21.2E: Capitalism, Modernization, and Industrialization

Sociologists Weber, Marx and Durkheim envisioned different impacts the Industrial Revolution would have on both the individual and society.

Learning Objectives

- Compare the similarities and differences between Weber's Rationalization, Marx's Alienation and Durkheim's Solidarity In relation to the Industrial Revolution

Key Points

- Weber imagined that an increasing rationalization of society would lead to man being trapped in a iron cage of rationality and bureaucracy.
- Marx believed that capitalism resulted in the alienation of workers from their own labor and from one another, preventing them from achieving self-realization (species being).
- Finally, Durkheim believed that industrialization would lead to decreasing social solidarity.
- Bureaucracy is a type of organizational or institutional management that is based upon legal-rational authority. Weber believed that industrialization was leading to a growing influence of rational ideas and thought in culture, which, in turn, led to the bureaucratization of society.
- Karl Marx understood species being to be the original or intrinsic essence of the species. A simplified understanding of species being is that it is a form of self-realization or self-actualization resulting from fulfilling or meaningful work.
- Durkheim imagined that industrialization would lead to a decrease in social solidarity, which can be defined as a sense of community. He referred to this decrease in social solidarity as anomie, a French word for chaos.
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• Durkheim referred to the decrease in social solidarity resulting from industrialization as anomie, a French word for chaos.
• Industrializing societies would be characterized by specialization in that individuals would occupy different roles and occupations in a given society. According to Durkheim, specialization would lead to interdependence between the various components of society. He referred to this interdependence as organic solidarity.
• Societies exhibit mechanical solidarity when the source of its cohesion is the homogeneity of its individuals in terms of their work, educational and religious training and lifestyles.

Key Terms

• **species being**: Karl Marx understood species being to be the original or intrinsic essence of the species, which is characterized by pluralism and dynamism: all beings possess the tendency and desire to engage in multiple activities to promote their mutual survival, comfort and sense of inter-action. A simplified understanding of species being is that it is a form of self-realization or self-actualization resulting from fulfilling or meaningful work.
• **anomie**: Alienation or social instability caused by erosion of standards and values.
• **alienation**: Emotional isolation or dissociation.

As Western societies transitioned from pre-industrial economies based primarily on agriculture to industrialized societies in the 19th century, some people worried about the impacts such changes would have on society and individuals. Three early sociologists, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Emile Durkheim, envisioned different outcomes of the Industrial Revolution on both the individual and society and described these effects in their work.

**Weber and Rationalization**

Max Weber was particularly concerned about the rationalization of society due to the Industrial Revolution and how this change would affect humanity’s agency and happiness. Weber’s understanding of rationalization was three-fold: firstly, as individual cost-benefit calculations; secondly, as the transformation of society into a bureaucratic entity; lastly, and on a much wider scale, as the opposite of perceiving reality through the lens of mystery and magic (disenchantment). Since Weber viewed rationalization as the driving force of society and given that bureaucracy was the most rational form of institutional governance, Weber believed bureaucracy would spread until it ruled society.

As Weber did not see any alternative to bureaucracy, he believed it would ultimately lead to an iron cage: there would be no way to escape it. Weber viewed this as a bleak outcome that would affect individuals’ happiness as they would be forced to function in a society with rigid rules and norms without the possibility of change.

Related to rationalization is the process of disenchantment, in which the world is becoming more explained and less mystical, moving from polytheistic religions to monotheistic ones and finally to the Godless science of modernity. Those processes affect all of society, removing “sublime values… from public life” and making art less creative.

**Marx and Alienation**

Karl Marx took a different perspective on the Industrial Revolution. According to Marx, a capitalist system results in the alienation (or estrangement) of people from their “species being.” Species being is a concept that Marx deploys to refer
to what he sees as the original or intrinsic essence of the species, which is characterized both by plurality and
dynamism: all beings possess the tendency and desire to engage in multiple activities to promote their mutual survival,
comfort and sense of inter-connection

In a capitalist society (which co-evolved with the Industrial Revolution), the proletariat, or working class, own only their
labor power and not the fruits of their labor (i.e. the results of production). The capitalists, or bourgeoisie, employ the
proletariat for a living wage, and, in turn, they keep the products of the labor. A major implication of this system is that
workers lose the ability to determine their lives and destinies by being deprived of the right to conceive of themselves as
the director of their actions, to determine the character of their actions, to define their relationship to other actors, and to
use or own the value of what is produced by their actions. This is what Marx refers to as alienation.

Durkheim and Solidarity

Similar to Weber and Marx, Durkheim also believed that the societal changes brought upon by industrialization could
eventually lead to unhappiness. According to Durkheim, an important component of social life was social solidarity,
which can be understood as a sense of community. For example, in his classic study, *Suicide*, Durkheim argued that
one of the root causes of suicide was a decrease in social solidarity, a phenomenon which Durkheim referred to as
anomie (French for chaos). Durkheim also argued that the increasing emphasis on individualism in Protestant religions –
in contrast to Catholicism – contributed to a corresponding rise in anomie, which resulted in higher suicide rates among
Protestants than among Catholics.

According to Durkheim, the types of social solidarity correlate with types of society. Durkheim introduced the terms
“mechanical” and “organic solidarity” as part of his theory of the development of societies in *The Division of Labour in
Society* (1893). In a society exhibiting mechanical solidarity, its cohesion and integration comes from the homogeneity of
individuals—people feel connected through similar work, educational and religious training, and lifestyle. Mechanical
solidarity normally operates in “traditional” and small scale societies. Organic solidarity comes from the interdependence
that arises from specialization of work and the complementarities between people—a development which occurs in
“modern” and “industrial” societies. Thus, organic solidarity is social cohesion based upon the dependence individuals
have on each other in more advanced societies. Although individuals perform different tasks and often have different
values and interest, the order and very solidarity of society depends on their reliance on each other to perform their
specified tasks.