

Dr. Elliott

Harari's Thoughts Compared to Class Discussion

Harari's book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, explores many ideas that apply to society today and how they are seen from a sociological perspective. He takes real events that have happened and sees how they have impacted society and its citizens. His book allows readers to look at topics from a new perspective and allows them to see the truth behind why some things are the way they are. The concepts we covered in class overlapped with some concepts Harari focuses on in his book. There are some similarities and differences between what he thinks and what we have discussed in our findings in class.

One concept Harari discusses that is inconsistent with a topic we discussed in class was the idea that religion has nothing to do with morality. It is a common thought that religion was created as a way to keep humans in line and behaving how they “should” be. Harari completely disagrees with this and says that even without religion, there would be morality. He states in his book that “morality, art, spirituality, and creativity are universal human abilities embedded in our DNA” (Harari, 187). He argues that religion doesn’t impact how smart someone is, or how someone acts. An example to explain this would be that Albert Einstein didn’t create the theories and equations he did because he was Jewish. His intelligence was separate from his religious beliefs. This can sometimes get clouded when people associate religion with discoveries and success. Harari also feels that morality and the collective ideas on how to act in society are just

have religion because it is out of their realm to even be comprehended, it is evident that it is not needed for them to have respect for others and for them to be able to interact with each other.

In class, we discussed how religion creates a sense of community between people.

Durkheim explored this idea along with the idea that everything is born from religion. Since everything stems from religion, it affects how collective consciousness, and the collective representation are formed. The collective consciousness is defined as, “a set of shared beliefs, ideas and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society” (Durkheim).

Examples of this could be gender norms, rituals, or laws in a society. It is essentially an understood concept by a group of people that can often times be considered unspoken. As these ideas have existed for so many years, they become a “norm,” and are just accepted by certain groups. The collective representation is defined as a symbol for any sort of group that shares the same values. An example of a collective representation would be wedding rings. They have been accepted in society as the symbol for two people who are married. When you see someone with a finger on their left “ring” finger, you know that probably means they have a spouse. Maryanski and Turner also have similar ideas to Durkheim’s about how religion creates stronger bonds between people. As stated in their selection, *The Neurology of Religion: An Explanation from Evolutionary Sociology*, religion “form[s] communities of individuals revolving around shared beliefs in a sacred and supernatural realm inhabited by forces and beings with powers to intervene in the mundane world” (Maryanski and Turner, 113). Religion helps bond people in a way that they can understand easily. Everyone practicing the same religion all have the same morals and ideas on how they want to live their lives. This makes it easier to bond with each other and create supportive relationships. These authors’ thoughts contradict Harari’s thoughts,

other, they are more likely to share the same morals with them and be more sympathetic with each other.

One other segment of this topic that Harari explores is that religion should not play a large role in policy because it makes it harder to come to solutions. He says that the only time religion helps in policy is when a country is very religious and collectively practices the same religion. However, if Durkheim and Maryanski and Turner were to share their thoughts on this, they might say that religion is technically involved in all policy decisions because it is subconsciously engrained in everything in society already. They would say that there is no way to take religion fully out of the equation because it already exists there and cannot be removed.

A concept Harari explored that aligned with a topic we discussed in class would be the importance of emotions and how they impact our response to a situation. Harari uses 9/11 as an example of a time where emotions changed how an event was perceived. When most people think about 9/11, they think about the Twin Towers falling in New York City, killing thousands of people. While this did happen, many people forget about the fact that there wasn't just one attack that day. There were a total of four planes, and only two of them crashed into the Twin Towers. The other two crashed into the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania. Harari discusses how "if the 9/11 operation had been a conventional military campaign, the Pentagon attack would have received most of the attention" (Harari, 166). The attack on the Pentagon still had a great impact on the public, but not as large as the attack on the Twin Towers. Terrorism is referred to as a "theater," therefore, it is meant to feel like a production. The structure of the buildings in the World Trade Center created more of an emotional response tied to the attack in New York City, this is what people remember most from that day. The most amount of people

brings up the point that people are more afraid of terrorists than sugar. While terrorists can technically do more damage than sugar, it is also out of someone's control if they end up in a terrorist attack. How much sugar someone eats is up to them. Terrorist attacks elicit more of an emotional response than eating sugar and suffering the consequences, this leads people to fear terrorists more. Emotions are the overall contributing factor to this idea.

In class, we discussed how emotions lead to the creation of language. Maryanski and Turner explored this idea in *The Neurology of Religion*. They are needed for the creation of language because they help humans remember things better. When emotions are tied to a certain event, it is easier to recall later. This builds cognition and keeps species in existence. There has also been research done that shows that the more emotional species are the more intelligent. Maryanski and Turner explained that “brains...are structured so that intelligence depends on the range of emotions a species can generate to provide nuanced tags for complex cognitions” (Maryanski and Turner, 125). This is not just true for humans but also many other species that are able to feel emotions. A larger neocortex in animals is linked to a greater emotional range. Maryanski and Turner also explain how “the rewiring of the subcortex was essential for early hominin well-being, and it was a necessary prerequisite for the later evolution of spoken language and culture in the human measure” (Maryanski and Turner, 114). Creating these connections helped lead to the creation of language. Placing symbolic thought on items also adds to the expansion of the brain and helped evolve human brains to be capable of creating language. Language can also be tied back to the concept of collective representations. Durkheim expresses in his selection, *The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations*, that “the ideas which correspond to the diverse elements of language are thus collective representations” (Durkheim,

to understand them, language needs to be in place.

The power of emotions leading to the creation of language shows the importance of emotions in the evolution of many species. Without language, there would be no functioning society. Communication is needed to be able to interact with peers and be able to solve problems together. Harari and Maryanski and Turner both had similar thoughts on how emotions have so much power in society and the progression of not only humans, but also other animals around the world.

While Harari's book offered many ideas that aligned with what we covered in class, there were also some differences between his beliefs and concepts we learned. Seeing that each sociologist has their own interpretation of the same concepts makes this book so interesting. Seeing different sides can help expand thoughts and ideas about a topic that a reader might not have explored otherwise. The advancements in technology have made people more and more ignorant of the world around them. There is less that people need to know in order to survive, therefore, they choose not to try to understand the things they don't need to know. This has created a rise in ignorance and a rise in people listening to others without forming their own opinions. Harari's book does a great job exposing the reader to these ideas in order to get them thinking more about the world around them and how their actions can impact the society they live in.

It is also debated whether or not he offered solutions to the problems he touched on. Either way, he dived deeper into subjects that need to be talked about more in society because they apply to the evolving world as a whole. Humans need to be able to understand how their world works and how the system has been formed to operate. Understanding its many parts can

place in the world.

Works Cited

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