

Sociology and modernity

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Modernity is one phrase that is complex to define. This is because no precise definition of modernity that is globally accepted has been decided upon. This is inclusive of the sociology field that has seen so many theories brought about to define modernity. However, we can have a general definition defining modernity as a post-middle age era that is discernible with a drastic change from the pre-modern concept of agrarianism to a world of industrialization, capitalism, urbanization, rationalization and general social change that was tremendously adopted by the entire world, though having its root origins in Europe in the times around 1700.

Renaissance was the immediate time that preceded modernity; renaissance in this case referring to the last moments of the middle-aged era. This era was all about scientific and industrial revolution that saw the rise of many inventions that have come to define the modernity of modernization. The social change can be attributed to the enlightenment of human kind as Immanuel Kant stated in one of his famous books. Many definitions have been thus brought up in the field of sociology and by different philosophers. Karl Marx defines modernity as a capitalist revolution.

Capitalism is a state of economic status that is based on individualism in that an individual invests in different ownerships or businesses for the sole purpose of personal benefits or for profit motive. He therefore sees modernity as an evil phenomenon and seriously criticizes it. On the other hand, Max Weber defines modernity on the basis of personal beliefs that eventually lead to the social changes that occur in modernization. He sees modernity as a trend that leads to the reduction in traditional values and

beefs up rationalization that he so much fears would eventually corrode off humanity.

He is so pessimistic on the effects of modernity given the mean definition that he gives to the phenomenon. The last of the philosophers to provide a definition in our essay will be Emile Durkheim. Durkheim at least had an optimistic definition of modernity, though not entirely optimistic. He defined modernity on the basis of labor division. He believed that modernity would bring in the world the concept of diversification of economic activities in the human society. He saw modernization as a shift of change in the way the community operated; the solidarity change from mechanical to organic.

On the pessimistic side, he however dreads anomie, a state that describes minimal moral guidance provided to individuals in the society (Calhoun, Gerteis, and Moody 46). As defined in the introductory part, modernity carries along different social changes and cultural values that define a clear-cut difference from the same elements that were experienced in the pre-modern age. Modernity has greatly affected the basis of the family in the world today. The family as an institution, coupled with many other things like marriage, morality and religion have all been compromised.

In the pre-modern age, the morality of the society stemmed from the family institution. Thus, the cautiousness that was always involved in the upbringing of a moral family was the number one priority by the family heads at that time (Macionis 4). Politics has undergone dynamic transformation due to the effect modernity. In the pre-modern days, politics was not as dominative as it is in the modern world. Modernity has caused

governments to have a very dominative hand by heavily regulating its citizens by very intricate and uncongenial bureaucratic formation.

The economy is another entity that has defined modernity. In the pre-modern era, economy was defined by agrarian productivity. This can even be demonstrated by the Feudalist system of government that existed in Europe. This system of a political system involved land being exchanged in turn for services. It was a system where the lords, who were the land owners, gave out land to vassals, who were the tenants. The land in this kind of political system was referred to as fief. However, the economy in the modern society has completely taken a twist, with capitalism being the system.

Capitalism centered on the personal interests and profits motive of either an individual or a country. This means no rational prioritization will be taken if at all a country or an individual has the aim of making profit. This is a system that was widely condemned by philosophers such as Karl Marx (Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, and Virk 122). The different philosophers who came up with the various definitions of modernity had varied expectations and predictions that would come along modernity. Karl Marx had a very pessimistic view of modernity.

He highly criticized capitalism, an economy system that he claimed set in with modernity. He sees capitalism as a profit motivated system and therefore a selfish system. He also feared the rise of classes in the society, something that he describes as the baby of capitalism. He abhorrently condemns capitalism as greed and self interest and had very pessimistic expectations of the modern world. He foresees challenges such as

extreme poverty while other countries swam in a lot of wealth, all with the advent of a capitalist economy.

Max Weber, with his definition of modernity being based on human rationality, had his fears on the degradation of humanity. Weber was also pessimistic on the way modernity would transform the world. He foresaw the alienation of social justice that would set in as a result of the change in individuals' beliefs brought about by modernity (Calhoun et al 122). Among these three philosophers, Emile Durkheim at least had an optimistic view of the setting in of modernity. With his definition of modernity being based on the division of labor, he saw modernity bringing in drastic growth of the economy.

This would occur due to labor diversification and specialization that would equally distribute human resource to every economic activity. His expectations for the advent of modernity were therefore high. Despite him having these positive expectations, he had a fear of anomie. This is a state where there is slow degradation of morals in the society due to disregard of moral guidance by human who would have all their minds set towards the development of the economy. The subject of modernity has always raised a lot of arguments. Many philosophers have brought up theories trying to define modernity but no particular theory has been globally accepted to define modernity.

With this essay though, we have had an overview of the various definitions of modernity by the three philosophers: Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. We have also seen their premonitions, feelings and expectations of

modernity. Different aspects of modernity and the change of these aspects that affect modernity have been discussed and compared to with the pre-modern age. However, even with all these, it should still be clear that there still exists no precise definition of modernity and the term is open to any belief that any person could come up with.