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Introduction to Sociology

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Second Reflection Essay

Author and Historian Yuval Noah Harari addresses many different topics in his book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. Harari wrote this book in order to share with others the problems that this world is facing as of the 21st century. Reading this book introduces many people to lessons and ideals that need to be addressed and considered. While I read this book, it was brought to my attention how concerned for the future Harari actually is. He believes that the future of humanity could be in danger if humans do not wake up and address the problems that lie in front of our faces. Harari is not afraid to discuss the difficult topics of the world which is why he is a best selling author and what makes this book such a good and important read. He talks about many issues and what we can learn from these issues which will improve the world we live in. Harari addresses topics such as technology, politics, despair and hope, truth, and resilience with subchapters in each major part. These topics conflict and compare with many different sociological principles such as Marx's principle on work, and Durkheim's theory of the collective consciousness.

To begin, I will be explaining Marx's view on work and its problems in a capitalist society. Marx believes that as man produces more, he becomes poorer. This is the main problem Marx sees with work. Marx also says that political economy takes for granted what is supposed

economy where as the worker produces more, he makes more money. Marx says that when a worker produces an object, the worker no longer belongs to himself but instead, to the object he produced. This is basically saying that when someone makes something, they have the expectation of the people to continue making this object and thus can not stop producing and the object becomes the workers life. This idea is called “alienation of the worker” which means that the worker is alienated from anything else but the object he produced. Marx writes in his book *Estranged Labor* “The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside of him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien” (32) . The worker can never escape the product which he produced, thus controlling his life, according to Marx. As Marx said, the product exists outside of him and independent to him. The product is no longer his own, in fact, the product he once owned not owns the worker.

Harari has problems with work, but not necessarily with capitalism or the political economy. Harari’s main problem with work begins, and ends, with Artificial Intelligence. Harari states that there are very many jobs that are redundant and would have no affect on humans if AI took over these jobs. For example, he says “no one dreams of being a cashier”, this is an example of a job that humans would benefit from if Arifcial Intelligence took over. It is boring to humans and has no real affect on the economy or life if AI was to take over the market for jobs like being a cashier. In the past, there were jobs that required a human touch; jobs that required cognition, learning, skill, and emotion. Harari argues that Artificial Intelligence has evolved and

in Vietnam, My Lai to be precise. A company of American soldiers masacred about 400 civilians. If the U.S. government had a company of robot soldiers, this tragic event would never have occurred, thus removing the need for human soldiers. Harari says that there are positives and negatives to this option. While this massacre would never happen with a company of Artificial Intelligent soldiers, the war would have lasted a much longer time because the government would not be concerned about soldier morale. The same goes for the economy in the event that Artificial Intelligence takes over the job market. If humans were replaced from the job market by robots, companies wouldn't have to pay the employees, just the fee of the robots and service which could save the company money. On the other hand, the company may lose business because the customers would lose the human interaction and help from employees and the level of customer service that can only be done properly by a human. Artificial Intelligence would only follow the protocol in which they are programmed with while a human may recognize extenuating circumstances that may affect the company's decision. Harari states that creative decisions pose a very difficult problem for automation. AI are not programmed to process emotion and thus can not make as many creative decisions as a human would be able to. "We rely on their {human} creativity not just to produce completely new music but also choose among a mind-boggling range of available possibilities" AI is not equipped to make decisions that require creativity and emotion which is why Artificial Intelligence should not take over jobs that require creativity, intuition, or skill.

While Marx and Harari would agree that there are problems with work, they would disagree on the problem. Marx says its a problem of capitalist societies while Harari would argue

the fact that there is a problem, but contrast when it comes to naming the problem.

The next theory I will be addressing is Durkheim's theory of the collective consciousness. The collective consciousness is a set of shared beliefs, morals, or attitudes that connect and unite a society. Durkheim believed that the collective consciousness was prevalent in every society and was the reason not every society was the same. Basically the collective consciousness provided an explanation of why societies act differently and why some actions are seen as taboo while others are seen as normal within a certain society. The collective consciousness works to provide members of a society with a feeling of identity and belonging. It shows the morals and principles of the society very clearly and is made of many different ideas that can be influenced by a change in the society or a change in important members of the society. What I find similar between the collective consciousness and Yuval Noah Harari begins in the chapter where Harari addresses war.

War is an issue for many people in different countries. As long as there is war, there will be people who support it and those who do not. In the chapter War in Harari's book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Harari discusses the past of war and its causes. Harari states that in the past, wars were fought to gain capital, mainly land, from another country. Take the Revolutionary War for example, the American soldiers wanted independence from England after the Americas were colonized. They wanted to gain capital and start their own country. This is what the purpose of war used to be, but as time went on the cause changed dramatically. The cause of war is still usually capital but countries are not looking to expand their influence, they are looking for a different type of capital, wealth. There are times when humans fight wars as a result of another

says never to underestimate human stupidity and its limits. He does not say “never underestimate the stupidity of some humans”, he groups all humans into one. I would say this is because Harari is using Durkheim’s theory of the collective consciousness when he says this. He makes it clear that all humans, no matter what country, are under a greater society, the human society. It is clear that humans are selfish beings and that most want to expand their wealth which is why Harari places us all under one “society”. When he does this, I see a connection between Harari and Durkheim through the collective consciousness. Humans are greedy and selfish creatures, which is a set of shared attitudes and actions between all humans. Harari believes that humans are all interconnected through a bigger power which Durkheim would call the collective consciousness.

Emile Durkheim and Yuval Noah Harari agree that humans are connected through some sort of greater power. This power would be considered, by Durkheim, the collective consciousness which connects members of a society. This connection between societies could be seen as the reason why wars begin, because every human is greedy and selfish and many want to increase their wealth by any means necessary. There is evident proof of a connection between Harari’s view of why wars start and Emile Durkheim’s theory of the collective consciousness.