

Max Weber

Weber is famous for his study of:

1. social stratification
2. understanding of bureaucracy
3. the factors contributing to modern industrial society
4. the effects of religion on the development of capitalism

Underlying stratification, Weber believed that there are a set of **primitive drives or motives** that affect behavior.

What are some basic human motives and needs?

Weber described a basic need for:

1. **food and material comfort**
2. **fear of death and avoidance of pain**
3. **sexual gratification**
4. **membership in a social and moral community**
5. **meaningful view of the world and self-actualization**

Weber did not seek to explain the **psychological** dynamics of these basic motives (this was left to Freud and Mead).

Weber believed that society should NOT be viewed from a single perspective.

Instead, it should be viewed as a mixture of perspectives that vary according to the groups that make up the society (i.e., **stratification**).

What are some ways that society is stratified?

Age, race, sex, politics, geography, willpower, culture, income, education, religion, physical ability, self-control

Weber believed that it is natural for differing **groups** to exist.

Social institutions provide common feelings and beliefs that hold the varying groups together.

What are some social institutions?

education/schools

families

religion

culture

economics

military

politics

Which three would you say are most effective at providing feelings and beliefs that would draw groups together?

The social institutions most important to Weber were **economic (class)**, **political (power)**, and **cultural (status)**.

Weber believed these social institutions affect how a person sees the world and how she/he will act.

Weber developed two methodologies for studying social phenomena that have become famous:

"verstehen" and the **"ideal type"**

Verstehen refers to obtaining an empathetic understanding of what people's subjective meanings are (spending a day "in the shoes" of someone)

What would be an example where Verstehen might be used?

The "ideal type" refers to taking a social concept and describing it in its ideal form.

For example, in the case of a "college student":

What would be the characteristics of the perfect "college student"? That is, the ideal type for a college student?

Weber examined the ideal type bureaucratic organization and compared it to the traditional, "personalistic" form of organization.

Weber began by identifying problems with the traditional, personalistic form:

- lack of guidelines for doing the work
- poor communication from top to bottom
- difficulty coordinating many people
- lack of support from workers

The personalistic procedures for carrying out the work gave way to bureaucratic procedures.

How would you describe the ideal type bureaucracy?

For example, what criteria would be used to hire someone?

Who would get promotions and raises?

Where does a person's "authority" come from?

Which customers would get served first?

Weber's ideal bureaucracy:

- authority is in the "position" not the individual
- clear rules and regulations
- hiring and promotion are based on merit
- salaries are paid for managers to carry out bureaucratic work

Weber described the social conditions that allowed for the development of bureaucracy:

- literary (to maintain rules and records)
- money economy (allowed for salaries instead of paying by barter)
- transportation and good communication (to keep track of workers)
- industrial machinery (replaced scattered handicraft work with factories)

Sociologists today, studying the "ideal type" bureaucracy, have discovered an "informal" bureaucracy or organization.

What might be some characteristics of an informal organization?

Re-thinking Weber's social stratification:

How have we said that Weber tended to stratify society?

By **diverse groups** rather than individuals.

What characteristics might cause people to be in different groups?

Weber focused on three:

- Politics (power groups)
- Economics (classes)
- Culture (status groups)

Weber defined **politics** as "the conflict over who shall control the state"

Weber started several political parties

Weber asked the question:
Why do people carry out the
orders of a leader?

That is:
What characteristics provide
a leader with the legitimacy
needed so that people will
carry out the orders given?

Those identified by Weber
included:

- Tradition (e.g., king)
- Charisma
- Rational-legal authority
(holding a bureaucratic
position that brings with it
specific powers)

Weber viewed **economics** as a
second factor contributing to
the creation of varying social
groups.

Economics was viewed as
influencing:
(1) how people live,
(2) who they associate with, and
(3) their perspective on the
existing social order.

The third factor
identified by Weber as
creating differing groups
was **culture**.

Culture was viewed as the
closest to how people
actually view the world.
People group with others
because they respect
their views (e.g., religious
beliefs).

Another goal of Weber's
was to explain why society
was able to **change from a
feudal to a modern
industrial society**.

Four factors were identified as
helping to develop the
modern industrial society:

1. stable markets (reduced risk of
transportation)
2. available labor (workers free from
slavery or debt to landlords)
3. modern finances (monetary
system, literacy)
4. religion

Regarding **religion**, Weber believed modern industry was facilitated by the evolution from a "communal" or tribal God to a "universalistic" God.

The change broadened the size of the community included in he accepted "solidarity".

A second change was that God came to be viewed as **separate from the physical world**.

This allowed people to look for **rational** explanations for phenomena in the physical world rather than **supernatural**. Scientific investigation became accepted.

A final contribution of Weber is his examination of **religion** and how it has affected the **emergence of capitalism**.

This work was presented in his book: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

His main thesis was that it was the **protestant ethic** that contributed to the **emergence of Capitalism**.

In particular, was the Protestant belief in **predestination**.

That is, the belief that one's destination to heaven or hell was decided at birth.

Due to this belief, people looked for **signs of their destination**.

Being physically "**well-off**" was viewed as a positive sign.

Consequently, people worked hard to gain wealth and this included a keystone to (the spirit of) capitalism, **investing**.

How might this compare to another religion such as Buddhism?

It is argued that the development of capitalism in a country such as India was stalled due to their religion.

