

Individualism; One's Position in Society, According to the Founders of Sociology

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Abstract: *The concept of individualism in the field of sociology was introduced by the empirical scheme of one's position in society. The growing importance of the attention to this pattern affected by social changes has been rapid and rough. Cultural and social processes of modernization and modern age always create new conditions and stimulus leading to changes and verities in methods of individualization. Whether "individualism" is a distinctive characteristic of modern societies is a usual term among founders of sociology and its revision has not been stopped yet. The present article is to analyze different standpoints of founders of sociology about the relationship between an individual and society and the very concept of individualism. For founders of sociology, the question of individual-society is a completely social issue suggesting modernity along which expresses itself with more severity. All of them wish a real release from individual, but – albeit unevenly - suggest its difficulties and dangers. From Marx's point of view, under the present alienation, the individual is linked to future, his full realization will only be done by capitalist exploitation at the end of the history. In contrast to this optimism of Marx's, Weber's pessimism can be easily observed: the process of rationalization causes one to be imprisoned in his iron cage. Conservatively, Durkheim and Tocqueville are more optimistic. Individualism is particularly specific to individuals, a fact that brings about a new status which cannot be opposed, but must be adjusted. In addition, its dangers towards society and individuals should be analyzed and steps must be taken to compensate. But in between, its extraordinary complexity causes Simmel's analysis on individuality and individualism to be distinctive. He states most of different features of individualism which are clarified in contrast to previous conditions, and teach them in all classes of individual more than other things.*

Keywords: *Individual, society, individuality, individualism, founders of sociology.*

Introduction

The concept of individualism in the field of sociology was introduced by the empirical scheme of one's position in society. The growing importance of the attention to this pattern affected by social changes has been rapid and rough. In societies with successive and pseudosteady political changes such as American and French Revolution, the Human Rights Revolution and Industrial Revolution with its exiting breaks from within, make the sociologist ask himself about one's position in society (Tarot, 2004:93). Where from Tonnies' point of view, "social revolution will become spontaneous and decentralized". From Simmel's standpoint, the sudden "impact" of "stimulus" in production, society and history which for the first time was experienced in French Revolution and then in other revolutions of nineteenth century was limited to the existing social movements, but a century later, it was considered to be the very movement and permanent changes (Friebee, 1375: 453). In fact, "appearance of individuality in its modern form, is related to the collapse of religious, economical, and social order in Middle-Ages. In general movement against feudalism, a new emphasize on the importance of personal issues could be observed. In Protestantism, this emphasize was also on the direct relationship between God and man, as opposition to the church's being a medium between man and God" (Vosoughi et al. 1384:34, Vosoughi and Mirzaiee 1387:15). In this evolution from the Middle-Age world to the modern one, a new concept of individual was created which in practice, were adjusted to some characteristics such as "increase in reasonability, skills, conscious and evaluated efforts to improve man's conditions, stability and public assurance in the faith in man's nature which is distinctive everywhere and every time" (Behravan and Alizade 1386:2). The century which was moving along with the changes in humans' relationships, made the sociologists position themselves; some like Tonnis and

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Riseman paid attention to the negative aspects of individualism or negative individualism and some others like Durkheim, De Tequvill, and Parsons considered positive aspects of individualism or positive individualism as well as negative aspects (Javadi Yegane and Hashemi, 1387:146; Vosoughi and Mirzaiee 1387). Marx looked at the issue optimistically while Weber and Simel did it pessimistically. "Positive individualism is considered to be one of the most important component of development and is focused on self-actualization, self-confidence, independence, self-efficiency, self-respect, and etc. While negative individualism is focused on autonomy, personal profit at the expense of others, radical self-reliance, egotism, and having an authoritarian personality"(Teriandis, 1378, quoted by Mirzaiee 1385). Therefore, the growth of elements of individualism can be seen from Renaissance¹. The present study is to analyze one's position in society and the concept of individualism as a social event from viewpoints of founders of sociology.

Alexi De Tequvill

According to "Oxford Dictionary", the first example of the concept of individualism was found in De Tequvill's book entitled Democracy in America translated by Henry Reev in 1840 (Rahmatpour 1370:199). In De Tequvill's opinion, individualism is a new concept which a novel idea can be born from and has a democratic origin, so the comprehensive and comparative process enables it to decrypt the message of Great French Revolution: an exciting, inevitable and painful transition from a royal society as a feature and heredity privilege to an equal one in which all the members are provided with freedom with similar rights and life conditions (Trot, 2004:95-96).

Tequvill's confirmation of the France's incorporation to the ideas of freedom does not mean that he supports the cumulative effect of individualism's behaviors, rather, he believes that democratic movement is more powerful than individuals. In Ancient Regime (before the French Revolution) and Revolution², he tries to present that revolution is everything except an accident or occurrence, which can change everything after that, as is nothing has happened. For this reason, Montesquieu's pupil changed the logic of governments, even human's excitements and tendencies and guide them beyond the conscious but restricted goals of those who can evaluate their own tendencies. Tequvill believed that full individualism would probably be the greatest chance of a despotism³ because individualism ends in integration. Everyone tries to do as Romans, the man does not have the power to be an individual and cannot take its responsibilities. And finally, in isolation, he prefers equality to freedom. Therefore, individual and individualism carry the power of their ruins in themselves (Ibid).

Emil Durkheim

According to Durkheim, the primary of sociology is the priority of society to individuals, while this individual does not have an immediate recognition of this priority especially historical contemplation and ethnology. So the sociology must choose a method by which it can be separated from subjectivity and bias of certain social issue. The subject of sociology is the social events which must be methodologically reconstructed and objectified in order to ignore the subjectivity which individualism is to deduce. Mauss⁴ is on the idea that the priority of society to individuals implies the importance of coercive criterion: "if all the social issues are not deliberate then all the deliberations are certainly social" (quoted by Terrier, 2012).

Considering all, the Durkheim's holistic methodology never takes the issue of individual as individualism for granted, whether it is a basic point in its mind. He represented it in *Division of Labor* through contrast of mechanical and organic Solidarity. While separation of politics from religion decreases the domination of religion, respect to one and human's rights will change into modern religion because they are the only basics which all the people from all over the world can come to a certain point (Baghaie, 2010:953). This individualism must not be integrated with "shortsighted utilitarianism and profit-seeking selfishness (Durkheim, 1970/1898: 262, quoted by Truc, 2005:162) because this individualism is holly and has spiritual aspect: "to separate Good and Evil, a human being who has a normative definition is considered to be holly in other words, a religion in which human is both the worshiper and the worshiped, but since humanity is its goal, and in definition, humanity is an individual, this religion is individualist" (Ibid: 264-265).

¹ A period from the 14th to the 17th century, considered the bridge between the Middle-Ages and Modern history.

² Ancien Régime et la Révolution

³ A form of government in which a single entity rules with absolute power. That entity may be an individual, as in an autocracy, or it may be a group, as in an oligarchy. The word despotism means to "rule in the fashion of a despot" and does not necessarily require a singular "despot", an individual.

⁴ A French sociologist and nephew of Émile Durkheim. Mauss's academic work traversed the boundaries between sociology and anthropology

From Durkheim's point of view, the problem of the new society, is individualism or irregular growth of individuality: "social differentiation, the special feature of new societies, is the creative condition of individual freedom. The individual can have act and thought independence only in society where collective consciousness has lost part of its overcoming strength. In such an individualist society, the main problem is the maintenance of the least collective consciousness. If it is wiped out completely, solidarity leads to separation and social efforts (Aron, 1386:373). Durkheim is on the idea that, although in ancient societies collective consciousness includes the biggest part of individual conscience and in different societies individuals are allowed to freely act and think about themselves (Ibid: 365), social development does not imply failure in social solidarity and the complete release in individual consciences but rather, they mean the appearance of a kind of individualism which is within the scope of people's interests and collective consciousness and is never separated. That is why this kind of individualism could be called "social individualism" (Ghaneierad, 1379:38). The state of anomie which rules certain parts of contemporary societies and is caused by lack of institutionalization of individualism. According to hypothesis in *Division of Labors*, this institutionalization should include the formation of unifying links in political and economic systems which through career forum leads to improvement in fair distribution of functions (e.g the elimination of forced labor division) under the government's general support and moralizing economic relationships" (Vosoughi and Mirzaiee, 1387). However, Durkheim does not get tired from referring to dangers (anomaly and suicide) of these movements several times. Durkheim's individualism is real but naïve, because, he is doubtful about the optimism of a liberating ethical innovation and awareness of the new forums formed by new solidarities (Colliot-Thélène, 2012:210).

Karl Marx

From Marx's point of view, whose fame is for complete holistic and totalitarianism, the meaning of bourgeois individualism, abstract individuality of political economy, constructional individuality of political Liberalism and human's rights can be easily obtained from that. But it is rare, because he thinks they are individualist's forums having unstable and incompetent formats (Tarot, 2004). The only goal of Marx's evolutionary approach towards social constructions is individual's degradation because it shows that the constructions and movements are formed by some forces beyond that of humanity. It can even be said that these forces can surround humanity with all his power. On one hand, individual is ignored by forces and conciseness determining his needs and relationships. The forces which he has no less control over. On the other hand, making a model of society as an organization and inconsistent structure proposed which includes powerful relationship among groups and especially class relationships whose objective is realizing a society which may include individual position. Marx believes that "political democracy"¹ is not the goal of social freedom though in comparison to absolutism, it is far ahead of it. By proposing the idea of "social democracy"², he declares that for instance, the French Revolution released the "political spirit" but could not release physical and spiritual elements of civil society. In a political democracy, human is the high power but since he has lost his humanity, has become alienated and been under the authority of inhuman conditions. That is a man who is not a real fellowman yet (Raha. 1392:3).

Along with this regression analysis of the conditions surrounding individuals, as is expressed by Louis Dumount (1977, 134-218, quoted by Tarot, 2004:89), there is a design of individual's general release for Marx, to an extent in which one can see the anarchism and dream of the society by indirect relationship between man to man, recognizing everyone by all, where each human relationship would be optional. Except from Lenin's, another reading may be found in Marx's design. But the fact is that a Marxist is more related to future than reality, and it is probable that he remains in the same state (future) for a long time.

Max Weber

Weber believes that methodological individualism does not guarantee anything about a modern man's ability to think and change his present conditions, an issue which will be problematic for humanity's certain freedom. First of all, he finds himself entangled with a clash of gods caused by modern polytheism³, and nobody, even interested in, could show the way to leave the pluralism of values. On the other hand, individualism leads to a painful contrast whose fan have forgotten simple rights of humanity. Good examples of the contrastive results are the strict puritanical virtues through their austerity which corporates to the birth of the first capitalism and capitalism being

¹ In the political realm there can only be one form of democracy, what we may call political or direct democracy, where political power is shared equally among all citizens.

² Alternatively, social democracy is defined as a policy regime involving a universal welfare state and collective bargaining schemes within the framework of a capitalist economy.

³ Polytheism refers to the worship of or belief in multiple deities usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses.

turned into hedonism which probably Boudon¹ did not dare calling it an evil result (Collio Thelene). In Weber's idea, from Middle-Ages, cities have become the center of individualism's development. He thinks that, from many aspects, individualism developed by specialization of cities. In fact, individualism is the particular feature of cities. In social city lives, punctuality and accuracy are the necessities of the complicated lives. He believes that world's rationalization is out of its development and industrialization and it is along with the increase in individualism (Weber 1381:5, quoted by Behravan and Alizade, 1386).

From his point of view, a new type logical organization originated in "rational calculations related to production and economical investment framework and Governmental Management which is managed by those officers trained legally and officially. In both cases, objectification of social relationships in organizations and machines creates "robots" whose characters have been but they are "logically efficient"; in a way that these inanimate robots in production and animated machines in bureaucratic organizations, form bars of an "iron" cage" (Frisbee 1375:455-456). Here, Weber discusses "inanimate professions" and "heartless hedonists" (Ibid). But whether individualism of a liberal society leads to the present "iron cage" of the rationalization of the investment, is a process in which Weber observes caging of the whole humanity that nobody knows how to exit: "probably, human being will be imprisoned in his self-build iron cage" (Coser 1386:319). Therefore, according to what Weber believes, rationalization is the cause of the lack of individual freedom.

George Simmel

Simmel's theorization on individualism is more verifiable than his other works about metropolises, fashion and the dynamic contrast between individuals and society. In these papers, Simmel considered individuals to be basically a social phenomenon. In his point of view, "the individual is not an ultimate and absolute element, rather in fact, it is an assembled being" (Simmel, 1997:323, quoted by Pietinen 2012:282), in other words, "the confluence of warp and woof or social lines" (Frisbee, 1386:148). From Simmel's sociological point of view, individualism is the result of complex of relationships which are specific and particular to each individual and society: "individual would be surrounded in the biocoenosis² and at the same time, he faces himself with it. He is both a chain in the organism of the bio coenoses and the whole independent organic; he exists both for himself and society" (Simmel, 1392:121). With all these, Simmel explains the essence and the deepest, original and previous meaning specific to sociology as "between individuals and society, "inside" and "outside" are not two irrelevant definitions, rather both of them describe a completely homogenous position of human being as a social animal" (Ibid). He emphasizes that individualism does not have innate essence, but it is created by synthesis of social chains inside which each person can be different: "we, as social creatures do not live around an independent center. But, every moment, we are constructed through the other's interaction" (Ibid: 120).

Simmel is on the idea that, the process of new history, represents the increasing freedom of individuals from sever social and personal affiliations. In addition, cultural products made by human beings would defeat them more than before. In old societies, dependence was a full-scale one and the whole characteristic of people was eroded in group life, but the organizational principle in modern world is different from that in ancient world: an individual is the member of several social chains, but none of these includes his whole characteristics and does not have full monitoring on him (Coser, 1386: 263). He also believes that quantitative changes in the members of a group leads to qualitative changes in their interactions. Life in a bigger social chain and interacting with it in its own essence, grow more awareness of characteristics than that in a smaller chain. The processes of social and personal separations, the growing process of task specialization and increasing labor divisions lead to a growth in one's characteristic and freedom. The freedom which would be limited by individuality:" the bigger chains encourage one's freedom while the smaller one's limit it", "the individual's freedom is the one limited by individuality and caused by the unity of one's existence and the unity of existence which can completely make it free, specialization of the needs whose requisite is availability of the biggest possible chains of possible choices" (Simmel, 1392:426-428). In Simmel's idea, freedom is "a social act and a relationship not a state restricted by a single subject" (Truc, 2005"162).

From the standpoint of Simmel, sociologically, growth of individuality is related to development of the group not its erosion. The reason is that a group is always developing and is never fixed; therefore, "individuality, either in essence or in act, increases to an extent which the social chain including individuals develop" (Ibid: 406). In a network of intersecting chains, the more the digit of possible combination of the one' membership, the better he can find a particular position in society. A split in group attachment awakes a feeling of particularity and freedom

¹ Raymond Boudon was a sociologist and Professor in the Paris-Sorbonne University, and was a member of many important institutions.

² Coined by Karl Möbius in 1877, describes the interacting organisms living together in a habitat.

(Coser, 1386:264). Along with the group's quantitative growth, social distinction will increase. By the necessity of competition, the difference in the members of a group would be more distinctive and this competition leads to one's growth of specialization. Inevitably, this process makes similarities among the groups because, from Simmel's point of view, social distinctive forms are nearly or completely identical, even in too much different groups. In a paper in 1988, entitled "considerations on social-ethical issues" Simmel declared: "along with development and increase of complication in a society, one's individuality would get matured. Along with deepening one's individuality, there would be similarities and proximity between the members of a group and those out of it. Therefore, on one hand, the process of socialization and development increases individuality, on the other hand, it brings about similarities and affinity among strangers" (quoted by Jafroudi, 1392:88). The same issue is stated in a paper entitled "Group's Development and One's Growth": "differentiation and individuation loosened the link among those who are closest to make a new one –real and ideal- with those who are further" (Simmel, 1392:410). Because he thinks that its construction will be made when people have two-way effect on each other (through interactions) and form social associations (Vatayer, 1388:118).

However Simmel emphasizes that individual and society have interactions on each other and are dependent to each other. Human beings express their individuality only in his relationship with other beings. "One cannot release himself from totality by himself: ceding a part of his ultimate ego¹ to a small number of others and joining them. Moreover, he can maintain his individuality and still avoid extreme isolation and irritability and too much personal thinking" (Simmel, 1392:418).

Discussion and Conclusion

Whether "individualism" is a distinctive characteristic of modern societies is a usual term among founders of sociology and its revision has not been stopped yet. For founders of sociology, the question of individual-society is a completely social issue suggesting modernity along which expresses itself with more severity. All of them wish a real release from individual, but – albeit unevenly - suggest its difficulties and dangers. From Marx's point of view, under the present alienation, the individual is linked to future, his full realization will only be done by capitalist exploitation at the end of the history, the one that returns it to an infinite history (Tarot, 2004:89). Weber's pessimistic point of view is contrasting with this optimism of Marx; the individual exists, and is basically free, but with worldly uncertainty and contradictory ethics, history does nothing for him, no ethical improvements. Liberalism looks like a hallucination² (Collio Telene, 2012:214), process of rationalization is just going on which imprisons individuals in his iron cage more and more. However conservatively, Durkheim and De Tequill are more optimistic. Individualism is particularly specific to individuals, a fact that brings about a new status which cannot be opposed, but must be adjusted. . In addition, its dangers towards society and individuals should be analyzed and steps must be taken to compensate. But in between, its extraordinary complexity causes Simmel's analysis on individuality and individualism to be distinctive. In fact, Simmel is not a theoretical defendant of individualism so that the interpreter could summarize it in a few lines. He states most of different features of individualism which are clarified in contrast to previous conditions, he implies organizational ordered causalities (on the first step, the effects of financial economic), but he teaches it more than other things with real issues of humanity in all individual level.

The idea of individuality from Simmel's point of view is designed as below: first, individuality as a separate entity (but not unique or full) and consequently, it is understood as the idea of quantitative individualism. Then it is understood separately and unique, but not yet full, whose examples are Shakespeare's heroes and are similar to the idea of qualitative individualism. And finally, there is a third kind of individualism which not only is a separate entity and unique, but also reflect the world's totality. Generally, this individualism is only a non-abstract moment in process of living, but it is the moment which includes the world as a whole.

¹ The realistic parts of human characteristics which mediates between desires of id and superego.

² Something which you imagine you can see or hear, but which is not really there.

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