

Modernity into post modernity essay

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Introduction A central concept in the study of social change is modernity, “social patterns caused by industrialization.” In every day usage, modernity, with its Latin root means “lately,” refers to the present in relation to the past; from feudal societies to “modern” ones, as a result of industrialization. Sociologists include within this catch-all concept social patterns set in motion by the Industrial Revolution beginning in Western Europe in the mid-eighteenth century.

Modernity then, is the process of social change initiated by industrialization. Peter Berger (1987) identified four general characteristics of modernity: 1. The decline of small, traditional communities. Modernity involves “the progressive weakening, if not destruction, of the concrete and relatively cohesive communities in which human beings have found solidarity and meaning throughout history” (Berger, 1987). For everyone, too, the family is no longer the unrivaled center of everyday life. As Talcott Parsons (1986) noted, modern living is played out in distinct institutional settings, including schools, businesses, places of worship, and centers of recreation. 2. The expansion of personal choice.

People in traditional, preindustrial societies view their lives as shaped by forces beyond human control – gods, spirits, or simply, fate. Jealousy protecting their traditions, these societies grant one another a narrow range of personal choices. As the power of tradition erodes, however, a society’s members come to see their lives as an unending series of options. Berger calls this process individualization.

Many people in Europe, for instance, adopt one “lifestyle” or another and even a variety of lifestyles, as the way of life one person finds suitable may hold little appeal for another. Recognizing alternatives in everyday life, of course, parallels a willingness to embrace change. Modern people, then, easily imagine the world different from the way it is now. 3. Increasing diversity in beliefs. In preindustrial society’s, strong family and powerful religious beliefs enforced conformity, frowning, on diversity and change. Modernity promotes a more rational, scientific world view, in which traditional beliefs lose their force and morality becomes a matter of individual attitude. 4.

Future orientation and growing awareness of time. People in modern society’s share a distinctive appreciation of time. First, we tend to think more about the future while preindustrial people focused more in the past. Modern people are not only forward looking but optimistic that discoveries and new inventions will enhance their lives. If the concept of modernity encapsulates the social reality that owes its existence to the industrialization, how about globalization? Does it signal the beginning of yet another era? A number of scholars answering affirmatively now trumpet the arrival of post-modernity. In its simplest formulation, post-modernity refers to social patterns characteristic of urban-decentralized societies with a formal bureaucratic system of control that tend to promote secularization. But precisely what post-modernism represents, for the present at least, is a matter of debate. Although there are many variants of post-modern thinking, the following five themes have emerged (Bernstein, 1992; Borgman, 1992; Crook, 1992; Hall & Neitz, 1993): 1.

In important respects, modernity has failed. The promise of modernity was a life free from want. As many post-modernist critics see it, however, the twentieth century was unsuccessful in eradicating social problems like poverty or even ensuring financial security for most people. 2. The bright promise of “ progress” is fading.

Modern people typically look to the future expecting that their lives will improve in significant ways, while members (even leaders) of a post-modern society, however, have less confidence about what the future holds.

3. Science no longer holds the answers.

The defining trait of the modern era was a scientific outlook and a confident belief that technology would serve human purposes. But the postmodern critics contend that science has created more problems (such as degrading the environment) than it has solved. 4. Cultural debates are intensifying.

Modernity ushered in an era of enhanced individuality and expanding tolerance. Critics claim, however, that the emerging post-modern society reveals the shortcoming of this process. 5. Social institutions are changing. Industrialization brought sweeping transformation to social institutions; the rise of a postindustrial society is repeating this process. For example, just as the industrialization placed material things at the center of productive life, now the globalization has elevated the importance of ideas. Similarly, the post-modern family no longer conforms to any singular formula; on the contrary, individuals are devising varied ways of relating to one another.

Modernity and the rise of post modernity is a complex process involving many dimensionof change. The contention by many theorists that rich societies such as the United States are entering a postmodern era amounts to an indictment of modernity for failing to meet human needs. One important aspect is that most people in the in modern societies suffer from alienation and powerlessness due to persistent inequality. Early European and U.

S. sociologists such as Ferdinand Toennies, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx have tried to analyze the rise of modern and post- modern societies and its consequences to inequalities.Ferdinand Toennies viewed modernization as the progressive loss of human community, or Gemeinschaft. As Tonnies saw it, modernity undermined the strong social fabric of family and tradition by introducing a business-like emphasis on facts and efficiency.

European and North American societies gradually became rootless and impersonal as people came to associate mostly on the basis of self-interest – a state Toennies termed Gesellschaft. Modernity turns society inside out so that, as Toennies put it, people are “ essentially separated in spite of uniting factors.” Toennies` theory of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft is the most widely cited model for describing modernity. The theory’s strength lies in its synthesis of various dimensions of change- growing populations, the rise of cities, greater impersonality.

Another theorist, Emile Durkheim shared Toennies` interest in the profound social inequalities wrought by modernity. For Durkheim, the rise of

modernity is marked by increasing division of labor, meaning specialized economic activity. Hence, modern societies function by having people carry out highly distinctive roles and thus increased inequalities as the division of labor becomes more and more pronounced.

Durkheim`s work stands alongside that of Toennies, which it closely resembles, as a highly influential analysis of modernity. Of the two, Durkheim is clearly the more optimistic; still, he feared that modern societies might become so internally diverse that they would collapse into anomie. In the midst of weak moral claims from society, modern people tend to be egocentric, placing our own needs above those of community. For Max Weber, modernity amounts to the progressive replacement of traditional world view by a rational way of thinking. He held that ideas and beliefs stand out as causes of social change.

In preindustrial societies, tradition acts as a constant brake on change. Traditional people, Weber explains, “ truth” is roughly synonymous with “ what has always been”. In modern societies, by contrast, people see truth as the product of deliberate calculation. Because efficiency is valued more than reverence for the past, individuals adopts whichever social patterns will allow then to achieve their goals. A rational view of the world, then, leads people to seek out and assess various options according to their specific consequences rather than according to any absolute standard of rightness. Moreover, Weber declared that modern society had become “ disenchanting,” embracing rational, scientific thought; in short, modern society turns away from the gods.

Finally, Weber explored various modern “types” – the capitalist, the scientist, and the bureaucrat. What these all have in common is the rational and detached world view Weber believed was coming to dominate modern humanity. Compared with Toennies, and especially Durkheim, Weber was a profound critic of modern society. He recognized that science could produce technological and organizational wonders, yet he worried that it was carrying away from more basic questions about the meaning and purpose of human existence. Weber feared that rationalization, especially in bureaucracies, would erode the human spirit with endless rules and regulation. Karl Marx on the other hand, focused on social conflict (between the bourgeoisie and proletarians). For Marx, modern society was synonymous with capitalism; he saw the industrialization as being primarily a capitalist revolution.

His vision of modernity also incorporates a considerable measure of optimism. Unlike Weber, who viewed modern society as an “iron cage” of bureaucracy, Marx believed that social conflict in capitalist societies would sow the seeds of revolutionary change, leading to an egalitarian socialism. Such a society, he claimed, would harness the wonders of industrial technology to enrich the lives of the many rather than the few – and thereby rid the world of the prime source of conflict and dehumanization. While Marx’s evaluation of modern capitalist society was highly negative, then, he envisioned a future with greater human freedom, blossoming human creativity, and renewed human community.

Through the technological miracle of commercialization/industrialization, humanity could finally envision a society free from want. But he hoped that modern workers would overcome their alienation by uniting into a true social

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class, aware of the cause of their problems and galvanized to transform society. A popular approach in understanding modernity and post-modernity is explained by the ideas of Karl Marx. From his point of view, modernity takes the form of a class society, a stratified, capitalist society. Marx holds that alienation or the feelings of isolation resulting from powerlessness in modern society stem from social inequality.

Thus, Marx asserted, work produced alienation, rather than serving as an expression of personal creativity. Further, Marx explored alienation, in its various forms, as a barrier to social change. In place of capitalism, Marx envisioned a socialist system he thought would respond to the needs of all – rather than merely boosting the profits of few to totally eradicate alienation born from social inequality. Thus Marx, a relentless critic of the present, looked to the future with hope, claiming: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.” Marx’s theory of modernization draws together many threads in a fabric dominated by capitalism. Yet Marx underestimated the significance of bureaucracy in shaping modern societies. The stifling effects of bureaucracy on humanity turned out to be as bad-or-worse in socialist societies, as their government apparatus expanded, than the dehumanizing impact of capitalism.

Moreover, the striking class and racial inequality of the early Industrial revolution both saddened and angered Karl Marx. Though, modernity has gradually eroded some of the class and racial inequalities that divided preindustrial societies; the classic social theorists maintain, however, that elites persist, albeit in a different form: capitalist millionaires rather than as nobles who inherited their status. In the United States, we may have no

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hereditary monarchy, but the richest 5 percent of the population nevertheless controls half of all property. And, during the 1980s, the concentration of wealth actually increased. Max Weber agreed with Karl Marx that class and racial inequality sparks social conflict, but he disagreed with Marx in several important aspects. First is economic inequality – the issue is so vital to Marx- which Weber termed class position. Weber’s use of “ class” refers not to crude categories, but to a continuum on which anyone could be ranked from high to low. Second is status, meaning amount of social prestige.

Third, Weber noted the importance of power in the social hierarchy. A population that varies widely on each of these three dimensions of class and racial inequality displays a virtually infinite array of social groupings, all of which pursue their own interests. Thus, unlike Marx, who saw conflict between classes, Weber considered social conflict as a more subtle, and variable process. Weber also suggested that each of his three dimensions of social inequality stands out at different points in history. Agrarian societies, he maintained, emphasize prestige in the form of honor or symbolic purity. Members of these societies gain prestige by conforming to norms corresponding to their rank. Industrial capitalism generates striking economic differences, tying the importance of money to social standing. Mature industrial societies (especially socialist societies) witness a surging growth of the bureaucratic state and accord tremendous power to high-ranking officials.

Weber’s concern with the growth of bureaucracy led him to disagree with Marx about the future of modern societies. Marx, who focused on

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economics, thought that societies could eradicate class and racial inequality by abolishing private ownership of productive property. Weber doubted that overthrowing capitalism would significantly diminish inequalities in modern societies, because of the growing importance of power in formal organizations. In fact, Weber thought that a socialist revolution might well increase inequality by expanding government and concentrating power in the hands of political elite. These theorists paint a different picture of modernity's effects on society. These theorists maintains that persistent inequality undermines modern society's promise of individual freedom, but instead have caused alienation. For some, modernity delivers great privilege, but, for the majority, everyday life means coping with a gnawing sense of powerlessness.

For people of color, the problem of relative disadvantage looms even larger. Instead, social theorists hold, a majority of people in our society are still denied of full participation in social life. These theorists hail the struggle to empower individuals, which has been gaining strength in recent years to combat inequalities. References Berger, P.

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