

Q14. Max Weber used the term verstehen for better understanding of social actions. Explain the significance of the concept by discussing two examples from social life. (CSS-2020)

Ans. I - INTRODUCTION: MAX WEBER'S VERSTEHEN FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL ACTIONS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

German Term "Verstehen"	To Understand Subjective Meanings of Social Actions	Effective in all Levels of Management
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Social action is an act which takes into account the actions and reactions of individuals (or agents). Max Weber developed a social action theory that holds that society is constructed through the interactions and meanings of the people who make up society. He used the German term "Verstehen" in order

understand the subjective meanings attached to social actions by individuals. This concept is significant because its two types help to effectively manage and shape individual's actions, society and organizations and prepares them to cope with future challenges

II - MAX WEBER'S SOCIAL ACTION THEORY AND VERSTEHEN

a) Social Action

According to the German sociologist Max Weber, a social action is any act or activity which an individual performs within a society and there is a specific purpose behind it.

Example: Awareness campaigns regarding social problems, helping victims during a natural disaster, etc.

b) Social Action Theory

Social action theory examines the actions of people in the context of the meanings that they assign to them and the relationship these actions have with the

actions of others Max Weber called sociology as the science of social action.

c) The term Verstehen

In order to understand the subjective meanings attached to social actions by individuals, Weber used the term "Verstehen". It has two mechanisms:

i) Aktuelles Verstehen

It means direct observational understanding. It is when one just observes what people are doing. However, observational understanding alone is not sufficient to explain social action.

Example: When Anna observes from the facial expressions of Ali that he is angry.

ii) Eklarendes Verstehen

It means empathetic understanding. It is when one makes an effort to understand the motive behind the action. To achieve this, Weber argued that ~~you~~^{one} has to get into the shoes of people doing the activity.

Example: When Anna tries to find out the reason behind Ali's bad mood, has Ali fought with someone, is Ali's health good?

III - SIGNIFICANCE OF VERSTEHEN

a) It Gives a Purpose to Life

Nothing in the universe is created without any purpose. Through verstehen, one searches and defines meaning for his/her life (identifies the purpose of life).

Example: 1. Verstehen plays a key role in the identification of one's career through self-analysis process.

2. Through empathetic understanding, one gets calm during the hardships of life.

b) It Prevents us from Wrong Decisions

Verstehen is based on the detailed analysis of an action and hence one stops from taking wrong immediate actions.

Example: 1. During one's ^{car} accident, verstehen prevents him/her from violence and guides him towards proper legal and medical actions.

c) It is a Main Idea of Interpretive Sociology

Verstehen is the main idea of interpretive sociology which deals with the meaning attached to action, unlike positivist sociology which focuses on behavior. Interpretive sociology strives to show that reality is constructed by people themselves in their daily life lives.

Example: Interpretive sociology and verstehen maintains peace and religious tolerance in the world. They make people realize that religion is ones personal choice.

d). It Relies on Qualitative Data

Verstehen relies on qualitative data and tends to analyze all dimensions of an action, unlike positivist sociology which tends to make use of quantitative data.

Example: Today's success of science over religion is because science is based on qualitative data ^{while} and religion is based on quantitative data.

e) It Prepares us for Future Challenges

Every day life throws new challenges, these challenges can be effectively handled when one ~~app~~ adopts the observational and empathetic understanding of such challenges.

Example: During the outbreak of COVID-19, the world's blaming of China for the virus's spread was due to lack of *verstehen*.

f) It Regulates Organizations and Societies

Positive changes in organizations and societies can be effectively brought when Weber's social action theory is applied.

Example: When one's motive of action is understood then proper incentives in order to bring positive changes can be taken. (in organization and society).

IV - CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Social action is an action to which an individual attaches meaning. The social action theory is explained by both Max Weber and Talcott Parsons. Weber adopted a

symbolic interactionist approach/perspective while Parson's theory is based on functionalist perspective. The social action theory gives researchers a better understanding of actions behind human behavior, be they 'traditional', 'affective' or 'rational'. Weber's verstehen has the potential to transform this world into a successful and peaceful place through inculcating logical reasoning and tolerance among people.

V- CONCLUSION

To conclude, Weber's social action theory states that society is-constructed through the interactions and the meanings of people who make up society. The term verstehen used by him, having two mechanisms, effectively helps to understand social actions. The verstehen concept has significance at individual, societal, organizational and ~~hence~~ at all levels of life.

Q15. Max Weber and Talcott Parsons have theorized social action from their variable perspectives. Highlight the contributions of both thinkers and also locate the divergence of their standpoints. (CSS-2022)

Ans. INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIAL ACTION THEORIES BY MAX WEBER AND TALCOTT PARSONS

Social Action Theories
by Weber & Parsons

To Better Understand
Human Actions

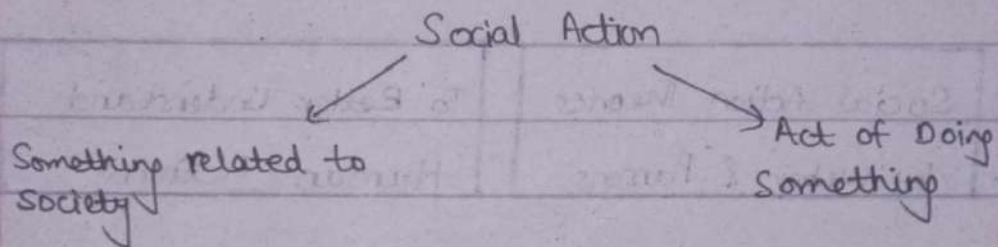
Social action is an act which takes into account the actions and reactions of individuals (or agents). Max Weber originally developed the social action theory, based on an interactionist perspective. This later inspired Talcott Parsons to carry on his work according to functionalist perspective. Thus, each explained social action according to their own perspectives. Weber defined social action as an action having meaning, orientation towards others and is performed consciously. Weber's social action has four types, while Parson's social action has an actor, goal, orientation (towards others)

and alternative means (to achieve goals).

Parson also defined three types of social actions.

II- SOCIAL ACTION AND THE DIFFERENCE IN APPROACHES OF WEBER AND PARSON

a) Social Action



Thus, social action is any act or activity which an individual performs within a society and there is a specific purpose behind it.

Example: Awareness campaigns regarding social problems, helping victims during a natural disaster, etc.

b) Social Action Theory

Social action theory examines the actions of people in the context of the meanings that they assign to them and the relationship these actions have with the

actions of others. Max Weber called Sociology as the Science of Social Action

c) Differences

Max Weber defined/explained his social action theory based on the symbolic interactionism while Talcott Parsons explained his theory based on structural functionalism. These differences are further explained in the below headings:

III - WEBER'S SOCIAL ACTION THEORY

a) Social Action

An action, according to Weber, is social if it satisfies the following conditions:

1. It is influenced by an action of past, present or future.
2. It presupposes the existence of other individuals and ~~get~~ some action by him.
3. It is oriented in its course (the action has some direction, purpose or intent).
4. It has subjective meaning (understandable or of concern to the social actor).

Example: Moving a chair on the order of a boss is a social action, while moving a

chair without any intention is not a social action.

b) How to Understand the Subjective Meanings Attached to Social Actions?

In order to understand the subjective meanings attached to social actions by individuals, Weber used a German term "Verstehen" which has two mechanisms:

i) Aktuelles Verstehen

It means direct observational understanding of an action.

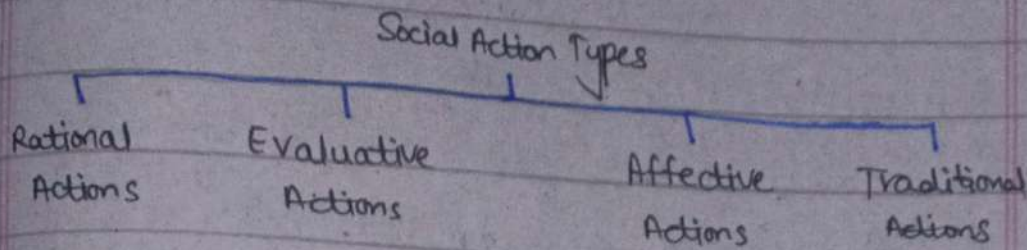
Example: When Amna observes from the facial expressions of Ali that he is angry.

ii) Eklarendes Verstehen

It means empathetic understanding of an action.

Example: When Amna tries to find out the reason behind Ali's bad mood — has Ali fought with someone, is Ali's health good?

c) Types of Social Actions



i) Rational Actions (Instrumental Rational)

This type of social action is goal-oriented and the motive of the goal is derived from the desires of actor. However, the goal should be realistic and actor should have means which are required to achieve the goal.

Example: An employee wants promotion, so he has to work hard and be sincere to his tasks.

ii) Evaluative Action (Value Rational)

This type of social action is also considered ^{to be} rational however, the rationality of that action is justified by the actor from his set of beliefs, which may be aesthetic, religious, constitutional, etc.

Example: A soldier laying down his life for the country (for the sake of certain values like honour and patriotism).

iii) Affective Action

This type of action is the anti-thesis of rationality and is also known as emotional action. Here the human beings act impulsively and do not necessarily think about consequences.

Example: Crying at a funeral is affective social action.

iv) Traditional Action

These actions are based on long-established and habitually practiced traditional expectations in a society which become second nature and habit. Because their doers are unable to comprehend the possibility of alternative ends.

Example: In traditional Indian society doing 'namaskar' to elders, emptying the chair for an elder, etc.

IV - PARSON'S SOCIAL ACTION

a) Social Action

According to Parsons, a social action must involve:

1. Actor

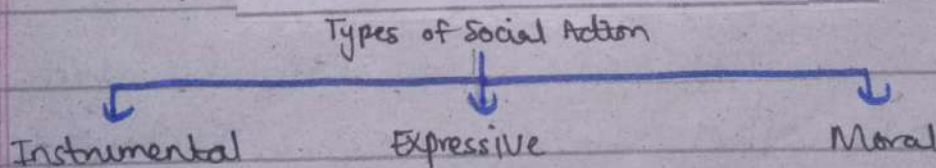
2. Goal
3. Orientation towards others
4. Alternative meanings to achieve goals

The social action must also satisfy the following conditions:

1. It occurs in social situation
2. It is oriented towards a goal.
3. Action is regulated by norms and values
4. It involves investment of energy

Example: A man drives and goes to office is a social action because the road is a situation, goal is to go to office, going to office is ethical and it involves investment of energy in the form of burning fuel, driving car, etc.

b) Types of Social Actions



i) Instrumental Social Actions

The instrumental actions are those which are executed considering their consequences and the various means to achieve the end.

Example: Filing an FIR against a bureaucrat or

a politician.

ii) Expressive Social Action

Expressive social action refers to actions as an expression of people's views.

Example: Father's thumbs-up towards his son in a match.

iii) Moral Social Action

Moral social action refers to actions which are performed in accordance with moral or ethical principles.

Examples: Driving a car with licence, respecting elders, etc.

V- CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Social action is an action to which an individual attaches meaning. The social action theory is explained by both Weber and Parsons. Weber adopted symbolic interactionist perspective while Parsons theory is based on functionalist perspective. The social action theory gives researchers a better understanding of actions behind human behavior, be they 'traditional', 'affective' or

'rational'. The social actions have the potential to transform this world into a successful and peaceful place through inculcating logical reasoning and tolerance among people.

VI - CONCLUSION

To conclude, social action theory states that society is constructed through the interactions and the meanings of people who make up society. The social actions is defined by Weber according to interactionism while Parsons explained it according to functionalism. However, Weber was the first to explain the social action, followed by Parsons who extended his ideas and theory.

Q17. 'Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social group of which the individuals forms a part'. In the light of this statement, discuss Emile Durkheim theory of egoistic, altruistic, anomie and fatalistic suicide. In what way the theory of anomie would be helpful in the solution of current involvement of Pakistani youth in suicidal attempts. (CSS-2017, 2018)

Ans.

I-INTRODUCTION: DURKHEIM'S STUDY OF SUICIDE, HIS SUICIDAL THEORIES AND THE APPLICATION OF ANOMIC THEORY IN PAKISTAN

Durkheim studied
Suicide

Act of killing
oneself

A menace in
Pakistan

Suicide is a social problem and is a deliberate act of killing oneself. Durkheim comprehensively studied and researched this topic and found out that social factors are the main causes of suicide rather than individual's psychological factors. He identified four types of suicide: anomic, altruistic, egoistic and fatalistic suicides and developed theories on them. This is a menace and is found among Pakistani youths mainly due to anomy (normlessness). Thus, there is a dire need of the hour to take actions in this context.

II-DURKHEIM'S STUDY OF SUICIDE

a) Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim was a nineteenth

century French sociologist. He is credited with being one of the principal founders of modern sociology. Most of his work was concerned with how societies could maintain their coherence and integrity in modernity.

b) Suicide

Suicide is the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally.

c) Durkheim's Research on Suicide

Durkheim's research found that suicide rate was:

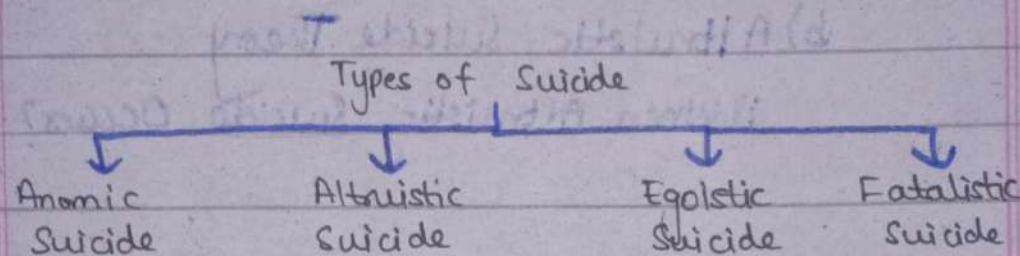
1. Higher in industrial societies than in traditional societies
2. More common among Protestants than Catholics
3. Less common among couples than single people
4. More common in soldiers; particularly in times of peace

d) Durkheim's Conclusion

Durkheim found that social integration is the main factor behind the

act i.e. - the more integrated a society is, the more an individual has a sense of belonging that might sustain him/her during times of distress and the less he/she is likely to commit suicide. Thus, social factors have to do more with suicide than psychological factors.

III - DURKHEIM'S THEORIES OF SUICIDE



a) Anomic Suicide Theory

i) Anomic

Anomic is a social condition in which there is a disintegration or disappearance of norms and values that were previously common to the society.

ii) When Anomy occurs?

Anomic situations occur during periods of drastic and rapid changes in the social, political and economic structure of the society. E.g., during COVID-19 pandemic.

iii) How Anomy leads to Suicide

During such drastic transition

periods, previous norms remain no longer valid and new norms have not yet evolved. This lack of clarity of rules and goals creates frustration among individuals and they began to feel alienated from the society with no motivation to contribute.

Example: Suicides caused by loss of jobs due to increased automation (use of machines).

b) Altruistic Suicide Theory

i) When Altruistic Suicide Occurs?

Such type of suicide occurs where there is excessive regulation of individuals by social forces that a person will be moved to kill himself/herself for greater good.

Example: The killing of wife after husband's death (Satti in Hinduism), a soldier who sacrifices his/her life for country, etc.

c) Egoistic Suicide Theory

i) When Egoistic Suicide Occurs?

Such type of suicide occurs when people feel detached from the society due to weakening of social bonds that normally integrate individuals into the collectivity. This is because excessive individualization

individuation gives rise to meaninglessness.

Example: Suicides among single males, suicides among members of nuclear families, etc.

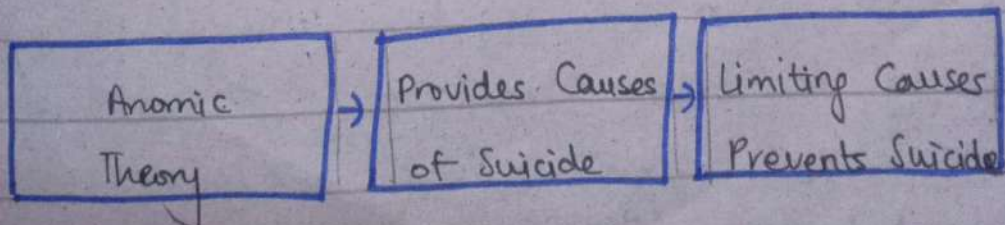
d) Fatalistic Suicide

1) When Fatalistic Suicide Occurs?

Such suicides occur when there is extreme condition of social regulation (opposite of anomic). This is because the individuals become so bound that they choose to die rather than to continue.

Example: Suicides among students due to educational burden and expectations, suicide among transgenders and homosexuals due to their negligence by society, etc.

IV - USEFULNESS OF ANOMIC THEORY TO SOLVE YOUTH'S SUICIDE IN PAKISTAN



a) Suicide Statistics in Pakistan

Pakistan's suicide rate is above the worldwide average. According to the

World Health Organization's country report 2022, the suicide rate in Pakistan has alarmingly crossed eight percent while one out of 200 people attempting suicide dies.

b) How Anomie leads to Suicide in Pakistan?

Pakistan has prevalent lawlessness due to which rapists get a free hand to pursue their activities. Several incidents of rape occur across country like motor-way incident, Noor Mupaddam's case and others. The inactivity of law due to long process and patriarchy prevents victims from reporting their incidents and as such they develop psychological issues and commit suicide.

Another case is the prevalence of corruption and nepotism which prevents young men from pursuing jobs. Such jobless men become psychological and hence prefer to take their lives.

c) How to Prevent Anomy and Suicide in Pakistan?

In order to prevent anomy and lawlessness in Pakistan, the following steps need to be taken:

1. Create job opportunities through economic investments and bilateral and multilateral cooperations with other countries.
2. Limit population size through creating awareness.
3. Implement strict laws to ensure transparency and accountability.
4. Focus on providing cheap and quality education and increasing literacy rate.
5. Promote economic and political stability.
6. Eliminate corruption and nepotism.
7. Discourage terrorism by strengthening police and military.

V - CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Suicide is a social problem studied by Emile Durkheim. It is mostly common among youths and males. due to less social interaction among them. From a functionalist

perspective suicide is caused by social structures like family and religion. The conflict theorist stresses the pluralistic nature of society due to capitalism which creates a sense of deprivation among people to commit suicide. The interactionists blame the psychological factors of individual to commit suicide. ~~However~~, suicide is a growing menace in Pakistan and can be curbed by regulating the socio-^{economic} ~~environmental~~ factors of the country which actually compel the people to commit suicide.

VI - CONCLUSION

To conclude, suicide is the deliberate act of killing oneself studied by sociologist Emile Durkheim. He identified four types of suicide and developed his suicidal theories. This ~~is~~ a social problem and is increasing its pace in Pakistan due to normlessness (anomy). Thus, the Pakistani people and government need to join hands in order to eliminate this menace from the country.