Society

Smith's notion of society

Smith believes that society is created by man in order to facilitate the exchange of goods. A man's self-interest leads him to specialize in certain fields, which allows him to exchange his excess product with other specialized workers. In order to continue this system of the division of labour, mankind creates societies that are increasingly complex and specialized.

Smith also believes that Sympathy, or our innate instinct to identify with other humans, leads to the development of a society. In turn, this "fellow-feeling" leads to the creation of general moral rules, which help advance society as a whole and maximize our individual chances to gain the most approbation (sympathy) from our peers.

Additionally, Smith explains sympathy's role in the operation of society through his concept of Methodological Individualism.

Marx's notion of society

Marx believes that a man is shaped by his society. Although Marx notes that our humanity comes from rational, conscious thought and actions, he also argues that human consciousness first arises out of the need to communicate with our peers. So, according to Marx, language or "Practical Consciousness" is created to satisfy this need for human interaction (see Consciousness). Even though language is first used as a tool in order for humans to communicate with each other, Marx illustrates that, once man has satisfied his (and society's) basic needs, human activity can shift to purely conscious thought. As this type of thought leads to societal advancements and production, consciousness finally becomes productive and meaningful (so it is no longer simply a tool used for communication).

In addition, Marx believes that society is a form of production and associated class relations. In Marx's society, Classes & Hierarchy with specific interests (such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) are especially important. This is very unlike Smith, who believed that society was simply (and created by) a collection of individuals. Marx also utilizes the theory of Dialectical Materialism to explain how society (and history created from class conflicts within that society) works.

Durkheim's notion of society

Durkheim understands society as an organic system comprised of many component parts. Durkheim refers to these component parts as "organs," and some examples are religion, the division of labor, the government, and the individual. The method of observing a subject by the interactions of its component parts is called holism, and Durkheim was a holist philosopher and sociologist. Unlike Smith and Marx, who find logical rules explaining how society operates, Durkheim inductively draws conclusions from the observations that he makes. While Smith centers his theory about society around the individual and Marx around classes, Durkheim starts from society itself. Furthermore, Durkheim believes that society is an entity of its own, or that it is sui generis.

The Progression of Society

Durkheim is not explicit in The Division of Labor in Society, how society came about, but he paints a picture of what he believes it would have looked like. He calls the first society a "horde," the members of which are nearly identical and autonomous people (126). Durkheim looks to the organization of lower societies like the Indians of North America to substantiate his theory of the horde. When the horde ceases to be independent and has become an element in a more extensive group, it becomes a clan; an association of clans forms a segmentary society (127). Segmentary societies, Durkheim explains, are like the annelida worm: if you were to cut the society in half, both halves would be able to survive. Each half would survive because the members comprising segmentary societies are autonomous. Each man satisfies his own needs and relies on nobody else.

An increase in population size and density in segmentary societies cause the societies to first concentrate and then form towns. In towns, townsmen begin cooperating, which introduces the division of labor. Durkheim postulates: "The division of labor varies in direct proportion to the volume and density of societies and if it progresses in a continuous manner over the course of social development it is because societies become regularly more dense and generally more voluminous" (205). This leads to a change in the type of solidarity from mechanical to organic. The solidarity in society is the type of bonds that characterize the relationships between people.

Functions

As mentioned above, Durkheim understands society through its component parts. Each component part fulfills a function that society deems necessary. Durkheim compares society to a complex organism. In this organism, many different internal organs work together, with separate functions, to keep the whole alive and healthy. Society, like the previously described organism, should, according to Durkheim, have separate parts with separate functions that work together to keep the whole healthy.

Relationship between Society and the Individual

For more on the relationship between society and the individual, see Individual.

Societal progression is dependent on the individual. The individual must further the division of labor, increasing the degree to which organic solidarity dominates mechanical solidarity. Furthermore, for society to be healthy, it must avoid social pathologies like anomie and forced division of labor. The burden falls on the individual to avoid such pathologies.

There is also a relationship between the consciousness of each member of society and society as a whole. In the first societies, the collective consciousness dominates, and there is very little room for the individual consciousness. But as society progresses, the individual consciousness grows and overtakes the collective consciousness. There are still commonalities between individuals, but individuals hold beliefs and sentiments that differ from each other. Durkheim explains that the collective consciousness is becoming "increasingly looser," which suggests that the rise in the individual consciousness is a mark of increasing organic solidarity and stronger social bonds.
How Durkheim observes society

One method that Durkheim uses to observe society is through the codified laws of society. Because laws represent a physical record of the bonds that are expected to be maintained in a society, they qualify for Durkheim's "scientific" method. He broadly categorizes all law two types of laws:

- **Repressive**: A repressive law system represents a segmentary society with a mechanical solidarity, which lacks the division of labor. Mechanical solidarity occurs when there is a strong collective consciousness. In such a society, there are laws that are made to prevent a person from doing something which would be considered against the collective consciousness, and therefore detrimental to society. According to Durkheim, in such a society, the individual does not yet exist and does not start to emerge until the arrival of a king or monarch. However, even the arrival of a despot yields minimum individuality as they represent the collective consciousness of the society that they rule (p. 143).

- **Restitutive**: A society with restitutive laws generally has organic solidarity, with more than just a rudimentary division of labor. In such a society, Durkheim observes co-operative laws instead of prohibitory ones. In layman's terms, this generally refers to civil laws as opposed to criminal (penal) laws. These laws indicate this type of society because they show the division of functions and the emergence of the individual which was not seen in a society with mechanical solidarity. In the society with organic solidarity, the sense of collective consciousness has decreased (but still remains to some extent) as the division of labor emerges and strengthens.

Therefore, much of Durkheim's research into different types of societies relies upon the analysis of different types of laws and their relation to the division of labor. The observation of these laws can give insight into what the society is like, the strength of the collective consciousness, and the presence of the individual in society.

**Durkheim's Holistic Medicine for Society**

According to Durkheim, to understand how to maintain the wellness of society we must study how its interrelated parts are fulfilling their functions to promote social solidarity. Vice versa, by pinpointing the specific parts that malfunction, we can diagnose the sickness of society and treat it correspondingly rather than replacing the organism entirely. Durkheim states that the sickness of our modern society under the capitalist system is that there is no social solidarity between the wealthy and the poor, the corporations and the workers. The social unity between the two classes has been replaced by the law of the strongest that rules and a state of warfare (Div. of Labour, p. xxxii). By examining social facts of the capitalist and workers solely economic pursuit, Durkheim concludes the malfunctioning occurs at the working of morality. Because of the over-paced economic development, our society lacks time and social interaction to foster a moral framework (Div. of Labour, p. xxiv) to generate social solidarity in our capitalist system. Although like Marx, Durkheim recognizes that corporations are committing most of the wrongdoing, Durkheim is not in favor of destroying the capitalist class entirely. Durkheim believes that the fault is not that corporations exist but rather that corporations are existing without fully realizing its potential function of promoting social solidarity by acting as the family for its workers (Div. of Labour, p. iv). Durkheim believes that by pinpointing the specific parts that malfunction, we can diagnose the sickness of society and fix the corresponding malfunctions rather than replacing the organism entirely.

**Society for Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau**

Hobbes does not think that man is a social animal by nature. On the contrary, Hobbes believes pre-society men (those in the state of nature) were driven by fear and power, which prohibited any kind of social cohesion. Thus society could not have evolved naturally; it is only possible after men consent to a social contract and form a state. To Hobbs, society and the state must be instituted together.

Hobbes believes men come together and form a society to institute laws which, by restricting the behavior of men, protect people from one another. Furthermore, laws must be enforced by punishment. Since society is not possible without laws and punishments, Hobbes concludes that society is also not possible without some form of governing body, or state, which institutes and executes these. Without subjection to a common power men must be in a state of war.

For Locke, on the other hand, society precedes the state. This claim is perhaps most apparent in chapter 19 of The Second Treatise of Government, titled the Dissolution of Government, where he explains the dissolution of government is not the same as the dissolution of society. The difference between state and society is fundamentally grounded in his ideas about human nature, natural rights, and the setup of the social contract where the people give the state fiduciary power. In other words, Locke thinks society creates order and grants the state legitimacy. The role of the state is to ensure justice is done.

Rousseau disagrees with Locke regarding existence of morality in the state of nature. Rousseau thinks that the savage man in the state of nature cannot comprehend philosophical concepts like morality. Instead, they acts merely on "sluggish passions" and instincts, perhaps with some pity, but not the coherent system of Christian ethics Locke prescribes to everyone, even those in the state of nature. Rousseau then describes how society develops, first based on chance events such as volcanic eruption, and then, as property appears, on laws and other political institutions. But Rousseau maintains that such develops lead to amour propre, or vanity and malicious competitiveness, eventually giving rise to inequality and the fall of human nature. He therefore argues that the so-called "progress" of society is but "decrepitude of species", replete with problems that necessitate a new order of social structure.

Therefore, Rousseau conceives of the social contract and the general will to address existing social problems. His main concern is: what legitimizes a government? Firstly, because morality is absent from the state of nature, legitimate government cannot arise naturally, but has to develop out of an artificial contract amongst people "fit to bear the law". Secondly, Rousseau believes that a government cannot be authorized on force alone, contrary to what Hobbes asserts. He argues that "power does not make right" and submission is "by necessity", not "will". Once the force is removed, so is consent. Since even the strongest may not always have the greatest force, consent by force is unstable. Since a person cannot voluntarily sell him/herself into slavery, forced consent is illegitimate. Therefore, the states at his time were not legitimate, since they are formed upon the force of the strong. The legitimate social contract must assume perfect equality, representing the will of every member. Thus, the general will is the "sum of differences" of individual wills, and by submitting to the general will, the citizen obeys no one other than him/herself. The freedom to obey laws of one's own prescription is what Rousseau calls civil and moral freedom. It is within this legitimate governmental structure that makind can progress, helped by a conducive society for the good of all.

Though Hobbes and Locke differ on the details of what the purpose of society is, they essentially share the view that societies are formed to restrict human behavior. Rousseau's idea of society is further distinct from Hobbes and Locke's in its functioning: society was first formed to execute a common will (i.e. catching a wild animal for food) and society continues to bring men together for a common purpose. Thus to Rousseau society is a positive force which must not be limited to ensuring men's security, but must go beyond that and mobilize men for a certain end.

**Society and Human Freedom**
For all of the authors we have studied thus far, there are certain configurations of society that are most conducive to human freedom. Specifically, we see that depending on how the author's define the psychology of the individual, they see particular political systems as being more appropriate than others. This idea is most evident in Dubois and Marx's arguments, who both describe the individual as being innately social and claim that the ultimate purpose of the individual is to contribute to society as a whole. Marx talks about man as being a "species-being," who is naturally communal. If a man's social relationships are strained, then he is alienated from his "species-being," and will never be free. Likewise, Dubois also describes the individual as having a psychology that is tied up in social forces. The idea of the African American as having a "double-consciousness," that man sees himself through the eyes of others (specifically white culture), illustrates how man is innately social, and that his relationship to other people affects his state of mind. Moreover, we see for both of these authors that unless society is structured in such a way that harmonizes social relationships, man will never be free and will always be in a state of turmoil. Thus, it follows that Marx and Dubois argue for an ideal society in which men complement each other and work towards the greater good of society. Specifically Dubois says that "work, culture, liberty,—all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward teh vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people, the ideal of human brotherhood" (Duboise 7). This idea of "human brotherhood" as being the ideal configuration of society is also reflected in Marx's argument, who says that an individual will only be free when he "recognizes his own forces as social forces." (which in essence is his true nature according to Marx). In summary; for both Marx and Dubois human freedom is only possible under circumstances, i.e. when society harmonizes social relationships. Ultimately their arguments are evolve from their unique picture of the individual psychology.

A great contrast to Dubois and Marx would be Hobbes, who doesn't really believe that individuals are innately social. Rather, in Hobbes point of view, the individual is someone is solely motivated by desires and aversions, and he can really do anything in his own self-interest (including killing other people). Given this different conception of the individual, it follows that Hobbes will have a very different idea of what societal configuration optimizes human freedom. Specifically, in this picture of society, all of the "plurality of wills" (i.e. the diversity of aversions and desires of man) are unified into one singular will, which is that of the sovereign. Essentially in this society, man is free inasmuch as his desires and aversions will not come into conflict with the desires and aversions of another man. For example, a man may love ice cream and be willing to kill another to get it, however, in this ideal society his fear of punishment will prevent him from fulfilling his appetite. Moreover, this society is more conducive to human freedom inasmuch as it is more ordered than the state of nature and makes the world predictable. Individuals can act on their aversions and desires without the fear of unexpected consequences. Thus again, we see how an author's unique conception of the individual determines how he will organize society. What is important to point out is that human freedom means different things for Hobbes, Marx and Dubois because they have a different conception of how the individual functions.

**Society for Sorel and Weber**

Society for Sorel is broken up into class hierarchy, the working class and the bourgeoisie. There also exist parliaments made up by bourgeoisie individuals that represent the interest of the working class when dealing with the bourgeoisie. The working class is wrongly in the assumption that they are negotiating with the bourgeoisie, as there is actually a blurred line between the two classes where there still exists rulers versus the ruled.

Sorel sees a problem in society as there does exist a popular charismatic leader, however he is the only one being creative, all the rest just obey and do not do things on their own. He thinks society should consist of spontaneity where actions are not calculated. This will lead to more freedom and production in society.

Weber views society slightly differently than Sorel although he does bring up the important of a ruler. Weber sees society as one of much democracy with a need for a leader to take control. Bureaucrats would not make good leaders as they cannot take responsibility for their actions and only make decisions by the book. Instead, like Sorel, the leader should be spontaneous and sometime veer away from the rules, looking towards the future in order to be successful. Society needs a big machine or leader that must take control of the democratic state.

**De Beauvoir's View of Society**

The society, as portrayed by de Beauvoir, is where men dominate women, who are restricted to the role of the other. De Beauvoir examines various narratives and stories in history; women have always been distinguished as the facilitator, the character that helps men become great, either by men satisfying their sexual hunger in women or men putting women on a pedestal to idolize. Society, through legal orders and traditions, has made woman only the negative while the man is both the positive and the neutral because man sets the political or social standards in the world; woman is left without reciprocity. Because of these class and social restrictions, woman, for instance, can never be the subject or the leader in political and thus feels excluded from the society; she sees herself as the inessential, whereas the male, having such dominance over the other gender, is on the plane of the essential (The Second Sex, p. 329).

Society has also formed its division of labor based on gender difference. De Beauvoir distinguishes between productive and reproductive functions. Men are mainly responsible for its productive duties, but women bear both however mainly the reproductive one. De Beauvoir puts it; it is impossible to regard woman simply as a productive force: she is for man a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object-an Other through whom he seeks himself (The Second Sex, p. 59). Society has deemed womans reproductive function as a serve or duty to the whole society; her reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity, no less in the social economy than in the individual life, and indeed in some periods, it is more useful to produce offspring than to plow the soil (The Second Sex, p. 58). De Beauvoir names Soviet Russia as the example of a society that has treated women merely as reproductive workers. Men know that they cannot directly compel women into their reproductive duty but to put her in a situation where maternity is for her the sole outcome-the law or the mores enjoin marriage, birth control and abortion are prohibited, divorce is forbidden (The Second Sex, p. 59). According to De Beauvoir, that is exactly what Soviet Russia is imposing. As the paternalistic concepts of marriage is revived in Russia, the woman has been induced to make herself an erotic object: in recent pronouncement female Soviet citizens were requested to pay careful attention to their garb, to use make-up, to employ the arts of coquetry in holding their husbands in fanning the flame of desire (The Second Sex, p. 59).