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Comparative analysis of economic theory of Karl Marx and max weber

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Abstract

Karl Marx and Max Weber are two genius of their time, who were engaged in propounding the Laws and Principles in Social Science which would be a basis of analysis for the ever changing society; especially Europe. The paper argues on the basic tenets of both German Philosophers, who were either the advocates of Religion which was the root cause of misery of the masses or vehemently supported the idea that Religion has been the contributory factor in Economic progress. The paper is an overview based on the assumptions and observations of Marx and Weber and the assumptions of the other Sociologists and Political Thinkers who in the past examined the two Social Scientists. The paper tries to delineate the relationship between Religion and Economy on one hand and on the other hand examines religion as a tool of exploitation. It's a theoretical and descriptive paper with substantive support of secondary source based references. It is Economic Determinist versus atheist bent and another Social Action Theorist with theistic approach.

Keywords: Religion, economy, exploitation, determinist, social action

Introduction

On Marx

The writings and work of both the thinkers had the influence of their time. Marx being the predecessor of Weber witnessed the turmoil in Europe with a different perspective, whereas the Weber adopted different methodology and analyzed the emerging society with different perspective. Karl Marx was born to the parents who were Jew but were non-religious, however they converted to Christianity. Marx father was a liberal humanist and this had influenced Marx. Later on Marx showed great interest in Hegel's philosophy and was largely influenced by the concept of 'Idea'. The second person who influenced Marx was his friend Friedrich Engel.

On Weber

Weber unlike Marx establishes correlation between Religion and Economy. Weber at a young age read Goethe, and is believed that it had influenced Weber's thought and methodology (Mckinnon: 2010). The other influence which shaped Weber's intellect was his mother who was a devout Calvinist and lead a life of an ascetic. Weber at his young age, while living with his aunt and her husband who was a Historian, got tremendously influenced.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this paper is to analyze two thinkers with different view point.

- The paper analyzes Religion and Economy from the perspectives of both thinkers.
- To draw similarities in the conceptualization of concept and theories.
- To analyze the converging and diverging view points of Marx and Weber.
- To evaluate the prophecies made by two thinkers regarding future society.

Review of Literature

Karl Marx and Max Weber's theories are considered to be pillars of Sociology as they laid the foundation of Sociology with their writings, considered as major contribution to Sociology.

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The theories and ideologies of these two thinkers have compelled many scholars to compare and analyze their work, especially related to Economy. Nisbet (2004) commented for Marx Socialism is inevitable and presocialist societies individuals were alienated from their work and others. For Weber Capitalism and Socialism are manifestation of rationalization (Nisbet: 1996, 2004) ^[10]. Further, Marx criticized division of labour as negative because it forced men into being a part of a 'system.' (Morrison). "One's duty in a calling is what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture, and is in a sense the fundamental basis of it" (Weber).

Marx versus Weber: An Overview

Marx and Weber are the two prominent thinkers who reflected on everything of their time which was affecting and influencing the European society. The paper analyzes and examines the view of both the thinkers on economics and society. It is a critical evaluation and is based on the Historical writings of the two thinkers and the reflection of the Sociologists. Morrison, Coser, Bottomore, Anthony Giddens, Mannheim etc are some of the writers who have deeply analyzed the work of Marx and Weber and accordingly commented. The comments and observations of these scholars is the basis of this research paper.

Views on Capitalism

Marx was influenced by Hegel and Weber by Kant's philosophy. Both of them built their insights on Capitalism as they perceived. Marx wrote against Capitalism when it was in emergent phase, whereas Weber reflected on Capitalism when it got matured and established. It has been observed by the scholars that Marx views are largely based on Classical Political Economist who came with labour theory of the value. Marx identifies 'two hostile' powers (Abraham, Morgan: 1985) which gives labour but alienated to product. One is the 'other man, 'the capitalist, who commands production. The other is the economic system, the market system which governs the behaviour of capital and the process of production. The former is human power and later is inhuman power (Abraham, Morgan: 1985).

The Marx notion on Capitalism is adverse as it evident from the above excerpt. On the other hand if we analyze Weber's view on Capitalism, it is rather positive and encouraging for the champions of Capitalist theory. Nevertheless it cannot be claimed that Weber supported the negatives of Capitalism. Weber in fact links Capitalism and economic progress with Religion (unlike Marx who considers Religion as 'opium of masses'). Weber while examining the relationship between Religion and Economy, explains that Protestant of certain sects, were the chief captains of industry and possessed more wealth and economic means than other religious group. (Abraham, Morgan: 1985).

Marx and Weber on Exploitation in Capitalism

Marx and Weber have differing view regarding exploitation in capitalism. Marx finds capitalism which grows on exploitation. It is inherent in such kind of economy. Weber in contrast to Marx, states that Capitalism is strongly correlated to Protestant Ethics. Fullfilment of duty in worldly affairs is highest form of moral activity. Work hard and save money was advocated by this concept and which in turn led to division of labour and class (Sztomka: 1993). Weber

ascertained harmony between the Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism.

Marx and Weber on Religion

Marx in his writings in "Towards a Critique of the Philosophy of Hegel" Marx states-"Religion is the opium of the people. It is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions." Marx has considered all modern religion and churches and all religious bodies etc are organizations used by bourgeois reactionary groups to buttress their system of exploitation and anaesthetize the working class. A struggle against religion should be waged. (Complete works of Lenin, Vol 17).

Weber on the other hand takes different stand on Religion. Abraham and Morgan (1985) comment and give the initial postulates of Weber's theory-

1. In the countless places in the world great material achievements had reached from the work of monastic order dedicated to the life of spirit.
2. Ascetic Protestant Sect were known for their economic interest.
3. Values embedded in Protestantism is harmony with the spirit of Capitalism.

Weber considers Protestant asceticism, denial of pleasure and concept of calling or vocation has been the major force of reinvestment in capitalism. There was reinforcement of concept of hard work based on continuous work ethic.

Methodological Differences

Marx ideology has basic foundation of Hegelian dialectics. Impressed by dialectical idealism of German Philosopher Hegel, Marx transformed the idealism to materialism and drew heavily from the evolution of society. Hence Marx adhered to the dialectics of Hegel and propounded the theory of Dialectical Historical Materialism. The dialectics is the basis of transformation of one society to another and the seeds of conflict are inherent in every society. On the concept of 'Thesis - Antithesis- Synthesis' he elaborated the various stages of Historical development of society, and the consequence of conflict in Capitalist society is Communism or Socialism. Coser (1957) ^[4] analysis Marx by putting forth his idea on conflict-'conflict leads not only to ever changing relations within the existing social structure, but the total social system under goes transformation through conflict. Yet conflict finally led to breakdown of all feudal relations and hence to the rise of a new social system governed by different patterns of social relations. Each social system contains elements of strain and potential.'

Weber in contrast to Marx was different in his methodology and approach to analyze the society. Though like Marx Weber is also of Positivist tradition but not of the view that Economics determines everything, but views that economics is shaped by other factors, as delineated in 'Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism.' Weber sought to demonstrate that Economic factors do not represent a constant and independent variable to which all other stand in dependence. This namely the treatment of economic factor as the paramount and determining influence (Abraham, Morgan: 179). Weber believed that Economic determinism is the Marx's major weakness and ultimate failure. (Abraham, Morgan: 179). Contrary to Marx, Weber asserts that the Western Capitalism was shaped by the combination of political, economic and religious structure. As for Marx

religion is a part of super structure and is determined by infrastructure, but for Weber the ethics of Protestant religion is the reason for proliferated growth of industrial Capitalism. Bottomore (1985) [3] Weber has analyzed rationality of social action to maximize profit in capitalism which is result of strict labour discipline engaged in production and economic accountancy which is a consequence of rational action.

Conclusion

The contrast and differences which Karl Marx and Max Weber had in their approaches and methodology to study the growth and transformation of society is perhaps due the time period they were and the kind of political structures and economic structures were getting established in their life time. Marx since built the edifice of his theory largely on 'conflict' and as a consequence he led a life of a wanderer and observed conflict in each and every aspect of life. Weber on the other hand too had a personal life with much distress, but on the contrary he based his theories on social actions and the rationality attached to these actions. The society which adheres to Zweck rational action and if there is love for labour, frugality for time, punctuality etc then, the economic structures of that society will progress, as the capitalist society do.

Schumpeter (1921) has analyzed both Marx and Weber on economic front and on that basis explains about the role of entrepreneurship in the development of capitalism. Schumpeter showing affinities to both the thinkers, put fort his viewpoint on capitalism "Capitalism is that form of private property economy in which innovations are carried out by means of borrowed money, which in general, though not by logical necessity, implies credit creation and the individuals who carry out these innovations we call entrepreneur".

Now this assessment of Schumpeter can serve as the basis for the negation of conflict of class struggle which was foreseen and predicted by Marx as a corollary to the downfall of capitalism and establishment of socialism rather communism. Lewis Coser was the first Sociologist who brought functionalism and conflict theory together. Coser and Simmel together asserted that conflict can be functional to society and this postulate of Coser has ruled out the possibility of class struggle as predicted by Karl Marx.

The notion of class as formed by Marx is that classes are the result of economic forces and in capitalist society sees class as social group which share same relationship with means of production. (Haralambos, 1985; Giddens, 1971) [6, 5], Marx argues that basic contradiction of Capitalist society will lead to the destruction of the Capitalist economy, as inevitable working class revolution will take place to overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize the forces of production (Haralambos; 1985) [6]. Here when Marx attempts to describe and assert his 'Utopian' notion of arrival of Socialist or Communist society, show tremendous optimism and predicts a bloody revolution.

On the other hand if Weber is evaluated on the notion of class, his theory of class, although partly based on Marx, differs in analysis. He argues that class is only one form of stratification, the other dimensions are status and party (Giddens, 1971) [5]. However Weber agrees to Marx on ownership vs. non ownership, which provides main basis of class division (Giddens; 1971) [5]. To sum up Marx and Weber, it can interestingly be argued, though Marx was pessimistic about Capitalism and Industrial economic setup,

nevertheless, he turns to be optimistic when he propounds the establishment of Communist society and the ownership of Proletariat class on means of production. On the other side Weber begins with optimism and correlates the economic progress and religion. Argues the role of religion in accelerating capitalist progress, which is due to rationalism. But as he moves on and analyzes rational action. He feared, more sectors of society would be dominated by rationalized principles (Ritzer; 2009) [12] Weber predicts-society will be web of rationalized structures, as Weber calls bureaucracy 'rationalized cage.'

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