The Sociology of Post-Industrial Societies

Lecture 1: *The Great Divide*

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What’s so special about sociology?

• **Economics**
  - Alfred Marshall:
    • “...economics is a study of mankind in the ordinary business of life.”
  - Lionel Robbins:
    • "Economics is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses."
    - the study of the consequences (both intended and unintended) of agents’ attempts to maximise utility under various types of constraints

• **Political Science**
  - the study of the use and distribution of power
  - the study of systems of governance
    • Parties, voters, parliaments, legislatures, executives
What’s so special about sociology?

• **Anthropology**
  - defined by the type of societies studied?
  - defined by the ethnographic method?

• **Sociology**
  - Whatever sociologists do?
  - An attempt to understand the consequences of industrialisation for:
    - Social institutions
    - Social structure
    - Human welfare
  - So before we get to Post-Industrialism let’s try to understand the anxiety about industrialisation
Sociology of Industrial Society: The great divide

• The early ‘sociologists’ were all grappling with the idea that industrialisation changed everything irreversibly
  – The way work was organised
  – Family relationships and the relationship between the sexes
  – The amount and distribution of wealth
  – The organisation of the state and politics
  – The content of intellectual life
  – The dominant social norms
  – The very texture of human interactions
  – The sense of what it meant to be human

• All share the idea that once the (technological) genie is out of the bottle there is no going back
Conservative, radical and liberal roots

• Critical views on the watershed nature of industrialisation are almost equally common on the political left and right
  – Robert Nisbet’s *The Sociological Tradition* makes a case for the intellectual roots of sociology lying in the mainstream of 19th Century European conservative thought
  – Anthony Gidden’s in *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* makes something of the opposite case - radical reactions to the specifically capitalistic form of industrialism are the fertile soil for sociological thought
  – Stefan Collini’s *Liberalism and Sociology* makes the case for the influence of the crisis in late Nineteenth Century liberal thought
    • For example L. T. Hobhouse’s obsession with the ideas of social and moral progress
Durkheim 1858-1917

- Durkheim witnessed extraordinary change in France during his lifetime

- Intellectual motivation was to understand these changes and repair the damage
Durkheim’s concerns

- Social integration
  - What are the bases of social order in large scale industrial societies?
    - Normative integration comes under strain
      - People don’t subscribe to the same codes or accept the same doctrines – for example religious orthodoxy
      - Individuality becomes a cult
    - Division of labour creates interdependence but also generates sectional interests
    - Contract rather than other sorts of ties comes to regulate a wider part of human affairs
    - Law comes to be less about collective rituals of retribution and more about restitution
    - Social bonds – ties to “society” – become looser
Durkheim’s solutions

• Recognition of the institutional prerequisites for the pursuit of self interest
  – Contract isn’t self-sufficient

• The fostering of civic associations lying between the state and the individual
  – Not a million miles from the concerns of Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*
    • Social capital
      – Bridging
      – Bonding
Max Weber 1864-1920

• Rationalization
  – the growth of means-ends instrumentality as the principle mode of cognition
  – theology
  – decline of magic
  – science and technology
  – routinisation of more and more spheres of life
  – bureaucratisation of governance and of work-life
  – ways in which institutions as well as the state seek legitimacy
  – Coincidence of older status structures with new money based hierarchies
  – end of ideology?
Karl Marx 1818-1883

- Capitalism breaking apart all previous social bonds
- The crude cash nexus governing relationships
- The growth of wage labour – especially factory labour
- Coalescence of interests amongst workers and also amongst the bourgeoisie – State as its executive committee
- Universal laws driving development everywhere in a unilinear direction
- Surprisingly utopian view of what the next stage would look like
Is it Capitalism?

- or is it industrialism?

- For Marx, Weber and Durkheim there was no empirical data to decide the issue
Next week

• Institutional convergence or diversity?