuality to an unprecedented level. Modernization will also lead to increased disruptions that send currents of anomie throughout society. Modernization allowed the rise of capitalism which in turn, causes a lot more societal disruptions than previous modes of production. Capitalism's necessity to expand and utilize more resources forces territorial expansion. Countless wars that could be considered disruptions have stemmed from this resource-driven warfare. Iraq war, Afghanistan war, Chingha Islands war, and many more.

### **Weber's Modernization**

Weber's conception of modernization has a similar 'rise' in one facet of the human experience. Contrasted to Durkheim's belief in the rise of individuality, Weber saw rationalization as the dominant change in the human psyche. Modernization to Weber was an independent variable when it came to the organization of society. The dependent variable is the bureaucratic organization, the extent to which a society has implemented the traits or rules of a bureaucracy. Weber believed that bureaucracy had six characteristics, and the variation of the dependent variable was the extent to which an organization had implemented the six characteristics. Bureaucracy has jurisdictional areas, a formal division of labor between employees. There are principles of office hierarchy, a formal chain of command. In bureaucracy everything is recorded and written down, companies and governments have files, handbooks, and legislation. Office management is present, and specialized positions have formal training to be eligible for them.

Full-working capacity is utilized in bureaucracy payment is through salary, not per product or a share of the profits, a dedicated static salary. Finally, general rules are in place that must be learned to know an office's proceedings. What affects the implementation of these characteristics is modernization. Modernizing forces that amp up the scale of society, via size, efficiency, or diversity, all impact the level of bureaucratic organization (Class Slides, February 21, 2024).

### **Bureaucracy Forever**

Weber thought inherent in the character of bureaucracy was its durability. The outcome or dependent variable is whether the powers of an organization are durable or ephemeral. The independent variable is how one organizes an office or society, whether it is bureaucratic or traditional organization. Farganis describes the traits of bureaucracy: "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 administration, and especially in its monocratic form" (Farganis, 2013: 85). Weber believed these traits that are raised from implementing the previous characteristics allows the bureaucracy to last longer than traditional organization. The objectivity of bureaucracy gave it an unprecedented ability to be efficient. Furthermore, it's disconnection to humans, the ability it has to be purely business, without room for interpretation, and free from consideration of humanity. "Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it 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" (Farganis, 2013: 85). Weber thought modern society required this type of organization. Our

diversity of labor, beliefs, and identities required stringent rules. Farganis writes, “The more complicated and specialized modern culture becomes, the more its external supporting apparatus demand the personally detached and strictly objective *expert*, in lieu of the lord of older social structures who was moved by personal sympathy and favor, by grace and gratitude” (Farganis, 2013: 86). The rigidity of bureaucracy is contrasted with a feudal system where the gifts of grace or charisma could sway a lord. Bureaucracy Weber believed, separated the individual from the deliberator of tasks so that they only have one option, enforce the bureaucracy. “In the great majority of cases, he is only a small cog in a ceaselessly moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march” (Farganis, 2013: 88). Finally, the individual ability to change or revolutionize a system is lost in bureaucracy, the individual is attached to the process, through financial security and ideological comfort, making the bubble of bureaucracy hard to burst.

## **Weber and Power**

Weber’s work is often described as an unending dialect with the ghost of Marx. Nowhere is it more prominent than his multidimensional view of power. Weber’s dependent variable is whether power is concentrated or distributed. The independent variables are the varying levels of power that class, status, and party hold in a society. Marx believed that class was always and forever the most dominant and influential form of power. However, Weber believes that class, status, and party constitute one’s power, with the party being the most powerful. Each also was found in its own sphere of power. Class was related to the economy, status was related to the culture, and party was related to the politics of a culture. Weber believed class took more than a common economic standing like Marx did. The class must first

be found in the same class situation, first, a shared causal factor in their life conditions, second the causal factor must be of exclusively economic origin, third, that these coincide under a commodity or labor-based market. These factors result in a class situation or market situation. Status doesn't necessarily constitute a community but is rather a group of people with a similar level or style of existence, often luxurious. A good way to think about the differences is that "Status relates to consumption of good produced, whereas class relates to economic production" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 127). However, the connection is discernible: if one drastically improves their class situation through their economic production, often they can end up in higher echelons of status groups. Parties were of a different order; they existed in the political sphere and were considered the most organized of the three. They also had the most variation in Weber's eyes; Ritzer writes: "Weber thinks of parties very broadly as including not only those that exist in the state but also those that may exist in a social club" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 128). Parties often represent class or status groups, such as unions, political parties, or environmental action groups. Furthermore, arguably the most important aspect is the aim of parties, "Whatever they represent, parties are oriented to the attainment of power" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013: 128). This orientation gives them dominance over class and status. Weber saw the party as the driving force of action that status and class groups want to do. Viewing power from this multidimensional lens allows one to step away from the economic determinism that Weber thought depreciated Marx's work, and that is why he developed this view. Finally, Weber believed modernization often preceded the formation of these groups. He writes "Parties are, therefore, only possible within communities that are societalized, that is, which have some rational order and a staff of persons available who are ready to enforce it"

(Weber, N/A: 102). Weber thought rational organization must come before a party could be formed.

## **Partying with Bureaucracy**

In a world dominated by bureaucratic organization, the question arises, how do we ever change it. The durability of bureaucracy may make it impenetrable to disruption, but that also means it's hard to change when societal values shift. Well, this is the reason Weber believed that party would come to be the most dominant dimension of power. The dependent variable is what dimension of stratification systems is most powerful, either class, status, or party. What changes is whether or not bureaucracy is the dominant form of social organization (independent variable). Compared to the economic dimension of class or the culturally relevant status standing, Weber writes, "Parties live in a house of power" (Weber, N/A: 102). Parties had directed action since parties both existed in and yet were themselves a bureaucracy. Parties are often organized around a specific problem or goal; their creation is dedicated to a cause. The interesting thing about them is the goals are often derived from class situation or status situation, and the followers of parties often come from these two other dimensions (Weber, N/A: 102). The parties that come up in modern society are often of a political nature. This allows parties to live in and affect the world of bureaucracy not just be dominated by it like, status, or class. Finally, party only becomes the dominant dimension when existing in a bureaucratically organized society, bureaucracy is often preceded by modernization, once again showcasing how for many of these theorists, the first independent variable is modernization.

## **Disenchanted with Society**

The final argument for our final theorist. Weber was not enchanted enough to write extensively about it, but it's an intriguing theory. Weber believed that society had become disenchanted vs being enchanted, for Weber enchantment was a sacred meaning beyond one's conditions for existence. The independent variable is whether a society has gone through modernization or not. Living in a rational scientific society leads to disenchantment, and pre-modern primitive societies lead to enchantment. Weber argued that pre-modern societies have infinitely more knowledge of their material conditions. The pre-modern human, knows how to make their tools, knows how to find food, yet we, do not understand the behavior of our computers or cars. For Weber, the differences in knowledge between the two was that one could learn, how a car or computer works at any time (Weber, 1919: 139). Disenchantment for Weber was "that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation" (Weber, 1919: 139). No longer would one look to a shaman or priest for answers. They could do so through technology. Modernization and, chiefly, intellectualization have left us indifferent to any mysteries of our world. As a result, our work and achievements are placed into the ever-expanding line of progress, and we die with mysteries unsolved, knowing we could have solved them just by giving more time.

## **Comparisons**

The first interesting difference between two theorists comes from Durkheim and Marx. Durkheim's arguments often resemble those of Russian dolls, layers that all have a similar core: modernization. Durkheim's "ultimate" independent variable that is, what is at the root of an argument, what historically causes the facets that allow the theory to rise, is modernization.

Modernization increases dynamic density, increases division of labor, increases individuality, and so on. The unique effect he points out is the increase of individual consciousness, contrasting pre-modern collective consciousness. The contradiction arises in Marx's forethought on the results of capitalism. Marx explored the effects of capitalism extensively in his day, but he also attempted to predict the future. Marx's vision of the proletarianizing of all workers except the bourgeoisie stands in direct contrast to Durkheim's view of the rise of individualism. "In effect, on the one hand, each one depends much more strictly on society as labor is more divided; and, on the other, the activity of each is much more personal as it is, more specialized" (Durkheim, 1893: 38). Durkheim's quote simultaneously explains why organic solidarity is predicated on interdependence. However, the latter portion suggests that everyone's job would become more unique and specialized, compared to pre-modern society. This is essential to Durkheimian modernization, the division of labor is increased. In direct contrast, Marx writes, "The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalized, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labor, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level" (Marx & Engels, 1848: 81). Marx's terminology is a word off Durkheim's opting for distinctions instead of divisions. Marx and Durkheim seem to be polar opposites on this front. Funnily enough, Durkheim was correct, even though his predictions of the future are far less analyzed. New skills have cropped up, such as Excel, file management, IT, data analysis, programming, GIS, and other unique computer software requiring extensive training. The point being, we have not become a skill-less, single-occupation society. The division of labor only increased with further modernization, something Marx did not predict.

The second connection is between Marx and Weber. Weber's view of power combined class, status, and party. To Weber, the party becomes the most dominant form due to bureaucratic organization caused by modernization. Parties become the only dimension able to influence bureaucracy effectively. However, Marx always saw class as the dominant form, ignoring other facets of power. If Marx had discussed with Weber or knew of Weber's view, he may have contended that class would still become the most dominant dimension of stratification. Marx may have predicted that by lining the pockets of those highest within the party dimension, the elites of the class dimension could effectively rule the party dimension without ever revealing themselves. His prediction would have been entirely accurate, in the form of lobbying. Often the worst most destructive sectors of capitalism lobby the most, as shown in the following quote, "The oil and gas industry spent about [\\$124.4 million lobbying the federal government](#) in 2022, according to an OpenSecrets analysis of lobbying disclosures" ([Cloutier](#), 2023).

Another comparison could be the fabricated notions of rationality which are, speed, calculability, and efficiency. Weber considers these the tenets of rationalization yet he creates this theory in an era where rationality has a definition decided by the ruling class (the Marx theory).