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Harari's Ideas in Comparison to Other Topics in Sociology

Harari discusses lots of different topics in his book "21 Lessons for the 21st Century", such as religion and community. He takes a look into what he thinks the future will or should be like. Some of the topics he discusses contradict other sociologist's views and writings. Some other topics complement other sociologist's views. Sometimes sociologists talk about the same concepts, but have completely different interpretations and opinions on them. Other times they have similar opinions. It is up to the reader who wants to learn to compare and contrast these opinions and decide how they feel about the subject. I will be analyzing these topics and how they compare based on other people's viewpoints.

In class, we discussed religion based on Durkheim's opinions and Maryanski and Turner's works. We discussed how according to Durkheim, religion is important to society because he believes all great institutions have a foundation born in religion. He also argued that the main categories of science and intellectual thought have various religious roots. He believes that religion is the direct consequence of society as a whole becoming intelligent enough. Durkheim clearly believed religion was extremely important for the whole world, no matter what you believe. He believes it shaped our world to be how it is today. Maryanski and Turner discuss their opinions in "The Neurology of Religion". They argued that as humans became more emotionally intelligent, that is when religion developed. Humans had the need to believe in something bigger than themselves and made up stories that would be passed down for years.

emotional significance to these objects or stories grew more and more over time, which is why they mean so much to people today. They believe that religion brings people together and gives them a sense of community and guidance. Harari discusses religion in many ways in chapter 8. Harari questions how religion can continue to help us as a society in the 21st century. He says that to “understand the role of religion in the 21st century”, we must look at 3 different types of problems; Technical problems, Policy Problems, and Identity problems. On page 128, he states that “traditional religions are largely irrelevant to technical and policy problems”, but are useful with identity problems. He also says that “in most cases they constitute a major part of the problem rather than a potential solution”. Harari elaborates how religion doesn't really fit into the world anymore with all of the growing science and technology. Religion used to control everything such as when to plant crops, protection against pests, rainfall, medicine and sickness. Now, farmers and doctors take over this, and many things that religions stand for can be proven wrong with science. Harari's argument is really summed up by his quote, “when things really work, everybody adopts them”. He is implying that not everyone believes in a specific religion, or religion at all, so it doesn't really work. Obviously, as you probably can see, these sociologists' opinions greatly differ. Durkheim, Maryanski and Turner believe religion is very important for society, while Harari does not. Durkheim believed that the fundamental categories of science and thought have religious roots, while Harari believes religion isn't really a factor in these topics, such as what will help someone who is ill. If this is based on religion, God will heal them if that is his plan. Based on science, medicine will heal them if there is a proper medicine. Durkheim says that all great social institutions are born in religion, but Harari would disagree and argue that a great social institution is built off of its technology, knowledge, and community within its

attaching significance to them, while Harari would say that things are important based on their function or what they are useful for, more than what they symbolize.

Some of Harari's thoughts go along with the other sociologists' thoughts. In class, we discussed people's need for groups, community, and social interaction. In "Microfoundations" by Fligstein and MacAdams, we discussed the "existential function of the social". The "social" provides meaningful activity, therefore, we make each other's lives meaningful by being together and building off one another. What is meaningful for someone may not be meaningful for the other person, but it is meaningful in some capacity due to people being together. In class, we used the example of football. Some people may think what is meaningful is winning, while others may think teamwork, the bonding, or the competition is what is meaningful. They also state that any "project" or anything that involves people is meaningful, even if they do not understand it is meaningful. Also, we discussed how people need other people to determine how they feel about themselves, and how they feel in general. Ervin Goffman discusses this topic in "The Presentation of Self". He discusses how humans are always putting on a performance, on the stage for other people to see. He says that how we act on this "stage" is for others, and how we want them to perceive us. How they perceive us affects how we feel about ourselves. Harari discusses something similar when he talks about community in chapter 5. He discusses how people have the need for a community to find their sense of purpose and support. Harari explains how over the past decades, communities have been declining. This is what inspired Mark Zuckerberg to make Facebook. He wanted people to be able to find communities online, from anywhere in the world. This could mean within extended family members, or groups you can join of people with similar beliefs and interests. His vision was to bring back these

people still need the in-person interaction with groups of people that they can call their community. He believes that people still need this community to thrive and succeed mentally and emotionally. He states that in order for a community to really flourish, they must be offline and in person. He makes a point to stress that these online groups are good, and are helping, but more in person groups and interactions are needed to really make a change. He also thinks that we should urge other companies and corporations other than Facebook to make their own ways to bring community back to people. Harari, Fligstein, MacAdams, and Goffman agree that communities are essential for every human being. They agree that humans depend on these communities for interactions, meaning, support, motivation, and purpose. All of their thoughts back up one another. For example, I think Harari would agree with the idea of the existential function of the social. He would agree that people need each other to make their lives meaningful. I also think Goffman would agree with Harari's statement that people need in person interaction. Goffman talks about the way people present themselves to how they want others to see them. If all interactions were online, the authenticity of this would not exist. People cannot really perform online. In a way they can, they can say whatever they want and people will believe it. They can make their lives seem perfect, but nobody really forms that bond with someone online. To really relate to or connect with a person, you have to see their "performance" in person. You have to see their facial expressions, mannerisms and body language. You have to hear the tone in their voice. You have to see their natural appearance. All of this cannot be portrayed online. Even if it is, people won't connect with you like they would in person. This is why all of the sociologists believe community is essential for all humans. Spending long periods of time with no human interaction, just through a phone, will alter your perspective, mood, and

community.

All of these sociologists discuss different things. Some of them contradict each other's thoughts, while others go along together. This is just the perspective on whose work you are reading. Harari discussed many things within his book. Some of these topics agree and disagree with other sociologists we have discussed, while other topics we haven't discussed in class. Regardless, all of his points were quite interesting. We can compare his opinions on religion to Durkheim, Maryanski, and Turner's opinions, and see that they are very different. All of them have different views on what religion is, and how it affects society today. None of their opinions are necessarily wrong, it's just their viewpoint. Durkheim, Maryanski, and Turner all believe religion was/is very influential in society for many reasons such as science, rituals, and community, while Harari thinks that in this day it isn't nearly as important as it used to be. We can also compare his opinion on community to Fligstein, MacAdams, and Goffman's. Fligstein and MacAdams believe that community is important for us to make meaning using other people. They discuss the existential function of the social. Goffman discusses how people's performances shape how they want others to view them. Harari's thoughts on community go along with this, as he talks about today's need for community, online and offline. As we can see, their thoughts go along with one another. All of these sociologists make great points and it is good to see things from different perspectives.