KNOWLEDGE AND RELIGION IN SOCIETY: 
A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study purposes to deal with the problem of how sociological approaches to the issues of knowledge and religion diverge according to their theoretical points of view. After we discuss Karl Marx, Karl Mannheim and Berger-Luckmann in the sociology of knowledge section, we will examine ideas of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber on religion in the sociology of religion section. Whereas the sociology of knowledge usually treats ideas regarding to social and economic environments, sociology of religion handles religious doctrines in terms of their implications on secular and mundane activity. Thus, these two branches of sociology will be investigated here in terms of different theoretical perspectives.

Key Words: Sociology of Knowledge, Sociology of Religion, Marx, Mannheim, Berger-Luckmann, Durkheim, Weber.

Toplumda Bilgi Ve Din: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Bakış

Özet


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This essay will examine different theoretical perspectives concerning knowledge and religion in two parts. In the sociology of knowledge section, three sociological approaches will be addressed: those of Marx, Mannheim, and Berger-Luckmann. Karl Marx brought a historical materialist perspective to sociology. For him, in order to look at the real nature of society free from the fantasies of the human mind, class relations and their materialistic basis must be examined. Mannheim applied Marx’s class-based perspective to all social positions. Inspired by a phenomenological perspective, Berger and Luckmann attempted to analyze the role of consciousness in the constitution of everyday life.

In the sociology of religion section, two classical sociologists will be dealt with: Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Durkheim emphasized the problem of order in his sociology and analyzed religion in this context. Weber brought a different perspective in his sociological approach, emphasizing the attribution of meaning to action and social relationships.

I. The Sociology of Knowledge: Marx, Mannheim, Berger and Luckmann

1) Karl Marx

Karl Marx’s turn from German philosophy begins with an ontological criticism of German idealism which considers “Truth” as an ideal to be striven for. This kind of philosophy, for Marx, regards “conceptions, thoughts, ideas in fact all the products of consciousness, to which an independent existence is attributed, as the real chains of man.” On the contrary, in an attempt to place theory on a material basis, Marx puts forward “real” individuals in “real” life conditions.

Opposed to Hegel’s idealistic ontological principle for which the real is rational and ideal, Marx proposes the materialistic understanding of reality. Since “it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness,” for Marx, true knowledge is the knowledge that depicts the material conditions of life. All other types of knowledge including metaphysics, ideology, morality, religion are incorrect and belong to human mentality rather than the true nature of material life.

Hence, for Marx theory has to address the real nature of life, which is full of contradictions and struggles. Marx attempted to investigate the real nature of society, which, unlike British economists such as Adam Smith for whom societies were governed fairly by an invisible hand, was for him antagonistic rather than harmonious. The “problem of order,” according to Marx, is a product and illusion of idealist thinking which seeks an order in social reality. It is ideological in the sense that it hides the real and antagonistic nature of social relations.

Political economy starts with the fact of private property; it does not explain it to us. It expresses in general, abstract formulas the material through

2) Ibid., p. 25.
3) Ibid., p. 28.
4) Ibid., p. 27.
which private property actually passes, and these formulas it then takes for laws. It does not comprehend these laws, i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property.\(^5\)

In this context, Marx accuses social philosophy and economics, both of which dealt with the problem of how social order arises, of being bourgeois sciences: both served bourgeois class interests by obscuring class struggles and conflicts. For him, because social reality is full of contradictions, such sciences, given their main concern with how social order emerges, cannot perceive the antagonistic nature of society\(^6\). Marx attempted to study social contradictions embedded in the very nature of society by means of his historical materialism method.

Turning away from Hegelian Idealism to historical materialism, Karl Marx essentially emphasized the crucial importance of social-economic relations in understanding society over subjective meanings and the intentions of individuals. This is evident from Marx’s understanding of the relationship between substructure and superstructure. Marx proposed that not men’s imagined conceptions like “social order” but the economic substructure of a society determines its superstructure, which consists of legal and political institutions. “The mode of production of material life,” in this sense, “conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general.”\(^7\)

According to Marx, as material conditions always possess ontological priority over human consciousness and human mental productions (concepts and ideas); material conditions must be given priority for the understanding of the true nature of things. Material forces, for Marx, unveil the real nature of things, and banish the illusions of false consciousness.

2) Karl Mannheim and the Task of the Sociology of Knowledge:
   Contextualization of Ideas in Social Bonds

Inspired by Marx’s critique of knowledge that focuses on the relation between knowledge and class interests, Karl Mannheim applied Marx’s ideas to a new field of sociology: the sociology of knowledge. This domain of sociology, for Mannheim, would investigate the relation between knowledge and social position. However, as Mannheim founded this field under the influence of German philosophy, we need to offer an overview of this intellectual background to Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge.

a) Immanuel Kant and Neo-Kantianism

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) basically asserted in his philosophy that an external world, independent of the human mind, is the source of our perceptions and our knowledge.


Although our perception depends on this external world, *a priori* concepts and forms of space and time in our mind construct the form of this perception, and therefore, our knowledge of the external world. Therefore, we cannot know this real world in the ultimate sense, which is external to the mental categories, due to the boundaries of our mental capacity.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) applied Kantian philosophy to the field of human history and social life in terms of understanding the real world through the existential conditions of the knower-subject. Like Kant, Dilthey asserted that the epistemological device of mankind is restricted by the conditions that shape human experience. In this manner, Dilthey proposed that “the structure of mind” discerns reality through one of the categories of “causal relations, experiencing value, meaning and significance, and willing.”

Despite Kant’s main concern with the physical sciences rather than the cultural sciences, Hegel had been concerned with human history and cultural issues as well as the physical sciences before Dilthey. However, unlike Hegel who asserted the ability to understand the absolute Truth in human history, Dilthey, utilizing Kantian philosophy, asserted that it is not possible to understand human history in its totality because of human existential conditions. Then, for Dilthey, a historian cannot approach the facts he or she is investigating from a universal point but through “a principle of selection.” In this respect, he deviated from the Kantian idea of the possibility of universal knowledge due to the unchanging human mental categories.

In addition, Dilthey distinguished the *Geisteswissenschaften*—or cultural sciences, from the *Naturwissenschaften*—or physical or natural sciences. For Dilthey, the understanding of the social world is an ongoing interpretative process which depends on the human mind’s attribution of meaning to social life. Therefore, this is an infinite, unrestricted process. On the other hand, for Dilthey the natural sciences “analyze causal connections of the process of nature.” Therefore, Dilthey argued that in the field of the cultural sciences there is no determinacy, as they are concerned with meanings in the socio-historical sphere, unlike the physical sciences which deal with the determinate field of natural laws.


Inspired by Kant and Dilthey, Max Weber, in his sociological studies followed their position in terms of social relations constituting an infinite phenomenal world. Then, he accepted the idea that the external world as the subject of science cannot be grasped in its holistic and substantial sense through our scientific investigations. Our scientific efforts are only a search for this ideal world. For this purpose, "ideal types" as heuristic devices can be used to analyze the facts we are examining. In addition to these "ideal types" which cannot apprehend the ultimate Truth, for Weber, there is no absolute "objective scientific analysis of culture," rather, it is "expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously ... selected, analyzed and organized for expository purposes."16

In this regard, according to the Neo-Kantian perspectives of Dilthey and Weber, both of which were inspired by the Kantian distinction between the numenal and phenomenal worlds, our existential situation (Dilthey) and our specific and interested point of view (Weber) determine or condition our knowledge. We cannot, therefore, apprehend the absolute Truth of social reality.

b) Karl Mannheim and the Existential Determination of Knowledge

Even though Karl Mannheim traced a path of scholarship in German thought in his Ideology and Utopia in 1934, he was particularly concerned with the problem of how people's ideas are related to and affected by their social positions. As Mannheim states: "it becomes the task of the sociological history of thought to analyze without regard for party biases all the factors in the actually existing social situation, which may influence thought."17

In this regard, for Mannheim the sociology of knowledge is concerned with two tasks. It seeks "to analyze the relationship between knowledge and existence," and it undertakes "historical sociological research."18 For Mannheim, because people look at the world through their social positions, all those different ideas, or in Mannheim's terminology, "Weltanschauungen", cannot reflect actual social reality because of their specific social situation. In Mannheimian terms, "... the specific character and life situation of the subject influence his opinions, perceptions and interpretations."19

However, this argument leads Mannheim to the charge of relativism. If every thought and every idea is based on the social positions of individuals, we cannot find any universal criterion for our intellectual activities; rather, all opinions and thoughts in social life are dependent on our existing social positions and become relative to each other. This brings absolute relativism, owing to the relativity of different social positions and their determining ideas and the claim that all ideas are false because of the lack of any universal criterion for truth. The following are Mannheim's own words:

16) Ibid., p. 72.
19) Mannheim, op.cit., p. 56.
It is precisely these factors which are responsible for the fact that two persons, even if they apply the same logical rules, e.g. the law of contradiction or the formula of the syllogism, in an identical manner, may judge the same object very differently.20

This social determination of ideas, referring to the determination of ideas in regard to their existing social positions21, seems at first glance as social relativism: all perspectives are different from each other with respect to their original distinct social position. Yet, Mannheim opposes the perspectivist, or relativist understanding of the idea-social position relationship in his approach to the sociology of knowledge. Rather, for Mannheim, sociology of knowledge looks for common patterns of "the relations between certain mental structures and the life-situations in which they exist" to investigate "how it comes about that a given type of social situation gives rise to a given interpretation."22

For Mannheim, ideas and thoughts have to be understood in regard to their social context i.e., their connected social relations as ideas achieve their meanings "not in a social vacuum but in a definite social milieu,"23 i.e. in reference to the social positions of their owners. That is to say that social situations and ideas are connected to each other in a context. Persons can understand each other with respect to their social position namely, the context of their ideas, as for Mannheim, "there are modes of thought which cannot be adequately understood as long as their social origins are obscured."24

By deciphering ideas with respect to their social context, a historical study, thus, "does not inevitably lead to relativism, but rather to relationism"25. Relativism, then, in the Mannheimian sense, does not imply the lack of truth with respect to ideas as they are relative to each other. Rather, it "signifies merely that all of the elements of meaning in a given situation have reference to one another and derive their significance from this reciprocal interrelationship in a given frame of thought."26

Accordingly, Simonds argues the same kind of approach to Karl Mannheim. For him, in Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, the relation between thought and social position has to be considered as a hermeneutical interpretation of inter-subjective relationship instead of as a causal determination. For Simonds, by proposing the relation between social position and thought Mannheim did not intend that all these special perspectives are false. Rather, it means that in an inter-subjective relation we are engaged in we understand other subjects’ perspectives contextually, namely by giving reference to their social and historical positions. Since, for Mannheim, Simonds asserts, "the conceptual means by which thought is formulated and expressed is...constituted by the social process of sharing meaningful experience."27 Then, Simonds argues that, for Mannheim,

20) Ibid., p. 272.
21) Ibid., p. 86.
22) Ibid., p. 80.
23) Ibid., p. 80.
24) Ibid., p. 30.
25) Ibid., p. 85.
26) Ibid., p. 86.
27) A. Paul Simonds, Karl Mannheim’s Sociology of Knowledge, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1978, p. 120.
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meaning is constructed by means of not subjectivity, but intersubjectivity, namely through reciprocal relations of individuals according to their intersubjective context. In this regard, Mannheim offers understanding the inter-subjective context of ideas as well as their immanent meanings "by bridging the gap between immanent understanding and intersubjective knowledge." 28

Besides, according to Mannheim, social positions that bind individuals delimit the capacity of thinking and the spectrum of the individual’s meaningful world: A social position that is carried by an individual brings him "the probability that he who occupies it will think in a certain way...with reference to certain meanings (Sinnausgerichtetes Sein)." 29 Opposed to ordinary people who evaluate ideas according to their related social positions, Mannheim asserts that sociology "tries to understand the whole of the views derived from the various perspectives through the whole of the process." 30 In his sociological analysis, he proposes a sociological contextual understanding of meaning through which a particular perspective is transcended. Instead of evaluating an idea through one perspective, the sociological perspective analyzes ideas by comparing all different views concerning them in terms of their social and historical context.

Mannheim, then, describes his two purposes in his Ideology and Utopia as "to refine the analysis of meaning in the sphere of thought" through "increasingly exact and detailed characterizations of the various thought-styles" and second "instead of scattered isolated facts, one will be able to perceive the social structure as a whole, i.e. the web of interacting social forces." 31 In this regard, Mannheim puts forward the "socially unattached intelligentsia" i.e., a group of people who, according to him, transcend subjective perspectives as they are free from the specific social positions that condition ordinary individuals. 32

Investigating common patterns of ideas with respect to social positions, Mannheim starts a new discipline, which handles the problem of how specific ideas and opinions are related to specific social positions and how they are interrelated to social context. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann tried to shed new light on how ideas and opinions are related to the process by which everyday social life is constituted.

3. Berger and Luckmann: From Construction of Self to the Construction of Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann’s co-authored study The Social Construction of Reality 33 essentially emphasized the role of human consciousness in terms of the construction of everyday social facticity. As Alfred Schutz and his phenomenological orientation inspired their search for the sociology of knowledge, we need to briefly review phenomenology and its philosophical origins.

28) Ibid., p. 20.
29) Mannheim, op.cit., 293.
30) Ibid., p. 170.
31) Ibid., p. 50.
32) Ibid., p. 155.
a) The Phenomenological Path of Husserl and Schutz

Starting with Schutz, Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) philosophy and his phenomenological concern inspired phenomenological analyses in sociology, just as Immanuel Kant's philosophy inspired Max Weber's sociology. In terms of understanding reality it can be said that Husserl's main emphasis was following the framework of Kantian epistemology. Resembling Kant's idea of a priori concepts and mental categories that form our knowledge, Husserl's philosophy concentrated on the problem of the constructive role of consciousness in building the external world we are living in: "how can consciousness become involved with it—with the material world and consequently with the whole world other than consciousness?"  

Applying the Kantian dualism of mind and the external world, Husserl reaches the conclusion that what we see in the outside, external world is not a world to rely on but a creation of consciousness. By the attitudes of consciousness, people perceive their living world natural as given or "simply there for me, on hand."  

Therefore, the task of Husserl's phenomenology is to discover certain assumptions that consciousness makes in its encounter with the external world. In this regard, Husserl's main aim "is not to destroy this presupposition or to prove it false" but to find out how people "produce and maintain" the world they are living in.

Alfred Schutz applied these Husserlian ideas to the sociological field, in terms of the constitution of everyday life by ordinary people. He began his search by tackling the problem of how social reality comes about in which a social theory is possible. For Schutz, ordinary people apply everyday techniques and idealizations like "typifications" created by their consciousness and these practices provide social life its regularity and orderly form. Among these mental techniques, "commonsense understanding" and "a stock of previous experiences" enable individuals to know the real world outside and keep it permanent.

For Schutz, the world of everyday life is not a world every individual can live according to how he/she gives meaning to it or interprets it freely or independently of this world. Or, vice versa, this world is not only a collection of determinations over human individuality. The social world, which we are experiencing and participating in, is constituted through an interaction between the social world and individual experience.

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b) The Social Construction of Knowledge: Berger and Luckmann's Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge

Having applied Husserl and Schutz's ideas on the problem of human consciousness' role in the construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann brought a phenomenological perspective to the sociology of knowledge. They attempted to investigate the constructive position of human consciousness in the regularity of social life. For Berger and Luckmann, the commonsense knowledge of ordinary people in everyday life, which is based on assumptions rather than theoretical explanations and ideas, keep social life orderly. They proposed that:

...the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people "know" as "reality" in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives.

In other words, commonsense "knowledge" rather than "ideas" must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge.41 Therefore, here, sociology of knowledge's first task is to handle the everyday, i.e. pre-theoretical, assumptions and attitudes of human subjectivity, and how a social order is constructed depending on everyday assumptions of human consciousness.42 According to Berger and Luckmann's thesis "the primary knowledge about the institutional order is knowledge on the pretheoretical level." This primary knowledge includes "an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth."43 In this regard, the Berger-Luckmann analysis is Marxian in terms of attempting to explain how social life is brought forth in its wholistic logic. It is also Durkheimian in terms of considering any type of knowledge including myths and rumors as "functional" in terms of the constitution of social order.

Therefore, knowledge, for Berger and Luckmann, plays an essential role in providing an order in social reality. They argue that "knowledge about society is thus a realization in the double sense of the word, in the sense of apprehending the objectified social reality, and in the sense of continuously producing this reality."44 Through knowledge (pretheoretical-commonsense rather than theoretical) human subjectivity puts forward an intersubjective order and keeps it permanent. Berger and Luckmann, thus, approached knowledge in terms of its relation to society first, as a constructive element through which human consciousness is realized in objective social relations, and second, as an intellectual ability to understand the nature of the social world.

Within this phenomenological perspective, everyday attitudes of consciousness construct an intersubjective reality. That is to say that the main source in the constitution of social order is man himself. Unlike Marx's emphasis on the material basis of society independent of human consciousness, Berger and Luckmann propose the idea of consciousness as the constructive element of social life. In this context, "the social order is a human product, or, more, precisely, an ongoing human production."45 Despite the fact

41) Berger and Luckmann, op. cit., p. 15.
42) Ibid., p. 20.
43) Ibid., p. 65.
44) Ibid., p. 66.
45) Ibid., p. 52.
that the constitution of social order emerges out of human initiation with the attitudes of his consciousness, this objectified social order establishes certain principles, rules that tighten human subjectivity. This brings us to a permanent process of “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.”

So far, we have looked at how different theoretical perspectives handle the sociology of knowledge and we have applied Marx, Mannheim and Berger-Luckmann’s theoretical studies. The next section offers two more perspectives regarding another subfield of sociology, the sociology of religion through Emile Durkheim and Max Weber’s classical works.

II. The Sociology of Religion: Emile Durkheim and Max Weber

1. Emile Durkheim and the Problem of Social Order

For Emile Durkheim, the essence of society is social whole, not the meaningful world or the actions of particular individuals. Durkheim considers the constitution of social order and regularity not through an individual’s ascribing of meanings to his actions, but through the determination of prevailing social regulations. As for Durkheim “society is a reality sui generis” and “it has its own peculiar characteristics,” social order dominates over individualistic needs and desires and particularistic ambiguity. Therefore, the problem of “how society becomes possible” is seen as the determination of the wholeness of society over this individualistic ambiguity in Durkheimian sociology.

Morality plays a significant role in the process of the constitution of a social order in Durkheimian sociology. It instructs individuals how to act and enables society to achieve an orderly form. Social order forces human nature to act according to “a moral ideal.” This ideal is irreducible “to a utilitarian motive” which is seen by Durkheim as a factor leads alone society into a chaos of wild drives. As every society has some notion of the sacred that prescribes moral order, telling individuals what they should and what they can do, this moral order imposes upon society a kind of religious regulation. Since every society needs morality for the sake of the constitution and protection of its order, this moral order makes society religious by its nature. For Durkheim, “there can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality.”

Religion, in this manner, contributes to the constitution and protection of social order by supplying a moral order. That is to say that “since society will always require periodic reaffirmation, religion is an indispensable, permanent social fixture.” For Durkheim,
then, religion is a social phenomenon. It imposes certain regularity, order and limits on the arbitrary individualistic sphere. Religion, in addition to its moral prescriptions, brings an orderly form to society through its distinction between “profane and sacred.” By means of religious limitations that prescribe people to act according to certain laws, social life achieves its own order and regularity.

Religion prohibits the Jew from eating certain kinds of meat and lays down that he must dress in a prescribed fashion. It imposes upon him this or that view regarding the origin of the world. Often it regulates legal, moral, and economic relationships.

Religion has no existence or meaning apart from the type of social organizations and relations themselves. Then, for Durkheim, there is no false religion as all of them “respond to the same needs, they play the same role, they depend upon the same causes.”

In this regard, religion with its social character differs from magic, which is, for Durkheim, individualistic and does not have a role in society. Whereas religion fulfills a certain function in society by uniting people around certain rites, magic does not have this kind of role. In this manner, Durkheim defines religion as;

a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

For Durkheim, religion is functional in terms of providing morality and organization in social order; however, it is not essential for a modern society. As “both religion and morals are inseparable from a social framework,” religion is weakened in modern societies and the division of labor undertakes these tasks.

Durkheim proposes in his study on the division of labor in modern societies that morality (defined by him as any force that links persons together) is created by the division of labor in modern societies. Under these circumstances, the old types of social ties no longer survive. Religion, with its function in primitive societies to enhance collective consciousness, is replaced by a kind of civil-individualistic morality: “There is indeed one area in which the common consciousness has grown stronger, becoming more clearly delineated, viz., in its view of the individual.” For Durkheim, the division of labor supplies this morality for the collective consciousness in modern societies.

56) Ibid., p. 47.
59) Ibid., p. 331.
60) Ibid., p. 122.
61) Ibid., p. 123.
2. Max Weber’s Sociology of Religion

Like Durkheim, Max Weber was also concerned with how patterns of social regularity arise out of the chaos of the indeterminacy of infinite individualistic needs and desires. However, unlike Durkheim who points out social whole and social principles to understand society, he tackles this theme at the individualistic level; how does social action in regularity come forward out of particular individuals? According to Weber, social continuity is constructed at the individualistic consciousness level through ways in which social actors ascribe meanings to their actions. Weber states his idea on this issue in the following manner:

The real empirical sociological investigation begins with the question: What motives determine and lead the individual members and participants…in such a way that the community came into being in the first place and it continues to exist? Weber looks for, in his sociological studies, the factors producing these patterns in social life. As these regularities at the social and individualistic levels come together in social action, Weberian sociology focuses on this matter as a basic sociological problem. For Weber, the motive behind regular action is the meaning which individuals attribute to their actions. Weber states that:

Within the realm of social action certain empirical uniformities can be observed, that is, courses of action that are repeated by the actor or (simultaneously) occur among numerous actors since the subjective meaning is meant to be the same. Sociological investigation is concerned with these typical modes of action.

Then, Weber’s sociology mainly concentrates on the attribution of meaning in social action as the main element giving regularity to social life and its patterns. In the same words, Weber emphasizes individual meaning in patterns, and these regularities and patterns are “carried” by groups: status, religious, classes, organizations (bureaucracies), etc.

For Weber, one important manner in which an individual attributes meaning to his actions occurs through religious belief. In terms of the sociology of religion, his attention was devoted to assess the independent impact of religion on “the world,” e.g. social change and the interrelation and interaction between religions and economic-material conditions. He completed his studies on several world religions: Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and ancient Judaism. He planned but could not complete his studies on Islam, early Christianity, and medieval Catholicism.

In Weber’s sociological analysis a variety of causal factors, including religion, bring about social change. In terms of causal analyses, “Weber’s comparative-historical texts

63) Ibid., p. 4.
64) Ibid., p. 29.
For Weber, the interaction between religion and social regularity cannot be understood by referring to one-sided causality relations, but the interaction of those phenomena with each other. On this matter, Weber states that: "It is not my aim to substitute for one-sided materialistic and equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history. Each is equally possible." 66

Without denying that material forces are also influential on ideas, or particularly religious ideas, Weber tries to investigate in The Protestant Ethic "whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and the quantitative expansion of that spirit over the world." 69 Weber proposes that, in the process of social change, ideas, religious beliefs and material forces intermingle with each other. 70

For Weber, religion, because it calls forth a type of personality through beliefs in ethical values, affects social life and interactions. These ethical values and religious ideas, in turn, are affected by social, economic and political conditions in a given society. 71 In this sense, he focused on how economic and social conditions affected ancient Judaism and its monotheism. 72

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber deals with the origin of a spirit of modern capitalism, emphasizing the role of Protestant asceticism and its consequential search for profit. He proposes that, by means of the spirit of capitalism, ascetic Protestantism paved the way for the "rationalist" world-view of modern capitalism. The Protestant ethic, primarily the Calvinist ethic, enabled people to make rational means-end calculations by bringing "self-discipline" to the West. Western customers and fellowmen trusted this newly-appeared entrepreneur who achieved "highly developed ethical qualities" through Protestant ethics. 75

Protestantism provided modern individuals with coherent, meaningful, ethical conduct in terms of seeking salvation and God's blessing in their worldly activities—unlike Catholicism's emphasis on the Church's institutional doctrine rather than textual meaning. This view legitimized the mundane world in the eyes of Protestants and made work meaningful to believers. Eventually, this ascetic type of Protestant ethic transformed

69) Ibid., p. 91.
70) Ibid., p. 91.
74) Ibid., pp. 55-58.
75) Ibid., p. 69.
76) Ibid., pp. 118-24.
itself into a kind of work ethic for modern capitalism. This was different from what took place in other world religions, such as Judaism and Islam\(^7\).

In sum, Weber dealt with the phenomenon of religion as a source of ethical values for the individual sphere. He studied the systematization of social action as it occurred in reference to religious doctrines and religions as types of ethical conduct, and their relations in turn to practical economic activity. This means that Weber studied the question of how the orientation of social action to religions plays a role in affecting social relations and historical change through the meaningful world of individuals.

**Conclusion**

In this essay, different views in regard to the analysis of the phenomena of knowledge and religion in society have been discussed. For Karl Marx's materialist point of view, what is real is material. Therefore, any analysis of knowledge that does not see its materialistic basis is false or illusionary. Karl Mannheim brought a perspectivist understanding to the sociology of knowledge. For him, ideas took their meaning according to the social context within which they exist. According to Berger and Luckmann's approach, the attitude of human consciousness to the external world is taken as the constructive element of social life. All ideas, opinions and beliefs take their own constructive position in a dialectical relation between human consciousness and society. Marx, with his concern with the relation between class and ideas, Mannheim with his emphasis on social position and ideas, and Berger and Luckmann with their interest in the role of human consciousness in the constitution of everyday life -all attempt to explain the relation between ideas and society. All analyses try to answer how the question of ideas is connected to social forces and the part they play in the constitution of society.

In the sociology of religion section, two authors have been discussed. Emile Durkheim puts forward the idea of "collective consciousness" instead of a human consciousness in seeking the answer to the question of how social order comes about. All knowledge and beliefs that can be observed in society are functional for the sake of social order. Religion has a specific place in providing society with a moral order and binding social relations. Max Weber, on the other hand, dealt with ideas and beliefs in respect to their meaning to persons and with respect to the social action that followed. In many of his sociological studies, Weber was concerned with how ideas and beliefs in the sphere of religion interact with practical and economic activity.

Both Emile Durkheim and Max Weber studied religion with reference to social frameworks. By emphasizing the role of religion in the constitution of social order, Durkheim tried to identify the functions of religion in society. Weber, on the other hand, analyzed religion as one type of meaningful action and investigated its relationship with political, economic, legal, and stratification factors. For him, by giving ideas, ethical values, and discipline to individuals, religion may significantly influence even the economic activity of persons.