

**Division of Labor and Structuration Theory:  
A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis of Marx's and Durkheim's Theories as the Early Approaches to  
Structuration Theory**

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**Abstract:** *To the extent that a society is to work, there exist a need for a cooperative process, including Weber's and Merton's note of common means and goals. But at the same time, there exist no societal process without involving conflict; (conflict in a dynamic and dialectical sense.) Dealing with this problematic situation the emergence of "division of labor", as a compulsive social differentiation, seemed to be inevitable. With the developmental process of societies, the division of labor, as the other processes, became more and more complex. The problem, here, is to analysis, theoretically and comparatively, the nature of Marx's, and Durkheim's theories of division of labor, concerning the notion of structuration as used by Giddens.*

**Keywords:** *Division of labor, objective alienation, structuration.*

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### **Theoretical Analysis**

First, the study will discuss the concept of division of labor as has been represented by Marx, and Durkheim, and its impact on, or relations with actors and the structure, the issue of structuration which has been posed by Giddens. The concept of division of labor is not something new. As most of anthropological studies have found, the origin of division of labor goes back to the very beginning of human societies. The first type of division of labor had been based on the sexual differences. By transition of simple hierarchic societies to complex hieratic or class societies, the process of the division of labor became more complex<sup>2</sup>. According to the dialectical relations of objective and subjective parts of a social dialectic, in a multi-dimensional procedures sense, the concept of the division of labor has been necessarily represented in almost all of the socio-philosophical system and analysis up to now. The most profound system of thought in ancient times regarding to the concept of division of labor is Plato's theory of "ideal society" and his typology of personality (Somerville & Santoni, 1963). There is a single but very crucial point in these systems of thought, while in the age of enlightenment cease to grow, that has been manifested throughout the history of socio-philosophical thought, namely, the concept of "natural ability". Most of social scientists have tried to imply this concept, or in a better word, this criterion, in dealing with socio-political problems, while there are some social scientists which have opposed this viewpoint. The representative sociologist of the former school of thought, in this paper, is Emile Durkheim and the representative of the later is Karl Marx. Let begin with Pre-Marxian period of thought to get a clear picture of the background of the study.

#### **a. Pre-Marian concept of division of labor**

The process of division of labor has become more complex as the technological process has become more developed. The Pre-Marxian period of economic analysis has recognized that to the extent that division of labor develops the economic productivity becomes more feasible. This is the conclusive point that in his third manuscript, Marx has reached by analyzing the theories of Smith, Tracy, Say, Skarbek and Mill. He states: "The whole of modern political economy is agreed, however, upon the fact that division of labor and abundance of production, division of labor and accumulation of capital, are mutually determining; and also can produce the and autonomous private property alone can produce the most effective and extensive division of labor." (Marx, 1964, 180)

Accordingly, Marx points out the two basic concepts of this period of thought which are fundamentally intervened. The process of division of labor, basically, is related to two other phenomena; namely "abundance"

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<sup>2</sup> This is an anthropological discussion which is out of the scope of this study. For more discussion refers to: (1- Fromm E "The anatomy of human destructiveness"; 1975, 2- Child V.G "Social evolution", 1950, and 3- Child V. G "What happened in History"; 1942"

and “private property”, which in their turn, they are strongly interconnected. The very simple conclusion of this analysis is referred to the point that the process of division of labor, whether directly or indirectly, has been encouraged by the sector of private property in order involved in this analytical process is the concept of “exchange” Skarbek, in this case states:

“The motive which implies a man to give his services to another is self-interest; he requires a return for the services rendered. The right of exclusive private property is indispensable to the establishment exchange among men... Exchange and division of labor mutually condition each other.”(Ibid, 184)

The whole process can be summarized by stating that since human beings in the technically developing societies<sup>1</sup> considering the variety of social problem need the others to satisfy his/her needs has to perform one specific role or function, and to solve the other problems he has to exchange his product to get whatever he/she needs. As a process of specialization a functions the productivity will increase and encourage the growth of property (private property). Therefore the progressive process of division of labor seems to be an inevitable phenomenon as a result of technical development and centralization of wealth and power. There exists a dilemma here regarding to the inevitability of division of labor in one hand, and growth of private property on the other hand. In the other words, this is true that societies need certain amount of division of labor. But the question is to what extent this process should be developed? This is true that division of labor is necessary for development of society but also it is true that only productivity and accumulation have become the aim of society. This is the dilemma which has been posed before Marx. He quotes from J. B. Say that:

“If every family...produced all that it consumed society could keep going although no exchange of any kind took place...in our advance no exchange of any kind took though not fundamental, is indispensable”. The division of labor is a skilful employment of man’s power; it increases society’s production -its power and its pleasures, but it diminishes the ability of every person taken individually.” So, one thing is missing here; and as a matter of fact a very crucial thing, namely acting individual. This is the dilemma with which Marx starts his discussion and concerned about. Let see, now, his view of division of labor.

#### **b. Marxian concept of division of labor<sup>2</sup>**

As for every philosopher or sociologist, it is also true for Marx to build his theory in relation to his specific historical time, partly to accomplish and partly to criticize it. In the previous section the general representative of economic analysis were presented. In this section there will be an attempt to explain Marx own theory regarding to the concept of division of labor and its consequences. Marx, basically, recognizes three major stages in the capitalistic mode; of production. These stages are considered to be occurred in the evolutionary process. The emergence of capitalism, for Marx, can be identical with the growth rate of urban communities and every day separation of urban and rural areas. He states:

“The greatest division of material and intellectual labor is the separation of town and country, the opposition to civilization, from the tribe to the state, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole history of civilization to the present day (the Anti- corn- Law League). With the existence of towns there is the necessity of administration, police, taxes etc. in short of municipal life and thus politics in general.” (Marx, 1964, 184)

One of the results of this phenomenon is intensive association of worker and every day increasing number of workers under particular form of law and order. Through this process, consequently, there come into existence a class of people, who takes the charge of dealing with products. Consequently; he states:

“The next intention of the division of labor was the separation of production and commerce and the formation of a special class of merchants, a separation which had been handed down (as for example with the Jews) in established towns and soon appeared in new ones.” (In: Ibid)

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<sup>1</sup> (This study by referring to the first principle of dialecticism accepts that everything is in the process of motion and consequently by rejecting the cyclical theories of the philosophers of history such as Spengler and Toynbee, believes in a type “Spiral progress”. Therefore every society is in the process of progress, while here we emphasize on technological points.)

<sup>2</sup> The basic references used for this section are Marx’s first Vol. of Capital and his first manuscript in “the early writings”

These characteristics of sub stages constitute the first stage of capitalism. In this case Marx states in page 322 of Capital:

“A great number of laborers working together at the same time, in one place, in order to produce the same sort of commodity under the mastership of one capitalist, constitute, both historically and logically, the starting point of capitalist production.”

The fundamental character of this stage of capitalism is a process of cooperation among workers with low and non-significant division of labor. Zeitlin states that “the emphasis here”, for Marx, “is on the socially productive forces that come into being by bringing, many men together to work side by side and to cooperate with one another”.(Zeitlin, 1968, 104) This is why, as the first stage of capitalism is called as “simple cooperation”.

The second stage is represented by a more complex division of labor. This is the late phase of manufacture. In this stage, the worker fails to be a creative worker. To the extent that he is specialized in one particular function, he is more efficient. In other words to be more efficient he has to become part of the whole operation, “an automatic, specialized implement of that operation”. And through this process and the more development of machine he has to be more and more as a part of machine; thereby the third stage of capitalism as the “modern industry” came into existence. Zeitlin explains that:

“In contrast with manufacture, where the productive process was adopted to the skills of the worker, the machine system compelled the worker to adapt himself to it. The subjective principle disappears and the whole process is examined objectively. Production is analyzed into a sequence of phases, each of which is solved by means of machines. The total system is now considered superior the more the process becomes a continuous one, the less it is interrupted in its various phases, the more the shifts from one phase to another are made, not by hand, but by machinery.” (Ibid, 107)

The process of division of labor, Marx declares that, results into alienated individuals and society. Alienation will be a social character of human being in the modern world mainly because:

- 1- Human relation and the product of her/his labor is one of the objective ones. In other words the worker does not have any control over the process of work.
- 2- Consequently the human relation in this process, “the productive activity” is alien. He states:

“The division of labor is the economic expression of the social character of labor within alienation. Or since labor is only an expression of human activity within alienation, of life activity as alienation of life, the division of labor is nothing but the alienated establishment of human activity as real species-activity or the activity of man as a species-being.”(Marx, 1964, 181)

- 3- Man’s relation with “human species and with his self” is not subjective.(Ibid)

Let’s now develop the relations of division of labor and alienation little bit more. As a naturalist philosopher, Marx maintains that human being has a nature which is composed of two interrelated parts. One represents what the individual is without society and the other is the synthesis of the first part and its dialectical relation with the socio-historic situation (Fromm, 1978). Therefore the interrelation of human being and her/his socio-historic situation is the main key to the understanding of one’s behavior.

The distinctive point of difference between animal and human being is her/his capability of to work and that through this process he relates himself/herself to the world. Therefore work for Marx, is a meaningful activity through which one create himself. But in capitalist mode of production this meaningful activity has lost its significance, and so, the main goal of human association is to act as a part of the huge body of social organism simply in order to increase the productivity and to strengthen the order of the whole system. What happens to the individual is not the matter of reference, what happens to the process of economic development is the significant point. Therefore not only psychologically human being becomes oppressed, sociologically also, she/he becomes inappropriately stratified. In the formation process of capitalism, Marx writes: “ it became apparent that division of population into two great classes directly based on the division of labor and the instrument of production.”(Marx, 1975)

The major aspect of alienation which is the most important point in Marx’s discussion and unfortunately has been neglected in most of the so-called socio-analytical texts is the concept of alienation in its objective sense. Most of psychological and sociological analyzers assume that Marx has discussed alienation as a “state of mind”.

As the authors of “the capitalist system” concludes the Marxian concept of “alienated labor”, is not just a psychological one:

“Today we tend to think of alienation as a psychological state of mind involving elements of dissatisfaction with the world and the isolation from others. An alienated worker doesn’t like his or her job; and an alienated student can’t get along with her or his teachers; an alienated person, is simply “turned off” by the society in which he or she lives. In this way we may use the term “alienation” in its subjective sense to describe something that people experience and feel. It is important to distinguish clearly between this subjective concept of alienation and the objective concept which Marx used in his analysis of capitalism. In its objective sense, alienation means powerlessness or lack of control; a person is alienated from something (e.g. a job) if he or she has no control over it. Clearly, an objective situation of alienation can give rise to a subjective feeling of alienation; but it need not necessarily do so.” (Edwards & the others, 1978: 265)

It was previously discussed that there exist, for Marx, three aspects of alienation (in its objective sense). Also it was mentioned that division of labor is one of the major cause of alienation. Before concluding this section lets distinguish and clarify few terms which we have used here. I referred to two types of alienations one is subjective, and the other is objective. Dealing with “objective alienation”, we mentioned that this type of alienation is a result of “objective relation” of one and his/her circumstances. While “subjective relation” is the creative relation which, must be replaced in order to abolish alienation.

In other words Marx use alienation in its objective sense namely the state of powerlessness and believes that human relation in this sense are objective because they lack the control over labor process while humanistic condition refer to conditions in which human relations are subjective, namely, people are subject of their own acts.

Very briefly, Marx asserts that as the consequences of division of labor:

1. the process of power and economic centralization will come into existence,
2. Consequently poverty, conflict and dehumanization become the social character of the capitalist societies.
3. Instead of leading the process of work, individual will act automatically and will adapt her/himself to the system, while the system must be adapted to the individual’s world.

### **c. Durkheim’s concept of division of labor**

Division of labor as an exchange process of products and its synchronized acceleration and development with the growth of private property is the fact that has been emphasized by economists since Pre-Marxian period. What Durkheim emphasized here, is not the growth of productivity but reduction of competition. He states that the division of labor thus emerges as a social arrangement not for increasing productivity, but for reducing competition. Its principal effect is to increase the amount of heterogeneity among the parts of the social organism, there by multiplying and intensifying their mutual dependence. In other words, the function of the division of labor is to preserve social solidarity.” (Harris, 1968, 476)

Therefore what is really important for Durkheim is the social solidarity which he believes is the direct result of the division of labor. In the other words, social solidarity is depended to the extent of the development of division of labor. Applying an evolutionary logic, he believes that in less developed society “commonality” is a dominant pattern, “everybody is like the others”. But in developed societies heterogeneity is the dominant pattern. The only factor which despite this heterogeneity holds the society together is a common consciousness which penetrates into the society together is a common consciousness which penetrates into the individuals through the process of division of labor. Individual as “parts of society” such as a part of the whole organism has to perform a “function” in order to preserve the totality of the “whole”.

This is the “normal” way of life in today societies with high division of labor. But Durkheim soon found out that this normality actually does not exist. So he tried to explain these aspects by stating that:

“Though normally, the division of labor produces the social solidarity, it sometimes happens that it has different and even contrary result.” (Durkheim, 1968, 353)

So he believes that there exist some forms of “abnormal” or “pathological” form of division of labor. One type of this abnormality is “anomie division of labor”. Conflict is what Durkheim regards as one aspect of this type of abnormality. He even recognizes a direct relation between “specialization” and conflict in a very Marxian sense. He explains that:

“The conflict between capital and labor is another example, more striking, of the same phenomenon. In so far as industry fails to function become more specialized, the conflict becomes livelier instead of solidarity increasing.” (Ibid, 375)

The second type of abnormal division of labor is the “forced division of labor”. This is very interesting that reacting to this type of specialization as one of the “in just” form of division of labor he suggests a radical solution, “there is no other way out than to change the established order and to set up a new one.” (Ibid) But not only, according to Zeitlin, (1968, 234-280), Durkheim did not develop this idea, but also he did emphasize throughout his entire works, on preserving the order of society. He clearly states that:

“Those...whose preference for change and diversity prompts a revolution at all uniformity are certainly in danger of being morally incomplete. Regularity is the moral analogue of periodicity in the organism.”(Durkheim, Ibid)

Social change, for Durkheim, is acceptable only to the extent that does not disturb the whole system (organism). “Law” and “order” are the main keys to the understanding of Durkheim’s theory. He considers individual as simply as a part of system, which performs a function only to enhance the social solidarity. But it is very interesting to mention that function, according to Durkheim, has a very conservationist meaning. In Durkheim’s good society, “social inequalities exactly express natural inequalities”(Durkheim, Ibid). As Zeitlin explains Durkheim:

“Envisioned a system in which some men have a (natural) bent for the (functions) which as he himself acknowledged, are humanly debarring. His good society therefore becomes one in which some are still more equal than others but now, presumably, the inequalities are based on (natural) abilities.”(Zeitlin, 249)

Criminal behavior, for instance, is considered criminal, for Durkheim, not in the sense that it might endanger, let us say, humanity; rather it is criminal because it is against the equilibrium of organism, because it disturbs the order of society. But what will happen if the order is dehumanized? Durkheim’s answer depends on the type of division of labor and social solidarity. If division of labor, based on natural ability occurs, there will be no such dehumanization. Doesn’t he try to justify sexism, racism and exploitation? Is it true that “social inequality exactly express natural inequality? So if the established division of order which in Durkheim’s sense (and contrary to Marx) is based on “natural inequalities”, can one conclude that men are naturally superior to women, Whites to Blacks and conservationists to radicals? Because Durkheim believes this capitalist system is fine, there is no need to change or revolution or:

“All in all, Durkheim hoped with (his) demonstration to prove that modern society is good. A complex division of labor is inherently orderly, for it contains within it its own moral principles.” (Collins & makowsky, 1978, 103)

Now let’s give some clarification to other related concepts and bring a conclusion to the discussion.

### **Social solidarity and freedom: a conclusive remark**

So far we have discussed, in a general sense, how Marx and Durkheim explain the process of division of labor and its consequences. To analysis the basic assumptions and be prepare for the next discussions let bring a very summary of what we discussed before. By analyzing the social facts and by reviewing the economic literature Marx concluded that the process of division of labor while increases the productivity at the same time diminishes the individuality. Durkheim nor accepted the first outcome, the increase of productivity, while almost all of economist had accepted, neither he accepted the second one. He declared that by the development of division of labor individuality develops as well. While these two perspectives seem too contradictory if one accepts any of these perspective’s definition or the terminology, he sees each of these models are right in their sense except in one case. Let me now develop this process in a different mode.

Alienation, for Marx, is not a free state of being, but a state of powerlessness. Marx asserts that division of labor under capitalist mode of production prevents people to be free, to do whatever they like to do, to act as a human. In the existing order people fail to actualize their selves and cannot make their faculties to work.(Wood, 2004), (Turner, 2009). For Marx to be free, or not to be alien or to be yourself, means to be not tied up with alien functions; it means to explore as the thesis and antithesis counteract each other to explore a new world, to be new, to act and interact based on consciousness and shared meanings. This dynamics assumption is a very crucial principle; it pre-assumes that the aim of history is not society. The aim of society, in contrast, is individual acting based on meanings. He states:

“It is not history which uses men as means of achieving -as if it were an individual person-its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuing of their ends.” (Marx and Engels, 1975, 63)

While for Durkheim this society uses people to pursue its ends, he believes that: “..to be free, is not to do what one please, it is to be master of oneself, it is to know how to act with reason and to do one’s duty”. (Durkheim, 1974, 89-90)

In contrast to Durkheim, Marx believes that the existing order does not help an individual to reveal his self. Durkheim believes that the state:

“Must remind the teacher constantly the ideas of the sentiments that must be impressed upon the child to adjust him to the milieu in which he must live.” (Durkheim, Ibid, 79)

While Marx states:

“The realm of freedom only begins, in fact, where that labor which is determined by need and external purposes ceases...” (Marx, 1975, 254) Durkheim writes: “It is society, it is the race acting in and through him, he is only the intermediating through which they realize themselves. His liberty is only apparent at his penalty is borrowed.” (Durkheim, 1968, 404)

While Marx declares that:

“To speak precisely and in ordinary language the members of civil society are not atoms.” (Marx and Engels, 1975, 219)

Durkheim asserts:

“To be a person is to be an autonomous source of act.” (Durkheim, 1968, 408)

What Durkheim cares about people is that they fit into the organism, do their job, their function, and try to be nice. What Marx cares about is freedom, is to be active, to be alive, no matter what will happen. This social order for Durkheim is on the behalf of people as one well integrated group, but for Marx the order is on the behalf of one special class. Durkheim wants to prove that interest of individual and society are the same, Marx wants to say it must, be but actually it is not.

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