

How modernity arises through various theories



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Charles Taylor two theories of modernity

Modernization is a term that is usually used to distinguish the present from the traditional or earlier aspects. While there are many ways of distinguishing the present from the old, we might wonder how modernity arises. Many scholars have tried to explain how modernity arises through various theories. This paper will focus on Charles Taylor two theories of modernity.

Charles Taylor postulated that modernity is not a form of life but a movement from one constellation to another. He appreciated that there are two perspectives from which modernity arises; cultural and acultural. In the cultural model, each human group has its own identity, language, virtues, vices, specific understanding of humanity and social relations. These aspects may undergo transformations with time and this influences the culture of that particular group. At this point, we have to admit that there is a difference before and after transformation, the culture will have changed by the time these transformations are manifested (Charles,).

In the acultural model, Charles tries to distinguish the present from the past as a whole. In this case, he does not look at transformation from a single culture perspective but the changes that occur to all cultures within a stipulated period of time. In this model, modernity is conceived by growth of reason for instance growth of scientific consciousness or through differentiating between fact finding and evaluation. In this case, the modernity is accounted for by intellectual and social changes. An example of this was during the ages of reason and enlightenment, industrialization and urbanization. There were imminent transformations in all cultures. While

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each culture has to go through these transformations, some are forced to undergo these transformations (Charles,).

Acultural modernity is such that each culture plays a principle role and is not defined by an end point in understanding these transformations from either a personal or societal perspective. Though this kind of modernity is culture neutral, it affects all cultures either positively or negatively. Sometimes, some culture may suffer from the impact of a transformation in modernity. Transformations usually arise in one culture or civilization and spread to the rest. The culture from which transformation starts is powered by its own positive visions for good. However, some cultures undergo though these transformations easily while others have a hard time. This is characterized by the difference the transformation will serve in that particular culture and not when the idea of the transformation arrived in this culture.

Charles appreciated the fact that transformations are facilitated by having certain values and understanding of things. Each culture has different perspectives on different transformations depending on their values and understanding of that transformation. In fact many developments and transformations in the last few centuries were based on culture neutral developments. Acultural theory is dominant over cultural because it shows transition from traditional beliefs to modern way of life. This may be described in scenarios such as those of urbanization and industrialization. Transformation of this type may influence cultures positively or negatively. Those cultures that valued traditional beliefs and have narrow scientific reason have difficulties in appreciating transformation.

At this point, we might wonder which theory is good and which is bad. However, there is no good or bad theory as they explain transition to modernity and show how traditional beliefs are lost. Though cultural theory is of the point of view in which we visualize one culture among others, we cannot overemphasize the fact that the first accounts of modernization and development were acultural. As most scholars believe, Charles denotes that cultural theories make value judgements impossible, acultural theories are believed to be materialistic. Despite these negative attitudes towards these theories, Charles emphasizes that they play an important role in the concept of modernization.

All in all, we cannot disregard that modernization is as a result of social and intellectual change. Charles notes that after the seventeenth century, there was imminent transformation arising from the western modernity and after these transformations, natural science was valid and the technology that accompanied this had efficacy. These transformations were embraced in some cultures while others were forced to appreciate them. Different cultures have different beliefs and through acultural theory, these civilizations are bound to come together. All civilizations will lose their traditional beliefs even those that resisted the challenge. The road to modernity eventually ends when all civilizations look alike.

Different civilizations will understand these transformations differently and have different perspectives on them. There are several levels of understanding transformations; the divine, cosmos and embodied understanding. Charles acknowledges that these different levels of understanding bring about changes in belief and shift in views of the

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possibilities. In this case, there are people for certain transformations while others are against. Charles gave the example that people believed there is God but when their views changed, there was conception of atheist. This purely based on ones view and horizon or what they believe in depending on their understanding towards a certain concept.

Although acultural theory is dominant over cultural theory of modernity, there are some limitations. This theory does not clearly show the originality of the western modernity and the fact that we tend to underestimate the nature of this transformation. Charles disregards that though modernity started in the west, it is not western specifically but a form of life where all cultures converge. It is unfortunate that some civilizations lose whatever they believe in just to hold on other transformations. This pattern lacks what Charles called rational justification. Acultural theory puts all civilizations in the same package of transformation.

Charles Taylor argues that if a civilization fails to note its contrast with other civilizations, it will have a distorted understanding of forthcoming transformations and people in that civilization will have self misunderstanding which can be very costly to the civilization. In this case, the civilization's knowledge and background is suppressed. In other words, this may be termed as a form of colonization. It may seem that this civilization does not know itself and the relation it has to other civilizations. Despite the truths of acultural theory on evolution of modernity, it is worth noting that a change only moves us from constellation to another which throws up its values and traditions to move to the other. This is in support of the cultural theory of modernization.

There are varied views on the cultural and acultural theories of modernity. While some support one theory and disregard the other, others have negative and positive attributes of both cultures. However, we have to appreciate that though some of these facts may be true, both theories have played a significant role in explaining modernity. According to Charles, modernity has presented numerous problems in social science. Modernity is combination new practices, way of life and single forms neutral phenomenon. Charles acknowledges that there are multiple modernities which are products of depending on the self understanding and practices of different civilizations.

References

Charles Taylor. Two theories of modernity.