

Synoptic Epistemology: Social Thoughts of Pre-Classicism and Classicism

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Abstract

This literature brief provides a concise but comprehensive perspective on pre-classical and classical social theories that have revolutionized societies in the past and continue to have an indelible impact on the human social structure today. This paper weighs in on the contributions of pre-classicists and classicists such as Isidore-Auguste-Marie-François-Xavier Comte, Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne, Marie-Comte-Joseph de Maistre, Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat-Marquis de Condorcet, Claude-Henri de Rouvroy-Comte de Saint-Simon, Charles-Louis de Secondat-Baron de La Brede de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, and John Locke. This brief also analyzes, groups, compares, and contrasts the concepts of pre-classicism and classicism prior to the emergence of classical-modernistic and modernistic sociological theories.

Keywords: pre-classical, classical, classicism, classicist, theory, thought, synoptic, epistemology

The orchestration of the human habitat is a unique artistry that puts in place the necessary social, political, and economic elements responsible for producing life and sustaining it. However, during the sustainability process many factors come into play; most of which are geared towards shaping the human makeup holistically. Though the intent of socialization is adaptability, it becomes a challenge to some and less of a challenge to others. Harro (2000) in her Cycle of Socialization project argues that adaptability becomes a problem to some and less of a problem to others because the social structure of society is an unequal system of oppression that favors some and disfavors others. According to Harro, those who the system disfavors find adaptation and adoption to be a challenge due to the injustices, inequalities, and oppressions they experience compared to those who it favors. Bobbie Harro argues that majority of those who find adaptability to be less of an challenge are affiliates of the dominant groups in society whose interests the system is designed to protect.

Literature Review

Instability, inequality, disagreement, fear, and conflict are results of a socialization process that favors some and disfavors others. Historically, great thinkers and actors have always used their talents to address those social disequilibria. The English philosopher and politician John Locke, an enlightenment thinker writes extensively on natural rights and argues that all humans are born with the endowment of certain rights that cannot be revoked, transferred, or compromised. He argues that by nature humans are born free and are equal, and if government wanted the people to share some of their rights with it, it would require a serious negotiation. Locke describes this negotiating proposition as a “social contract;” one in which citizens share

some of their rights by obeying the law and government in return guarantees the protection of those rights which are life, liberty, and property. Additionally, Locke argues that if government breaches the terms of the contract by not protecting the lives of all its citizens, not promoting equality and freedom for all, and not respecting and securing the material and immaterial possessions of all its citizens the people have the right to protest and demand that the government be dissolved and replaced. Locke is also a proponent of the principles of majority rule and separation of power. He argues that in reference to the principle of majority rule, the views and voices of the people take precedence, and with regards to the principle of separation of power, no branch of government should have more power than the others because it could lead to absolutism or dictatorship and unrest. Locke opposes government policies and tactics that serve as punitive means to subject its citizens to it. The brilliance and works of John Locke played a major role in the American and French Revolutions. In fact, most of Locke's words are recorded in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America. Locke's ideas about "natural rights" moved the citizens of France to get rid of monarchal absolutism for representative forms of government (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005; A & E Television Network, History.com, 2019).

Charles-Louis de Secondat-Baron de La Brede et de Montesquieu, a French political philosopher, another enlightenment thinker like John Locke argues that government should not be stronger than the people. He argues that through a representative form of government the people elect individuals to represent them to handle the daily affairs of the country, not dictating to them or abuse their rights, rather, to govern in accordance with the law. Montequieu, a proponent of separation of power argues that no branch of government should have more power than the others. He argues that power should be clearly defined and evenly distributed among the

three branches of government. His book, *Spirit of Laws* contributed to some of the principles embedded in France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Constitution of the United States of America (Oxford University, 1979-86 as cited in *Encyclopedia Britannica; Biography*, 2019).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French political philosopher, and educationalist argues that by nature humans are born good but are corrupted by government and its institutions. He argues that bias, inequality, and exploitation are products of corrupt policies and practices of government. He writes lengthily on education and argues that government should provide equal access to education for all boys and girls. He argues that education will enable boys and girls to become productive citizens and contribute to the general good of society. One of his famous quotes is "man is born free but he is everywhere in chains" (Infed, 2019). The quotation is Rousseau's argument that government should mutually work with its citizens. He urges that government should respect the general will of the people because by doing so it can lead to the general good. Rousseau sees this supposedly bond between government and the people as one that can build trust and mutual understanding and dispel fear, hatred, stereotype, and division (Infed, 2019; British Library).

Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne, a French economist was an advocate for change, not only economic, social as well. He was influenced by some of the great philosophical and sociological minds of his time. Renowned figures such as Marquis de Condorcet and Pierre-Samuel du Pont de Nemours were two of those with whom he had intellectual conversations. Turgot in his own right exudes the title social and political revelator for making several social and political predictions that came to pass. He predicted the American Revolution twenty years before it happened and predicted that America will be a leader of the free world. He was a proponent of freedom and self-government and an opponent of slavery and

absolutism. He urged Americans to be more concerned about civil wars than foreign (Bouvier, 2020; Rae & Thompson, 2017; Rothbard, 2010; and Foundation for Economic Education, 2018).

Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat-Marquis de Condorcet, a French philosopher is a social reformer and proponent of human rights and democratic polity. He argues that in a democratic society the rights of the people should be protected by government and the freedoms of citizens should not be impeded by government. He argues that government should not be in the business of instigating division amongst its citizens, rather, promoting social equality and satisfaction among the citizenry. He advocates for transparency in government and adherence to the rule of law or the constitution. Not only was he for human rights, he strongly advocated for equal rights, especially for women. He argues against the notion that women are unqualified to serve in public office. He opposed slavery and proposed legislation to end slavery and reform colonial rules. He advocated for social justice, morality, coeducation, and the right for women to make decisions regarding pregnancy. He contributed to the French Revolution in theory and practice. He was instrumental in the drafting of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens. He was the architect of France's Principles of Tolerance and Minority Rights (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016; OER Services; Online Library of Liberty; 2016).

Jeremy Bentham, a British philosopher, economist, and utilitarianist argues that individuals have the right to seek their own interests apart from government therefore government should not interfere or sabotage their pursuit. In his principle of legislation proposal he argues that good governance is dependent on the rule of law which everyone should be subjected to, including those in authority. He argues that adherence to the law brings about public and social harmony and satisfaction for all. He argues that the two major drives that govern humans are pain and pleasure, and that the application of the principle of utility provides

an exit for one's pain. He is a proponent of prison reform; one that gears toward promoting morality, rehabilitation, career preparation, and education. His arguments on police reform also suggest the enhancement of morality and utility (satisfaction) for all. He advocated for equal rights and women's suffrage. He argues that women were capable as men to participate in government therefore they should not be hindered. In his social improvement proposal, he advocated for laws that favor all equally, especially the poor and/ minority. He argues that government should provide jobs for the poor and supplemental assistance such as welfare benefits in the form of cash, career training, education, health, dental, vision, and other means until they improve socioeconomically. He proposes the elimination of privileged elitism and encourages the upholding of democratic values. He argues that government's involvement in promoting policies and practices that produce inequality and division is one that is prejudicial and politically and socially unethical. He denounces constraints on liberty and argues that the power of government should be limited (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019; Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy; University of Oxford; Unitarian Philosophy).

Marie-Comte-Joseph de Maistre, a French moralist and one of the great minds of his time. He opposes government use of punitive measures as the means of safeguarding social order. He argues that government should respect the rights and core values that bind its people together and enhance morality in its policies and practices. He argues that social order can only be ascertained and maintained if morality is registered as a core-value tenet of governance. He was influenced by Auguste Comte and Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon, renowned thinkers of his time (Encyclopedia Britannica; New World Encyclopedia: Merion West, 2019).

Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon, a French social theorist and social and economic reformer. He argues that good planning is one of the key steps to great governance. He argues that a government that disallows all its citizens to equally participate in the democratic process by voting and enjoying all the rights granted by law to them is an example of bad governance. He also argues that a government that supports class privileges and domination is one that fuels division, fear, hatred, and civil unrest among its people. He argues that in an open society, work should be available for everyone and rewards should be based on meritocracy, not favoritism or privileged status. He advocates for the poor, women's rights, and social order; one that promotes a positive atmosphere of governance (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; The Great Debate, 2008; Chastain, 2004; Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2010).

Isidore-Auguste-Marie-François-Xavier Comte, a French philosopher and social reformer is known to be one of the founders of socialism and the first to develop the concept of sociology. His contributions to the principles of social statics; forces that hold society together and social dynamics; causes of social change which also are referred today as "social structure" and "social change," continue to impact the field of social science greatly. He argues that logic along with other disciplines can be used to understand human relationships. He argues the possibility of society being able to transition out of chaos to something better once its social statics are in place. He was admired by John Stuart Mills, a renowned British philosopher and political economist and inspired by philosophers such as Charles-Louis de Secondat-Baron de La Brede de Montesquieu, Marquis de Condorcet, Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne, and Claude-Henri de Rouvroy-Comte de Saint-Simon. He advocates for the welfare of humanity and improvement of society (Encyclopedia Britannica; Crossman, 2019; The School of Life).

Discussion

Pre-classical and early classical sociological theorists set the foundation for classical sociological modernists such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Jane Addams, Harriet Martineau, and others. Each theorist had a unique approach to addressing the sociological needs of his or her time.

Theoretical Congruity

Most of the works of Isidore-Auguste-Marie-Francois-Xavier Comte, Marie-Comte-Joseph de Maistre, Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon, and Jeremy Bentham are about social reform. Their didactical and literary platforms concentrate on ways society can improve to make life better for its people. Isidore-Auguste-Marie-Francois-Xavier Comte, Marie-Comte-Joseph de Maistre, and Jeremy Bentham are also proponents of morality. They argue that morality as an element of social order brings a balance between the governed and government.

Marie-Comte-Joseph de Maistre was influenced by the teachings and writings of Isidore-Auguste-Marie-François-Xavier Comte, and Claude-Henri de Rouvroy-Comte de Saint-Simon. Claude Henri de Rouvroy-Comte de Saint-Simon was also a contemporary of Isidore-Auguste-Marie-Francois-Xavier Comte. With regards to social change, Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne joins the company of the aforementioned theorists. On the issue of liberalism (the employment of new ideas for change), Marquis de Condorcet and Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne dedicated most of their works to that cause. Marquis de Condorcet and Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne were also advocates for abolitionism. They argue that slavery is inhumane and should have no place in a civilized society. Marquis de Condorcet and Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne were also contemporaries.

Pre-classicists and classicists who advocate for equal rights and against inequality are John Locke, Marquis de Condorcet, Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne, Jeremy Bentham, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They argue that women are part of the citizenry and should be allowed to vote and play a civil role in society. Auguste Comte and Anne-Robert Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne are proponents of positivism. They argue that one of the responsibilities of government is to create a positive environment for its citizens. John Locke and Jean-Jacques write profoundly on social contract. They argue that if government asks its citizens to share some of their rights, in return government has to guarantee the protection of its citizens from foreign and domestic harm. However, according to them if government breaches its agreement to guarantee the equal protection of all its citizens, the citizens have the right to protest and demand the replacement of that government.

Jeremy Bentham, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Charles-Louis de Secondat-Baron de La Brede de Montesquieu advocate for limited government. They argue that government should not have more power than the people. They argue that the will of the people is paramount in a democratic society. In addition, John Locke and Charles-Louis de Secondat-Baron de La Brede de Montesquieu argue that in order for there to be a balance of power between government and the people, power must be separated evenly between the branches of government so that one branch cannot have too much power than the others.

The presence and works of Charles-Louis de Secondat-Baron de La Brede de Montesquieu, Claude-Henri de Rouvroy-Comte de Saint-Simon, and Marquis de Condorcet impacted the American and French Revolutions. Both Marquis de Condorcet and Jean-Jacques Rousseau devoted most of their time to education reform. They wrote lengthily on the importance of education in society. In reference to the issues of poverty and the poor, Jeremy

Bentham and Claude Henri de Rouvroy-Comte de Saint-Simon allotted some of their time raising concerns about both issues (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; The Great Debate, 2008; Chastain, 2004; Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2010; Crossman, 2019; Merion West, 2019; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019; & A & E Television Network, History.com, 2019).

Theoretical Incongruity

Isidore-Auguste-Marie-Francois-Xavier Comte shares many views similar to most of his colleagues in the philosophical realm but few of the approaches that make him different from them are his concerns about understanding human relationships and the welfare of humanity. He refers to sociology as a positive science. Three peculiarities of Anne-Robert-Jacques-Turgot-Baron de L' Aulne are tolerance, social evolution, and laissez-faire, a French word which means let the people do as they choose without the interference of government. The same word is used by Adam Smith, the great economist as a corollary for his economic theory which discourages the inference of government in the economy. Marquis de Condorcet turns some of his attention on colonial reform because he condemns the policies and practices of the colonialists and colonialism. He is also a proponent of social justice. A unique advocacy of Joseph de Maistre is for nationalism (promotion of the culture and welfare of a nation) and universalism as it relates to the cultural patterns of people and society. John Locke's theory on "property" became the premise of the arguments of Adam Smith on human capital and the factors of production in economics and Karl Marx's socialist and capitalist manifesto or "Communist Manifesto." Apart from his work on economics and Unitarianism (collective freedom and social change), Jeremy Bentham spent a good bit of his time focusing on police reform and the prison system (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; The Great Debate, 2008; Chastain, 2004; Encyclopedia of

World Biography, 2010; Crossman, 2019; Merion West, 2019; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019; & A & E Television Network, History.com, 2019).

Conclusion

The common goal of pre-classicists and classicists was to reform society socially, politically, and economically. While most of them shared similar arguments and agenda, some expanded their thoughts and concerns into other areas in society. The magnitude of their concentration on a particular issue showed the severity of that issue and their vested interest in that area. Majority of those scholars were knowledgeable and diverse in their thinking and practices so that accorded them the latitude to extend their philosophies into other areas or disciplines. Even those among them who might not have formally attained credentials in certain areas, their devotion to self-education, and interaction with experts in those areas privileged them to a lot of information and knowledge they did not have. The ideas and practices of pre-classicists and classicists set the foundations for future theoretical frameworks such as structuralism, functionalism, structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, feminism, Marxism, and postmodernism.

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