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Theory Assignment 4

Tiffany Neil
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1. Definitions:

a) material vs. non-material social fact

Social fact is a concept created by Durkheim. Social facts are the phenomenon and structures that are created by society. “A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual and external constraint; or which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations” (Durkheim 1982: 59). There are two types of social fact, which are material and non-material. Material social facts are the structural components of society that have tangible effects on the individuals of society. These components are bodies that exist physically and are larger than any individual. “A social fact is identifiable through the power of external coercion which it exerts or is capable of exerting upon individuals” (Durkheim 1982: 56). This means that material social facts are discovered through the effects they have on individuals. Examples of material social facts are the division of labour, the State, and the Church. Non-material social facts do not exist physically. Non-material social facts are norms, morals, beliefs, and values. An example of a non-material social fact is the collective conscience, which is the sum total of values and beliefs held by individuals in society. Non-material social facts are external to the individual and do not have a tangible effect on the individual. For example, there is no physical intervention to stop individuals from breaking norms, which are non-material social fact.

b) collective conscience

Durkheim created the concept of collective conscience. Collective conscience is “[t]he totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life” (Durkheim 1933: 79). In other words, collective

conscience is the sum total of values and beliefs held by individuals in society. It includes ways of acting, thinking, and feeling (Durkheim 1982: 52). The collective conscience is external to the individual and coercive of the individual. It is external in that it is larger than any single individual and exists outside the individual. Collective conscience is endowed with coercive power by virtue that it exercises control over the individual (Durkheim 1982: 52). It forces every individual in society to believe in the beliefs and values of society. Furthermore, individuals internalize the social codes as their own. Individuals believe that the beliefs and values held by the collective conscience are their own beliefs and values and live according to them. For example, individuals look at crime as how not to behave and do not break any laws. The collective conscience is the moral aspect of society and it creates and maintains social harmony.

e) negative vs. positive social control

Durkheim created the concept of social control. Social control are different methods by which society encourages individuals to conform to society's norms. Social control regulates people's behavior. Negative social controls are any regulations which make a person not behave in a certain way. These included social sanctions and other forms of punishment. For example, if a university student plagiarizes in their work, they would be expelled from university for committing the act of plagiarism. The function of punishment of acts that are considered deviant "is to maintain social cohesion intact, while maintaining all its vitality in the common conscience" (Durkheim 1933: 108). Positive social control makes individuals want to act in a specific way. An example of positive social control is the incentive of achieving rewards. For instance, if a good employee gets a promotion, he is being rewarded for his exemplary actions as an employee.

Individuals aim to behave properly for they do not wish to be punished and strive to achieve rewards. In this way, society controls their behavior and social harmony is maintained.

f) fatalistic suicide

Fatalistic suicide is a concept created by Durkheim. Fatalistic suicide is a type of suicide that occurs when there is an excessive amount of regulation. This occurs when individuals find themselves dominated and oppressed. With an excessive amount of regulation, an individual will feel a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. An individual may take their life because a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness is created from the fact that have no power to change the situation that they are in. For example, slaves may commit murder because they have no other method to free themselves from bondage. Another example is someone living in extreme poverty, who may take their life because they do not feel they will ever stop being poor.

g) anomic suicide

Anomic suicide is a concept created by Durkheim. Anomic suicide is a type of suicide that occurs when an individual's integration into society and regulation are low. Low integration and low regulation in society occur in times of rapid social change. Anomic suicide occurs when "the transitory occurrences which disturb the functioning of the collective life without changing its anatomical constitution, such as national crises, economic crises, etc." (Durkheim 1951: 321) In other words, when regulatory social powers are disrupted, confusion is created and normlessness, or anomie, results. Anomie is the breakdown of social morals in society. Anomie can leave individuals feeling vulnerable and confused. When anomie occurs, a person is more likely to

commit suicide. For example, during the stock market crash in the 1930s, people, who valued money, found themselves instantly bankrupt. Many committed suicide because their money, which was what held meaning in their life, was gone. The rapid economic crises that occurred compelled them to commit anomic suicide.

2. a) How does Weber trace the origins/root of capitalism to certain cultural/religious foundations in “Protestant Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism”?

Max Weber traced the origin of capitalism to the protestant faith of Calvinism. This essay will demonstrate how Weber showed that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination created the norms necessary for capitalism. Calvinism created salvation anxiety, which propelled people into action for the salvation of their souls. The results of their actions were the rationalization of economic methods, the legalization of pursuit of profit, and the accumulation of capital, which are all necessary for the existence of rational capitalism.

Capitalism is an economic system that is based on the mass production of goods. Weber believed that in order for capitalism to arise, two conditions needed to be satisfied. These conditions are spirit and substance. The spirit, also called the normative, is the existence of systematic norms that are implanted in society. The proper norms needed for capitalism are norms that create a rational economic spirit that drives people to pursue profit and wealth. The substance, also called the institutional, is the material structures needed to support a capitalist economic system. The substance consists of structures which allow for commerce, such as bureaucracy. The spirit is key to the rise of capitalism, for it creates the desire in people to wish to create the proper structures for capitalism. According to Weber, the spirit arose in the protestant

religion of Calvinism. He was able to trace the origin of this spirit back to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.

In order to understand how the capitalist spirit arose with Calvinism, one must understand the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The doctrine of predestination arose when Calvinism displaced Catholicism. In the Catholic view one can be forgiven for their sins, thereby earning a place in heaven. To be forgiven for a sin, one must have sins absolved by a priest or perform acts of good. What one does throughout their life determines whether they earn a place in heaven or hell. Calvinism went against the Catholic view. In Calvinism, a person's fate is predetermined from birth by God. This means that no matter whether a person does good or evil in life, they have already been chosen to go to heaven or hell. It does not matter what a person does, they cannot change their fate. The result of the doctrine of predestination is salvation anxiety.

Weber developed the concept of salvation anxiety, to conceptualize the anxiety felt by a person trying to cope with the fact that they can do nothing to alter their fate. Salvation anxiety is another important part to the creation of the capitalist spirit, for it compelled people into action. It converts the Calvinist doctrine of predestination from a passive doctrine into an active doctrine. The way people coped with not knowing whether they were chosen to go to heaven or hell was to look for signs of grace. They became driven to search for tangible evidence that they would go to heaven. This search was done through a calling.

The idea of a calling exists in Protestantism. A calling is a duty that a person must perform. Weber was most interested in the type of calling that led individuals to economic activity. A calling gave meaning to people's lives and gave a way to deal with salvation anxiety. Salvation of their souls was the focus of their work. Calvinists viewed "[t]he achievement of

wealth as the fruit of work in a calling as an expression of God's blessing" (Weber 1978: 161).

This means that any positive results from their labour were seen as signs that they were one of the chosen to go to heaven. In this way, the protestant ethic was created and people began to work very hard to achieve their signs of grace. Their work led to increased rationalization, the legalization of pursuing profit, and to a large accumulation of wealth.

With the protestant ethic, people worked hard and engaged in economic activity in order to find God's grace. Through their calling, the Calvinists went out and found improved methods to create wealth. Rational actions are the most productive. Therefore, increasingly more rational and efficient ways of creating wealth were discovered. Methods that were not used before became increasingly important. An example of one of these new methods is bookkeeping, with which one could calculate and predict profits. Factories were also developed and the mass production of goods began. In order for the Calvinists to successfully introduce these new types of rational methods, they needed support from the law.

The protestant ethic, in which the pursuit of wealth is encouraged, shaped the law. The law supported the economic activities that the Calvinists engaged in. For instance, the law supported the exploitation of workers, who were formed by the protestant ethic to be obedient and diligent. As Weber says, "it made it lawful to exploit this specific willingness to work"(Weber 1978: 168). With the protestant ethic, the pursuit of profit was supported through legal ways. At the same time the protestant ethic also supported accumulation of wealth.

The protestant ethic "had the psychological effect of liberating the acquisition of goods from the restrictions of the traditionalist ethic: it burst the shackles confining the profit-motive, in that not only did it make it lawful, it even (...) looked upon it directly as the will of God" (Weber

1978: 160). People were compelled to accumulate a large amount of wealth, for wealth demonstrated God's grace. Using wealth to support a life of idleness was considered evil. The view people had about possessions is that "one must preserve them undiminished for God's glory and increase them by unceasing labour" (Weber 1978: 159). As a result, people amassed large amounts of capital. Therefore, capitalist accumulation resulted from an ascetic compulsion to save (Weber 1978: 162). The accumulation of wealth made it possible for the rise of rational capitalism.

Rational capitalism is a specific type of economic activity. It consists of the use of rational methods for creating wealth. With rational capitalism, the pursuit of profit and wealth occurs through legal means. This type of capitalism could also not exist without the accumulation of capital. As was seen, the rational methods that rational capitalism relies on were discovered by Calvinists working in their callings. The support of the law and the accumulation of capital necessary for the creation of rational capitalism are also attributed to the protestant ethic. In this way, the Calvinism created all of necessary parts for capitalism to exist.

Eventually, rational capitalism no longer needed the religious support that it arose from. "Capitalism in its triumph did not need this support any longer, since it rests on mechanical foundations"(Weber 1978: 171). The rise of bureaucratization and other rational methods helped to support capitalism. People began to pursue wealth, not for salvation of their souls, but simply to accumulate wealth. "In the United States, where it has been given most freedom, acquisitiveness, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends today to be associated with purely competitive passions" (Weber 1978: 171). The need for religion to support capitalism was no longer necessary. Simply the work ethic, in which money is the ultimate goal, remains. The tie

between the protestant ethic and capitalism is, therefore, not readily apparent.

Although, religion is no longer a necessary part of capitalism, one can see how it was once essential to the creation of capitalism. Weber believed that capitalism needed spirit and substance to exist. Realizing that the necessary parts of rational capitalism are rationalization of economic methods, the legalization of pursuit of profit, and the accumulation of capital, Weber was able to trace the origin of capitalism to the Calvinist faith. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination origin of spirit, in which people have unalterable fates, created salvation anxiety. Their salvation anxiety made the Calvinists pursue signs that they were God's chosen through a calling. The idea that money and wealth demonstrated the salvation of souls created the protestant work ethic. Therefore, the protestant work ethic, which was created by the Calvinist faith, provided the spirit needed for the existence of capitalism.

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