

Durkheim believed that “society has to be present within the individual”. He saw religion as a mechanism that shored up or protected a threatened social order. He thought that religion had been the cement of society in the past, but that the collapse of religion would not lead to a moral implosion. Durkheim was specifically interested in religion as a communal experience rather than an individual one. He also says that religious phenomena occur when a separation is made between the profane (the realm of everyday activities) and the sacred (the realm of the extraordinary and the transcendent); these are different depending what man chooses them to be. An example of this is wine at communion, as it is not only wine but represents the blood of Christ. Durkheim believed that religion is ‘society divinized’, as he argues that religion occurs in a social context. He also, in lieu of forefathers before who tried to replace the dying religions, urged people to unite in a civic morality on the basis that we are what we are as a result of society. Durkheim condensed religion into four major functions:

1. Disciplinary, forcing or administrating discipline
2. Cohesive, bringing people together, a strong bond
3. Vitalizing, to make livelier or vigorous, vitalize, and boost spirit
4. Euphoric, a good feeling, happiness, confidence, well-being

MAX WEBER’S SOCIOLOGICAL MATERIALISM

Max Weber (1864:1920) is known as one of the “founding fathers” of modern sociology. He worked in the Hermeneutic tradition, which insisted that the study of man is very apart from the study of nature. Whilst nature could be understood in strict causal terms, Hermeneutics held that human behavior had to be “interpreted” in a way that had no counterpart in the natural sciences. In Germany this was very much intertwined with the Idealist tradition, which stressed the primacy of spirit over matter. Weber is best known for his work on the sociology of religion, something he saw as a study of the rationalization of modern society (a recurrent theme through *The Protestant Ethic*). *The Protestant Ethic* is just a small fragment of his study of other World religions: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism and Confucianism. (He planned a study of Islam, but didn’t complete it). *The Protestant Ethic* was published in 1905:05 in *Archiv fur sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in Germany. It first appeared in English in 1920:21 in Weber’s *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion (Gesammelte Aufsatza zur Religionasozologie)*. The English translation thus contains some footnotes discussing the debate on the essay which had taken place since its first German publication. *The Protestant Ethic* is highly polemical and appears to have been written with such intent. The first thing a modern reader will notice in the introduction is Weber’s constant insistence of the “superiority” (in terms of scientific progress) of Occidental civilization. Architecture, art, medicine, scholarship – in all he esteems the Occident highest. The object of his study is one particular aspect of Occidental culture which Weber says has not developed elsewhere: modern capitalism, in the form of the rational organization of formally free labour. The

emergence of this institution is the object of his study, particularly the part which the ascetic branches of Protestantism have had to play in it. Let us follow his discussion.

Capitalism and Traditionalism: the Importance of definition

It would be foolish to suggest that the drive to acquisition is not part of the human state of nature, but it is equally foolish to suppose that every man is engaged in a drive to acquire as much as possible (such is the nature of rational, methodological capitalist). Nor should we regard every drive to profit as "capitalism" – the Merchant Adventurers of the Middle Ages had a conception of profit, but they were not engaged in rational, capitalistic enterprise. The attitude of swashbuckling opportunist that laughs at all ethical limitations in the drive to booty is not the same as that of rational capitalist. Speculators, who invest opportunely in war, state monopoly and political ends do so in a necessarily irrational manner, and the conception of constantly renewed profit does not exist. Capitalism is the rational organization of labour attuned to a particular market, seeking renewed profit from this market. This thrifty bourgeois attitude shall be examined in detail below, but first we must compare capitalism to the societies and environment's it's developed in and take a brief look at the interplay between it and the "traditional" attitude.

Weber regards as "traditionalism" the attitude of the worker who does not view his labour as an end in itself, but rather the means to the end of satisfying his traditional needs. This attitude was demonstrated to Weber by the complaints of capitalists who offered piece:rates to their workers. A piece rate is an agreement whereby a worker's wages increase by increment with the amount of work he accomplishes. For instance, a factory worker might be offered one pound for every widget he produces. Say that by exerting himself fully he may produce ten widgets a week, and so is accustomed to an income of ten pounds per week. In an effort to increase the factory's output to meet a large order, the capitalist ups the piece Rate to two pounds per widget. Anyone viewing their labour as an end in itself would doubtlessly keep their exertion at the same level as before, and those driven by avarice for the largest earning might increase it further – but the attitude of "traditionalism" would drive a worker to reduce his output to five widgets, hence maintaining the wage he is accustomed to. The drive of such a worker is to satisfy his traditional needs with the maximum amount of comfort. Such a labour force is not conducive to capitalist development.

An ethos of capitalism

Weber quotes Benjamin Franklin as "undeniably" expressing the "spirit of capitalism". He quotes from two of Franklin's works – *Necessary Hints to Those that would be Rich and Advice to a Young Tradesman*. Weber says that these words sum up the attitude of the capitalist ethos – that the increase of one's capital is an end in itself, and in fact a duty one owes to it. Franklin implores the young tradesman to take no rest, to not neglect his duty by letting his capital sit idle. As an ethos, this is quite detached from any enjoyment of life, or any pleasure:seeking with the fruits of one's earnings. It seems in fact highly irrational – why would a gentleman wish to spend his life in pursuit of profit, and not dispose of it for his own pleasure? This was not some mere crude avarice or greed (auri

sacra fames) which was distinct to the rest of society, as the romanticists of today claim. It was an ethical maxim, a duty. And from whence came this duty? It appeared in a society hostile to it. The most highly developed capitalistic center of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Florence, would have regarded a moral attitude such as Franklin's unthinkable. The aristocracy of blood only tolerated the aristocracy of capital because of taxes that could be extracted from it, and regarded it as "necessary" at best. In England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the people were inordinately proud of their commerce but opposed to the bourgeois on a personal level. There was a conception of scarce resources in the world that England must act viciously to acquire (often with the help of the Royal Navy - such activity belongs perhaps in the category of capitalist adventuring), but no particular respect was afforded to those who did it. But meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, where there was virtually no banking, small bourgeois and little money, capitalistic activity was seen as a duty to oneself and to one's people. It is this ethos of capitalism as a *calling*, so alien to the world from which it sprang, which Weber considers.

Lutheranism - a Stepping stone

Martin Luther first expounded the idea of a religious "calling" to fulfill duty, and Lutheranism was differentiated from Catholicism in several important ways which encouraged this. It may be considered a platitude, says Weber, that Luther stressed the importance of worldly activity in a calling as inspired by God. Catholicism of course encouraged good works, but these were of an essential irrational character - there was no need for them to be sustained for the Catholic to achieve salvation. The very human cycle of sin, repentance, absolution (through the confessional) and then renewed sin was the lot of the Catholic, and this provided no imperative for the individual to organize his "good works" in any sustained, rational manner. To Luther, worldly duty was a labour of brotherly love, and to repudiate it was to repudiate one's duty to God. To the great mass of Catholic believers, this imperative was alien - their salvation was gained through the mysticism of the Church. To a Lutheran, this salvation came between the believer and God. But then we see, in a bizarre twist, that Lutheranism was in some way a step backwards in the rationalization of daily life. Luther was compelled to stress the issue less as he saw it encroaching on *Sola fide* (justification by faith alone), and his opposition to Monasticism (which he saw as a dereliction of worldly duties to God) was in fact a set-back for rationalism. The monks in their Monasteries had practiced the rational organization of their deeds in a closed environment. The fact this took place in a closed environment meant that the Monastic ideal could never have led to the projection of rational action applied to the real world, was the first breakaway from Catholic doctrine on the matter. No similar concept existed in Antiquity or Catholicism, but nor was it wholly present in Luther's teachings. Puritanism approached the matter more consistently, and the ascetic branches of Puritanical Christianity are where the spirit of capitalism sprang from.

Ascetic Puritanism – Calvinism

It is well-known that one of the fundamental features of John Calvin's theology is the doctrine of double predestination. The doctrine holds that God does not exist for the sake of men, but men for the sake of God – and God is the only being outside of normal moral law. As He is omniscient and omnipotent. He has elected a small minority for salvation and a larger majority for damnation. To question the "darkness" of such a God is futile, for He is not subject to any human standard – we are subject to His. This creates what Weber calls an "unprecedented inner loneliness" in the individual – no act can help him attain salvation, and no priest can help him. The psychology of such a religion is to transfer the emphasis from earning salvation to convincing oneself that one is a member of the elect, and so acting outwardly as the elect would be expecting of doing. Not only would this help a man convince himself that he was elected for salvation, but also to convince others, and so secure a standing in the community. The first result of this doctrine which is worthy of note is the elimination of mysticism from the world of the Calvinist. The trappings and ceremonies of the Church, in which the Catholics placed their faith, were now to be avoided like the plague – no trust could be placed in them, for this surely would be the sign of the desperate damned.

And whilst Luther had maintained that a sinner could absolve himself before God (although not through the Church), Calvinist doctrine had no such emotional discharge of sin, which was important in the psychology of the Catholic and Lutheran. No action whatsoever could be taken to absolve oneself and the very fact one had sinned was taken to be a sign of damnation. The logical result of this was a rational organization of one's entire life in a manner which would show oneself to be a member of the elect – an ascetic life that shunned self – pleasure and dedicated itself to demonstrating grace. And sooner or later, every believer would have to face up to the question of whether there existed absolute criteria for demonstrating a state of grace, and what these were. To many Calvinists, the answer was to be found in the glorification of God's World, which existed solely for Him. And because rational labour was not done for the purpose of brotherly love (as with Luther), but for the glorification of God, it took on an impersonal and isolated character. This encouraged as rational an organization of the social environment as possible. To ensure one's grace – to be as the Saints – required such conduct in all one's life. This is not to say this was inherent in Calvin's teachings (he was sure of his own salvation), but was necessary result of their use by a less self-confident generation. So Calvinism provided the essential of proving one's faith in worldly activity, as an end in itself. To this doctrine, man must do the duty God sends him – calling – to the glory of God, and waste no time in rest or leisure. Indolence, and thus the pursuit of wealth for its enjoyment, is alien to the Calvinist – he pursues wealth as a secondary motive, finding his goal instead in the glorification of God through his calling.

Ascetic Puritanism and Capitalism

Our task is now to join the dots, and find a possible path from the above to the doctrine of Franklin. The opposition to idleness is perhaps not an expression of the maxim that "time is money", but that time wasted is time that could have been spent in

God's labour. Neglecting His glorification through leisure, wastefulness, or even excessive sleep, is the cardinal sin. Even contemplation which does not bear fruit is wasteful – and Sunday is provided for that. Thus one's life must be dedicated to constant, productive mental or bodily labour. Sexual ascetism is based on the idea that sexual intercourse for personal pleasure and not for God's glory is wasteful, and sexual intercourse may only be engaged in for God's glory ("Go forth and multiply"). Neither are the rich exempted from their duty – for God's Providence has provided a calling for everyone, and he must complete it to God's glory. As society stratified into classes and the division of labour became a fact, the secular literature of the time saw this as a good in utilitarian terms. It was providing the greatest good for the greatest number. The Puritan approach was largely similar, but justified in religious terms – that such activity was pleasing to God. Regular, rational labour was held to be the most efficient way to work for God's glory.

There was another moral imperative to the making of a profit. If God had given one of His elect the chance to profit, surely He expected an individual of perfection to take it. His Providence had surely provided this opportunity for a reason, and thus it was not to be squandered. The Parable of the Talents seemed to confirm this. The aim of this was not to make profit for the sake of oneself, but for the sake of God. Pleasure seeking with this profit would be idolatry of the flesh – and the Puritans opposed any activity which seemed slothful to serve no purpose (it's a lie that they were opposed to sport per se – it was accepted as a means to achieving physical fitness). And so, to capitalism. The idea that a man is only a trustee of God's Providence – which he must work to enlarge God's glory by taking advantage of opportunities presented to him by God, has obvious implications for the development of capitalism. Their struggle against the irrational disposal of wealth only furthered empowered their belief in the idea of its rational employment in modern capitalistic enterprise (both for the entrepreneur whose burden of wealth compelled him to employ it all the more diligently, and the labourer to work within the division of labour at his calling). The ascetic ideal of accumulating wealth but not irrationally wasting it led to concentration of capital as people sought to save it in banks (which would invest it in capitalistic activity). Thus the drive to capitalistic activity for God's glory and not personal gain was established, and the means to it followed shortly.

Weber's critique of Marx in the Protestant Ethic

Nouning has outlined Weber's main argument in the Protestant Ethic in his excellent write up. Our purpose in this write:up is not to offer another description of Weber's classic work. We focus on one of the most interesting aspects of the Protestant Ethic – Weber's historical method and his critique of historical materialism

Historical materialism

Historical materialism is the conception of history formulated by Marx. The clearest exposition of it is to be found in *the Preface to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy and the German Ideology'*. A somewhat more simplistic materialist theory is presented by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto. According to historical

materialism, ideas – and indeed everything in the superstructure – are determined, at least in the ‘last instance’, by the economic base. *The German Ideology* is worth quoting on this point: The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. It is this theory of ideas being reflections of material circumstances and more generally the doctrine that there is one fundamental causal factor in history that Weber Challenges in the protestant Ethic.

Weber’s historical method

Marx asserts that there is one fundamental causal factor in history, the economic base. Though Weber does not deny that the economic has often been of crucial causal importance in history, he denies that it is always the ultimate causal factor. There are many possible factors which may in any particular historical case be the decisive one. What the decisive factor is in given historical situation is left for empirical research to determine. The question cannot be answered a priori. This methodological pluralism is at the heart of the Protestant Ethic. The point of the work is not to show that Protestantism ‘caused’ capitalism, but rather that it was a significant factor in its development. Weber does not deny that the economic had a crucial role to play in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. He is merely arguing that an economic reductionist account of the transition is inadequate.

Weber’s diversion from Marx’s approach is perhaps clearest his insistence that ideas should be taken seriously as causal factors in history. For Marx, causation always runs ultimately from the economic to everything else. Weber asserts that ideas can have a profound influence on the economic sphere itself. Weber reverses the direction of causality that Marx presents. For Weber, a certain ideology or world view is a necessary precondition for a mode of production. In order that a manner of life so well adapted to the peculiarities of capitalism could be selected at all. i.e. should come to dominate others, it had to originate somewhere, and not in isolated individuals alone, but as a way of life common to whole groups of men. For capitalism to succeed, groups within society had to adopt ways of life compatible with it. Those ways of life were not caused by capitalism; rather they enabled its rise.

What kind of world view does capitalism require? Weber argues that the elimination of traditionalism is crucial. This is well covered in the above write up, and repetition is not necessary. Suffice it to say that traditionalism means that workers are complacent with their standard of living. They cannot be induced to work harder by the introduction of piece rates, for instance. This kind of populace is not well suited for capitalism, since capitalism requires a constant improvement in productivity. In capitalism, profits are continually reinvested – something that doesn’t make sense to people who only wants to uphold their current standard of living.

Capitalism requires that Labour be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling. Such an attitude does not come about simply because the economic base requires it (for a functionalist account of Marx's theory of history which argues that "bases get the superstructures they need because they need them". Rather...such an attitude ... can only be the product of a long and arduous process of education. The spirit of capitalism makes capitalist activity intelligible. Where the spirit does not exist, capitalist activity makes no sense. This is essentially the reason why the spirit of capitalism is a precondition of capitalism itself. It is just that (the bourgeois lifestyle) which seems to the pre-capitalistic man so incomprehensible and mysterious. That anyone should be able to make it the sole purpose of his life:work, to sink into the grave weighed down with a great material load of money and goods, seems to him explicable only as the product of a perverse instinct.

Weber does not simply present a theoretical argument against historical materialism, he also presents empirical evidence. He places considerable importance on his example of colonial Massachusetts. According to Weber, the spirit of capitalism was present in Massachusetts before the advent of capitalism itself. There are complaints of peculiarity calculating sort of profit - seeking in New England, as distinguished from other parts of America, as early as 1632. It is further undoubted that capitalism remained far less developed in some of the neighbouring colonies, the later Southern States of the United States of America, in spite of the fact that these latter were founded by large capitalists for business motives, while the New England colonies were founded by preachers and seminary graduates with the help of small bourgeois, craftsmen and yeomen, for religious reasons. In this case the casual relation is certainly the reverse of that suggested by the materialistic standpoint. In the backwoods small bourgeois circumstances of Pennsylvania in the 18th century, where business threatened for simple lack of money to fall back into barter, where there was hardly a sign of large enterprise, where only the earliest beginnings of banking were to be found, the same thing (rational capitalist accumulation a la Franklin) was considered the essence of moral conduct, even commanded in the name of duty. To speak here a reflection of material conditions in the ideal superstructure would be patent nonsense.

Weber or Marx?

Especially in American social science, often hostile to Marxism, Weber has been presented as the 'bourgeois Marx', the more acceptable of the two profound social theorists because of his more conservative politics. In reductionist. So, is Weber's critique of Marx successful? This is one of the classical questions of the social sciences, and we do not pretend to have an answer to it. The most profound differences of Marx and Weber do not lie in empirical investigations - which could be verified or falsified by further investigation - but in the theoretical foundations of their historical method. Weber seems the more attractive theorist, since he repudiates Marxist reductionism which most of us would reject. We think his critique of Marx is persuasive, though we doubt the controversy can be ultimately decided. Marx is not as reductionist as is often thought. For instance, in the 18th Brumaire he describes a situation where the state has

considerable autonomy from class forces in society. And even in the Preface, considerable latitude is left for the superstructure to exert causal influence in history. So, is Weber right in arguing that a certain world view is a necessary precondition of the rise of capitalism or Marx in arguing that such a world view is merely a consequence of the development of capitalism? Personally, we do not think there is an answer. The problem cannot be resolved by looking at historical facts, since it is precisely about how such facts should be interpreted. However, even if this question is unanswerable – or because of that – it is one of the most fascinating problems in the social sciences.

STRUCTURALISM

One development that we have said little about up to this point is the increase in interest in structuralism. Usually traced to France (and Often called French structuralism, structuralism has now become an international phenomenon. Although its route lies outside sociology, structuralism in sociology still is so undeveloped that it is difficult to define with any precision. The problem is exacerbated by structuralism's more or less simultaneous development in a number of fields; it is difficult to find one single coherent statement of structuralism. Indeed, there are significant differences among the various branches of structuralism. We can get a preliminary feeling for structuralism by delineating the basic differences that exist among those who support a structuralist perspective. There are those who focus on what they call the "deep structures of the mind." It is their view that these unconscious structures lead people to think and act as people do. The work of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud might be seen as an example of this orientation. Then there are structuralists who focus on the invisible larger structures of society in general. Marx is sometimes thought of as someone who practiced such a brand of structuralism, with his focus on the unseen economic structure of capitalist society. Still another group sees structures as the models they construct of the social world. Finally, a number of structuralists are concerned with the dialectical relationship between individuals and social structures. They see a link between the structures of the mind and the structures of society. The anthropologist Claude Levi-Straus is most often associated with this view.

Structuralism obviously involves a focus on structures, but they are not in the main the same structures that concern the structural functionalists. While the latter, indeed most, sociologists are concerned with social structures of primary concern to structuralists are linguistic structures. This shift from social to linguistic turn which dramatically altered the nature of the social sciences. The focus of a good many social scientists shifted from social structure to language.

ROOTS IN LINGUISTIC

Structuralism emerged from diverse developments in various fields. The source of modern structuralism and its strongest bastion to this day is linguistics. The work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857:1913) stands out in the developments of structural linguistics and, ultimately structuralism in various other fields. Of particular interest to us is Saussure's differentiation between *langue* and *parole*, which was to have

enormous significance. Langue is the formal, grammatical system of language. It is a system of phonic elements whose relationships are governed, Saussure and his followers believed, by determinate laws. Much of linguistics since Saussure's time has been oriented to the discovery of those laws. The existence of langue makes parole possible. Parole is actual speech, the way that speakers use language to express themselves. Although Saussure recognized the significance of the people's use of language in subjective and often idiosyncratic ways, he believed that the individual's use of language cannot be the concern of the scientifically oriented linguist. Such a linguist must look at langue, the formal system of language, not at the subjective ways in which it is used by actors.

Langue, then, can be viewed as a system of signs: a structure: and the meaning of each sign is produced by the relationship among signs within the system. Especially important here are relations of difference, including binary oppositions. Thus, for example, the meaning of the word "hot" comes not from some intrinsic properties of the world, but from the word's relationship with, its binary opposition to the word, "cold." Meanings, the mind, and ultimately the social world are shaped by the structure of language. Thus instead of an existential world of people shaping their surroundings we have here a world, are being shaped by the structure of language.

The concern for structure has been extended beyond the language to the study of all sign systems. This focus on the structure of sign systems has been labeled "semiotics" and has attracted many followers. Semiotics is broader than structural linguistics, because it encompasses not only language but also other sign and symbol systems, such as facial expressions, body language literary texts, indeed all forms of communication.

Roland Barthes is often seen as the true founder of semiotics. Barthes extended Saussure's idea to all areas of social life. Not only language but also social behaviors as representations, or signs: "Not just language, but wrestling matches are also signifying practices, as are TV shows, fashions, cooking and just about everything is else in everyday life". The "linguistic turn" came to encompass all social phenomena which, in turn, came to be reinterpreted as signs.

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

A Swiss linguist who founded the Geneva School of Linguistic Structuralism, Saussure emphasized the collective nature of language: like culture, language is a collectively produced and shared system of meaning. He was influenced by E. Durkheim. In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) he distinguished between speech or language: behavior (parole) and language as a system of regularities (langue). Language is a system of signs. Structuralism is only concerned with the structure and history of language. The meaning of language is determined by a structure of mutually defining units, which is a self-referential and conventional system. The linguistic unit or sign has two dimensions: the signifier and the signified. The radical nature of Saussurian linguistics was to claim that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary: there is no necessary, natural or intrinsic relationship between linguistic forms and their designated meanings.

Anthropological Structuralism: Claude Levi :Strauss

A Central figure in French structuralism – indeed Kurzweil (1980:13) calls him “the father of structuralism”: is the French anthropologist Clause Levi:Strauss. While structure takes various forms in Levi:Strauss’s work, what is important for our purpose is that he can be seen as extending Saussure’s work on language to anthropological issues: for example, to myths in primitive societies. However, Levi Strauss also applied structuralism more broadly to all forms of communication. His major innovation was to reconceptualize a wide array of social phenomena (for instance, kinship systems) as systems of communication, thereby making them amenable to structural analyses. The exchange of spouses, for example, can be analyzed in the same way as the exchange of words; both are social exchanges that can be studied through the use structural anthropology.

We can illustrate Levi:Strauss’s (1967) thinking with the examples of the similarities between linguistic systems and kinship systems. First terms used to describe kinship, like phonemes in language, are basic units of analysis to the structural anthropologist. Second neither the kinship terms nor the phonemes have meaning in themselves. Instead, both acquire meaning only when they are integral part of a larger system. Levi:Strauss even used a system of binary oppositions in his anthropology (for example, the raw and the cooked) much like those employed by saucier in linguistics. Third Levi Strauss admitted that there is empirical variation from setting to setting in both phonemic and kinship systems, but even these variations can be traced to the operation of general, although implicit laws.

All of this is very much in line with the linguistic turn, but Levi:Strauss ultimately went off in a number of directions that are odd s with that turn. Most importantly, he argued that both phonemic systems and kinship systems are the products of the structures of the mind. However, they are not the products of a conscious process. Instead, they are the products of the unconscious, logical structure of the mind. These systems, as well as the logical structure of the mind from which they are derived, operate on the basis of general laws. Most of those who have followed the linguistic turn have not followed Levi:Strauss in the direction of defining the underlying structure of the mind as the most fundamental structure.

GRAMSCI’S THEORY OF HEGEMONY

Antonio Gramsci (January 22, 1891 – April 27, 1937) was an Italian philosopher, writer, politician and political theorist. A founding member and one time leader of the Communist Party of Italy, he was imprisoned by Benito Mussolini’s Fascist regime. His writings are heavily concerned with the analysis of culture and political leadership and he is notable as a highly original thinker within the Marxist tradition. He is renowned for his concept of cultural hegemony as a means of maintaining the state in a capitalist society.

Gramsci was born in Ales, Italy, on the island of Sardinia. He was the fourth of seven sons of Francesco Gramsci, a low-level official from Gaeta. He was of Albanian descent,

his father's family was Arbëreshë and the family name was related to Gramsh, an Albanian town. Francesco's financial difficulties and troubles with the police forced the family to move about through several villages in Sardinia until they finally settled in Ghilarza. In 1898 Francesco was convicted of embezzlement and imprisoned, reducing his family to destitution and forcing the young Antonio to abandon his schooling and work at various casual jobs until his father's release in 1904. The boy suffered from health problems: a malformation of the spine owing to a childhood accident left him hunch-backed and underdeveloped, while he was also plagued by various internal disorders throughout his life. Gramsci completed secondary school in Cagliari, where he lodged with his elder brother Gennaro, a former soldier whose time on the mainland had made him a militant socialist. However, Gramsci's sympathies at the time did not lie with socialism, but rather with the grievances of impoverished Sardinian peasants and miners, who saw their neglect as a result of the privileges enjoyed by the rapidly industrializing North and who tended to turn to Sardinian nationalism as a response.

A brilliant student, in 1911 Gramsci won a scholarship that allowed him to study at the University of Turin, sitting the exam at the same time as future cohort Palmiro Togliatti. At Turin, he read literature and took a keen interest in linguistics, which he studied under Matteo Bartoli. Gramsci found the city at the time going through a process of industrialization, with the Fiat and Lancia factories recruiting workers from poorer regions. Trade unions became established, and the first industrial social conflicts started to emerge. Gramsci had a close involvement with these developments, frequenting socialist circles as well as associating with Sardinian emigrants, which gave him continuity with his native culture. His worldview shaped by both his earlier experiences in Sardinia and his environment on the mainland, Gramsci joined the Italian Socialist Party in late 1913.

Despite showing talent for his studies, Gramsci's financial problems and poor health, as well as his growing political commitment, forced him to abandon his education in early 1915. By this time, he had acquired an extensive knowledge of history and philosophy. At university, he had come into contact with the thought of Antonio Labriola, Rodolfo Mondolfo, Giovanni Gentile and, most importantly, Benedetto Croce, possibly the most widely respected Italian intellectual of his day. Such thinkers espoused a brand of Hegelian Marxism to which Labriola had given the name "philosophy of praxis". Though Gramsci would later use this phrase to escape the prison censors, his relationship with this current of thought was ambiguous throughout his career.

From 1914 onward Gramsci's writings for socialist newspapers such as *Il Grido del Popolo* earned him a reputation as a notable journalist, and in 1916 he became co-editor of the Piedmont edition of *Avanti!*, the Socialist Party official organ. An articulate and prolific writer of political theory, Gramsci proved a formidable commentator, writing on all aspects of Turin's social and political life. Gramsci was, at this time, also involved in the education and organization of Turin workers: he spoke in public for the first time in 1916 and gave talks on topics such as Romain Rolland, the French Revolution, the Paris Commune and the emancipation of women. In the wake of the arrest of Socialist Party leaders that followed the revolutionary riots of August 1917, Gramsci became one of

Turin's leading socialists when he was both elected to the party's Provisional Committee and made editor of *Il Grido Del Popolo*.

In April 1919 with Togliatti, Angelo Tasca and Umberto Terracini Gramsci set up the weekly newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* (The New Order). In October of the same year, despite being divided into various hostile factions, the Socialist Party moved by a large majority to join the Third International. The *L'Ordine Nuovo* group was seen by Vladimir Lenin as closest in orientation to the Bolsheviks, and it received his backing against the anti-parliamentary programme of the extreme left Amadeo Bordiga.

Amongst the various tactical debates that took place within the party, Gramsci's group was mainly distinguished by its advocacy of workers' councils, which had come into existence in Turin spontaneously during the large strikes of 1919 and 1920. For Gramsci these councils were the proper means of enabling workers to take control of the task of organizing production. Although he believed his position at this time to be in keeping with Lenin's policy of "All power to the Soviets", his stance was attacked by Bordiga for betraying a syndicalist tendency influenced by the thought of Georges Sorel and Daniel DeLeon. By the time of the defeat of the Turin workers in spring 1920, Gramsci was almost alone in his defense of the councils.

The failure of the workers' councils to develop into a national movement led Gramsci to believe that a Communist Party in the Leninist sense was needed. The group around *L'Ordine Nuovo* declaimed incessantly against the PSI's centrist leadership and ultimately allied with Bordiga's far larger "abstentionist" faction. On January 21, 1921, in the town of Livorno, the Communist Party of Italy (*Partito Comunista d'Italia - PCI*) was founded. Gramsci supported against Bordiga the *Arditi del Popolo*, a militant anti-fascist group which struggled against the Blackshirts. Gramsci would be a leader of the party from its inception but was subordinate to Bordiga, whose emphasis on discipline, centralism and purity of principles dominated the party's programme until the latter lost the leadership in 1924. In 1922 Gramsci traveled to Russia as a representative of the new party. Here, he met Julia Schucht, a young violinist whom Gramsci later married and by whom he had two sons.

The Russian mission coincided with the advent of Fascism in Italy, and Gramsci returned with instructions to foster, against the wishes of the PCI leadership, a united front of leftist parties against fascism. Such a front would ideally have had the PCI at its centre, through which Moscow would have controlled all the leftist forces, but others disputed this potential supremacy: socialists did have a certain tradition in Italy too, while the communist party seemed relatively young and too radical. Many believed that an eventual coalition led by communists would have functioned too remotely from political debate, and thus would have run the risk of isolation.

In late 1922 and early 1923, Benito Mussolini's government embarked on a campaign of repression against the opposition parties, arresting most of the PCI leadership, including Bordiga. At the end of 1923, Gramsci traveled from Moscow to Vienna, where he tried to revive a party torn by factional strife. In 1924 Gramsci, now recognized as head of the PCI, gained election as a deputy for the Veneto. He started organizing the

launch of the official newspaper of the party, called *L'Unità* (Unity), living in Rome while his family stayed in Moscow. At its Lyons Congress in January 1926, Gramsci's theses calling for a united front to restore democracy to Italy were adopted by the party. In 1926 Joseph Stalin's manoeuvres inside the Bolshevik party moved Gramsci to write a letter to the Comintern, in which he deplored opposition led by Leon Trotsky, but also underlined some presumed faults of the leader. Togliatti, in Moscow as a representative of the party, received the letter, opened it, read it, and decided not to deliver it. This caused a difficult conflict between Gramsci and Togliatti which they never completely resolved.

On November 9, 1926 the Fascist government enacted a new wave of emergency laws, taking as a pretext an alleged attempt on Mussolini's life that had occurred several days earlier. The fascist police arrested Gramsci, despite his parliamentary immunity, and brought him to Regina Coeli, the famous Roman prison. At his trial, Gramsci's prosecutor famously stated. "For twenty years we must stop this brain from functioning". He received an immediate sentence of 5 years in confinement (on the remote island of Ustica); the following year he received a sentence of 20 years of prison (in Turi, near Bari). His condition caused him to suffer from constantly declining health, and he received an individual cell and little assistance. In 1932, a project for exchanging political prisoners (including Gramsci) between Italy and the Soviet Union failed. In 1934 his health deteriorated severely and he gained conditional freedom, after having already visited some hospitals in Civitavecchia, Formia and Rome. He died in Rome at the age of 46, shortly after being released from prison; he is buried in the Protestant Cemetery there.

In an interview with archbishop Luigi de Magistris, former head of the Apostolic Penitentiary of the Holy See, which deals with confessions and forgiveness of sins, he stated that during Gramsci's final illness, he "returned to the faith of his infancy" and "died taking the sacraments". However Italian State documents on his death show that no religious official was sent for or received by Gramsci. Other witness accounts of his death also do not mention any conversion to Catholicism or renouncement by Gramsci of his socialist ideals.

Thought

Gramsci is seen by many as one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the 20th century, in particular as a key thinker in the development of Western Marxism. He wrote more than 30 notebooks and 3000 pages of history and analysis during his imprisonment. These writings, known as the prison Notebooks, contain Gramsci's tracing of Italian history and nationalism, as well as some ideas in Marxist theory, critical theory and educational theory associated with his name, such as:

- Cultural hegemony as a means of maintaining the capitalist state.
- The need for popular workers' education to encourage development of intellectuals from the working class.
- The distinction between political society (the police, the army, legal system, etc.) which dominates directly and coercively, and civil society (the family, the education system, trade unions, etc.) where leadership is constituted through ideology or by means of consent.

- 'Absolute historicism'.
- The critique of economic determinism.
- The critique of philosophical materialism.

Hegemony

Hegemony was a concept previously used by Marxists such as Vladimir Ilyich Lenin to indicate the political leadership of the working: class in a democratic revolution, but developed by Gramsci into an acute analysis to explain why the 'inevitable' socialist revolution predicted by orthodox Marxism had not occurred by the early 20th century. Capitalism, it seemed, was even more entrenched than ever. Capitalism, Gramsci suggested, maintained control not just through violence and political and economic coercion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became the 'common sense' values of all. Thus a consensus culture developed in which people in the working: class identified their own good with the good of the bourgeoisie, and helped to maintain the status quo rather than revolting.

The working class needed to develop a culture of its own, which would overthrow the notion that bourgeois values represented 'natural' or 'normal' values for society, and would attract the oppressed and intellectual classes to the cause of the proletariat. Lenin held that culture was 'ancillary' to political objectives but for Gramsci it was fundamental to the attainment of power that cultural hegemony be achieved first. In Gramsci's view, any class that wishes to dominate in modern conditions has to move beyond its own narrow 'economic -corporate' interests, to exert intellectual and moral leadership, and to make alliances and compromises with a variety of forces. Gramsci calls this union of social forces a 'historic bloc', taking a term from Georges Sorel. This bloc forms the basis of consent to a certain social order, which produces and re:produces the hegemony of the dominant class through a nexus of institutions, social relations and ideas. In this manner, Gramsci developed a theory that emphasized the importance of the superstructure in both maintaining and fracturing relations of the base.

Gramsci stated that, in the West, bourgeois cultural values were tied to religion, and therefore much of his polemic against hegemonic culture is aimed at religious norms and values. He was impressed by the power, Roman Catholicism had over men's minds and the care the Church had taken to prevent an excessive gap developing between the religion of the learned and that of the less educated. Gramsci believed that it was Marxism's task to marry the purely intellectual critique of religion found in Renaissance humanism to the elements of the Reformation that had appealed to the masses. For Gramsci, Marxism could supersede religion only if it met people's spiritual needs, and to do so people would have to recognize it as an expression of their own experience. For Gramsci, hegemonic dominance ultimately relied on coercion, and in a "crisis of authority" the "masks of consent" slip away, revealing the fist of force.

Intellectuals and education

Gramsci gave much thought to the question of the role of intellectuals in society. Famously, he stated that all men are intellectuals, in that all have intellectual and rational

faculties, but not all men have the social function of intellectuals. He claimed that modern intellectuals were not simply talkers, but directors and organizers who helped built society and produce hegemony by means of ideological apparatuses such as education and the media. Furthermore, he distinguished between a 'traditional' intelligentsia which sees itself (wrongly) as a class apart from society, and the thinking groups which every class produces from its own ranks 'organically'. Such 'organic' intellectuals do not simply describe social life in accordance with scientific rules, but rather articulate, through the language of culture, the feelings and experiences which the masses could not express for themselves.

Gramsci's central concept, and one that reflects his Hegelianism, is hegemony. According to Gramsci, "the essential ingredient of the most modern philosophy of praxis [the linking of thought and action] is the historical:philosophical concept of 'hegemony'. Hegemony is defined by Gramsci as cultural leadership exercised by the ruling class. He contrasts hegemony to coercion that is "exercised by legislative or executive powers or expressed through police intervention".

Whereas economic Marxists tended to emphasize the economy and the coercive aspects of state domination, Gramsci emphasized "hegemony' and cultural leadership". In an analysis of capitalism, Gramsci wanted to know how some intellectuals, working on behalf of the capitalists, achieved cultural leadership and the assent of the masses.

Not only does the concept of hegemony help us to understand domination within capitalism, but it also serves to orient Gramsci's thoughts on revolution. That is, through revolution it is not enough to gain control of the economy and the state apparatus it is also necessary to gain cultural leadership over the rest society. It is here that Gramsci see a key role for communist intellectuals and the communist party.

Gramsci's Hegemony Theory and the Ideological

Role of the Mass Media by Stuart Hains

A look at Gramsci's theory on governing bodies, their ability to control the masses, and the means employed to do so. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is born from the basic idea that government and state cannot enforce control over any particular class or structure unless other, more intellectual methods are entailed. The reason and motive behind the concept has been noted to be the way society is structured and exists on a power and class base. Gramsci defined the State as coercion combined with hegemony and according to Gramsci hegemony is political power that flows from intellectual and moral leadership, authority or consensus as distinguished from armed force. A ruling class forms and maintains its hegemony in civil society, i.e. by creating cultural and political consensus through unions, political parties, schools, media, the church, and other voluntary associations where hegemony is exercised by a ruling class over allied classes and social groups. Gramsci argues in his Prison Notebooks (which were written whilst he was incarcerated by Mussolini in Fascist Italy) that the way society is controlled and manipulated is of direct consequence of the practice of a 'false consciousness' and the creation of values and life choices that are to be followed. Gramsci argues that the system of hegemony can be classified as "social basis of the proletarian dictatorship and of the

Workers State". It is this process which Gramsci refers to when he tries to explain the way in which organization of people, media and information controls the thought and actions to create a state of domination through the creation of dominant ideologies. Another aspect of the theory of hegemony includes the economic determination and intellectual and moral leadership, which degenerates into a domination and consensual managing of life choices. The media has a central role in this theory and the practice of the process has become more and more to the fore in study of the way the ideological media are at the centre of the struggle for consumers' minds and central views. The role of the media has to be taken into account within the context of the theory of hegemony due to the value of the media and the public-imposed powers it yields. Communication from government, between and inside classes, is now controlled by the media and any text consumed by the state has to be considered to be potentially open to the practice of manipulation and therefore, the process of hegemony. It could be argued that the media exists as a vehicle and tool for consumerism to grow and for society to engage in the current purchase-dominated way. If people are not consumers then they may be considered by some areas of society to be outcasts and different from the 'norm'. It is this state of affairs where the media can be key to influencing the people it informs and instilling the thought that one must be a consumer and if not then at least aspire to be. Gramsci may argue that the way in which the media operates could equate to what he envisaged when he talked about a 'class struggle' and the creation of values that others must follow. It is this situation where the ideological role of the media can be seen to influence the way in which people can decode and read advertisement, features, television programmes and any text which may hold a hidden meaning, therefore creating the possibility for media to become very powerful in terms of ideological control and leadership. It could be said that the media has become the dominant class in a Western society full of semiotic and hegemonic traits. No longer can the world be seen through one's own single apathetic eye. Cultural Theory author Andrew Edgar states: "Due to the rise of trade unions and other pressure groups, the expansion of civil rights (including the right to vote), and higher levels of educational achievement, rule must be based in consent. The intellectuals sympathetic to the ruling class will therefore work to present the ideas and justifications of the class's domination coherently and persuasively. This work will inform the persuasion of ideas through such institutions as the mass media, the church, school and family". Recently, the proliferation and exploitation of press and interactive media has led to the creation of super media existence, threatening the objective viewpoints society relies upon to keep an 'open' state if one were ever to exist. Gramsci was mainly concerned with the determinism within the state of Italy in the early part of the 20th Century. He saw the potential for manipulation and the practice of domination growing in Mussolini Italy. Within the current theoretical climate, the theory has been adapted to include the theory of 'consent'. This allows the scope for many theorists to argue that the way society is now run, with the increasing emphasis on education, makes the leadership and decision making process less easy to quantify. The theory of consent exists to try and explain the way in which government policy; legislation and international policy are made and enforced.