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The Nature Of Modern Society

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- **General features**

Modernity must be understood, in part at least, against the background of what went before. Industrial society emerged only patchily and unevenly out of agrarian society, a system that had endured 5,000 years. Industrial structures thus took much of their characteristic form and colour from the rejection, conscious or unconscious, of preindustrial ways. Industrialism certainly contained much that was new, but it remained always at least partly an idea that in both its theory and its practice was to be understood as much by what it denied as by what it affirmed. The force of the modern has always been partly a reactive force, a force that derived meaning and momentum by a comparison or contrast with, and by rejection or negation of, what went before.

Considered at the most general level, this point suggests a view of modernization as a process of individualization, differentiation or specialization, and abstraction. Put more concretely: first, the structures of modern society take as their basic unit the **individual** rather than, as with agrarian or **peasant society**, the group or **community**. Second, modern institutions are assigned the performance of specific, specialized tasks in a social system with a highly developed and complex division of labour; in this they stand in the sharpest possible contrast with, for instance, the **family** in peasant society, which is at once the unit of production, **consumption**, **socialization**, and **authoritative** decision-making. Third, rather than attaching rights and **prerogatives** to particular groups and persons, or being guided by custom or tradition, modern institutions tend to be governed and guided by general rules and regulations that derive their legitimacy from the methods and findings of science. In principle

at least, they are not the agents of particular individuals, such as a king or priest, endowed with divine or prescriptive authority, but act according to the rational and impersonal precepts formulated by “experts.”

These contrasts by no means complete the characterization of modern society, nor are they the only ones that might be drawn. Nevertheless, they do illustrate the dependence of the concept of modernity on past structures that form the basis of comparison and exclusion. Indeed, it is such a set of contrasts, not necessarily carefully distinguished, that most people have in mind when they speak of modern as opposed to traditional society.

With regard to the more positive features of industrialism, industrial society can best be thought of as consisting of an economic core around which other, noneconomic structures crystallize. In Marxist terminology, this is rendered in the more deterministic form of an economic base conditioning a noneconomic “superstructure.” This seems unnecessarily rigid and misleading. The relation of the economic to the noneconomic realm is mutual and interactive, as can be seen by considering the impact of scientific ideas on economic and technological development. Still, it is true to say that, fundamentally, it is the economic changes that most dramatically affect industrial society.

- **Economic change**

Economic historians and theorists have been inclined to stress economic growth as the central defining feature of an industrial as opposed to a nonindustrial economy. Thus, the British historian Edward Anthony Wrigley (b. 1931) declared that “industrialization is said to occur in a given country when real incomes per head begin to rise steadily and without apparent limit.” The American economic historian W.W. Rostow (b. 1916) popularized a similar conception in suggesting that with industrialization, the economy at a certain point “takes off” into “self-sustained growth”; all the relevant statistical indexes of the economy—investment, output, growth rate, and so on—take sudden, sharp, almost vertical upward turns. Underlying this phenomenon of growth are certain core components of the industrial system. These include technological change, whereby work is increasingly done by machines rather than by hand; the supplementing or replacement of human and animal power by inanimate sources of energy, such as coal and oil; the freeing of the labourer from feudal and customary ties and obligations, and the consequent creation of a free market in labour; the concentration of workers in single, comprehensive enterprises (the factory system); and a pivotal role for a specific social type, the entrepreneur.

It would be easy to vary and extend this list. Not all components are of equal importance, nor are all equally indispensable to the industrial economy. They are drawn largely from the experience of the first industrializing nations, in western Europe and [North America](#). Later industrializers were able to dispense with some of them, or at least to try to do so. The [Soviet Union](#), for instance, industrialized on the basis largely of forced rather than free labour and made a point of doing away with entrepreneurs, while in [Japan](#) the entrepreneur was throughout stimulated and sustained by strong state involvement in industrialization. Moreover, it should be remembered that states—as, for instance, Denmark and New Zealand—can industrialize largely through the commercialization and mechanization of [agriculture](#). Agriculture simply becomes another industry; farms are simply rural factories.

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Even in this latter case, there is no place for a distinctively rural way of life in industrial society. [Mechanization](#) brings an increase in productivity that renders a large portion of the rural labour force superfluous. Even where agriculture remains an important part of the industrial economy, the proportion of the labour force employed in agriculture drops steadily with industrialization. This is the “sectoral transformation” that is one of industrialization’s clearest and most obvious effects. A majority of the workforce comes to be employed in the production of manufactured goods and in services rather than in the primary sector of agriculture. In both the United Kingdom and the United States, for instance, by the end of the 20th century more than 97 percent of the employed [population](#) worked in manufacturing and service jobs, while the number in agriculture had declined to less than 3 percent. Japan, as an example of a late developer, showed the same pattern: in 1970 more than 80 percent of the employed population worked in manufacturing and services and less than 20 percent in agriculture. By the late 1990s the declining number of workers involved in Japanese agricultural production represented only 5 percent of the workforce. These figures should be compared with the normal condition of preindustrial agrarian societies, where typically 90 percent of the adult population are peasant farmers or farm workers.

The vast increase in agricultural productivity on which this sectoral change in employment depends is characteristic of industrialism. Industrial society breaks through the historic limits of scarcity. In the past, the potential for economic growth was always cut short by Malthusian checks on population, by limitations of food supply, or by the shortage of easily available raw materials such as wood. Industrialization permits the creation of large [food](#) surpluses that can feed a largely urban population. The entire world, both on land and in the sea, is scoured for raw materials and further energy sources to supply industry. Science has so far proved

remarkably effective at finding substitutes for those sources that have dried up and those materials that have become dangerously scarce. The British economist [John Maynard Keynes](#) suggested that, for the first time in human history, “the economic problem may be solved,” and that “the economic problem is not the permanent problem of the human race.” In the mid-1980s it still seemed reasonable to believe that industrialism promised growth for the foreseeable future, even that it might bring abundance to all.

- **Population change**

There have been two major [population explosions](#) in the course of [human](#) social evolution. By the end of the Paleolithic period the world’s human [population](#) is estimated to have been between five and six million (an average of 0.1 person per square mile [0.04 person per square kilometre] of the Earth’s land area). Following the Neolithic or [agricultural revolution](#), the population made its first major leap, reaching over the short span of 8,000 years around 150 million by the year 1000 BC (2.6 persons per square mile). For the next two and a half thousand years there was relatively little change. World population had reached about 500 million by the middle of the 17th century. During this time any tendency for population to grow was punished by the checks of starvation and pestilence. Only with the [Industrial Revolution](#) of the 18th century did population growth break out again from its Malthusian fetters.

From about 1700 there was a second and far more rapid population explosion. Since the late 1600s the world’s population has increased more than 10-fold. This amounts to an average of 42 persons per square kilometre of the Earth’s land area. This gives some measure of the difference between the two population revolutions of human history: there has been a dramatic acceleration not simply in population but in the rate of increase of population since [industrialization](#) took hold. Between 1650 and 1850 the average annual rate of increase of the world’s population doubled; it doubled again by the 1920s, and more than doubled, once more, by the 1970s.

If the time taken to double the world’s population over the past 350 years is taken as a measure, then the doubling time is seen to have been shrinking fast. It took 200 years, to 1825, to double the world’s population from 500 million to 1 billion. It took only 100 years to achieve the next doubling, bringing the total to 2 billion by 1930; and only 45 years to achieve yet another doubling, to 4 billion by 1975. There were signs of slowing in the last

part of the 20th century; even as some experts predicted a world population of 8 billion by the early 21st century, the total had reached only 6.5 billion in 2006.

It was in western Europe, with the Industrial Revolution, that the second population revolution began. Europe's population doubled during the 18th century, from roughly 100 million to almost 200 million, and doubled again during the 19th century, to about 400 million. It was in Europe, too, that the pattern first emerged that has come to be known as the "demographic transition" (see [population: Theory of the demographic transition](#)). The populations of nonindustrial countries are normally stable (and low) because high birth rates are matched by high death rates. With industrialization, improvements in medical knowledge and public health, together with a more regular food supply, bring about a drastic reduction in the death rate but no corresponding decline in the birth rate. The result is a population explosion, as experienced in 19th-century Europe. In time, however, as European societies showed in the early 20th century, the urbanized populations of industrial societies voluntarily lower their birth rates and population growth flattens out. A new population plateau is reached. Japan, industrializing some 50 years later than the West, provided an almost textbook demonstration of the pattern of the demographic transition. Its population grew rapidly after 1870, during its industrializing phase, and leveled off equally rapidly after World War II. In an even more speeded-up form, the Soviet Union in its century of industrialization that began in the 1880s illustrated the link between industrialization and population.

Does the demographic transition hold good for the developing societies known as the Third World? Nearly all of these countries experienced rapid population growth after World War II, at rates greater than had ever occurred anywhere in the West. Western aid and medical science spectacularly reduced the high death rates, often by more than 50 percent. Determined population-control efforts in a few countries, such as Singapore, India, and China, yielded clear results. Only in Africa did population continue to rapidly grow into the 21st century. One important characteristic of societies that have not yet undergone a demographic transformation is the persistence of predominantly youthful populations, though these societies can least afford the burden of feeding and educating their nonproductive young. People under 15 made up more than 40 percent of the populations of the Third World, as compared with between 20 and 30 percent in the industrialized world.

It was argued that the birth rate remained stubbornly high in these societies partly because industrialization was so slow and fragmentary in the Third World. In addition, where any significant development had taken place, as in Brazil or Malaysia, it had only really affected

a small elite; the mass of the people were untouched. Thus, the reasons people in the industrialized West chose to have fewer children lacked cogency in underdeveloped countries. It remained rational for the bulk of the population to continue to have large families both to share in manual labour and to provide security for parents in their [old age](#). Lower fertility would come, it was argued, when wealth was more evenly distributed and [social security](#) systems well established.

- **Urbanism as a way of life**



Industrialism does not simply increase numbers; it distributes them in particular ways, concentrating mass populations in cities. Modern life is unquestionably [urban life](#).

It may be argued that it was in the cities of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome that a distinctively urban existence was first brought to that pitch of refinement that signifies an advanced civilization. Certainly for those fortunates who were free citizens the Athens of Pericles provided an agreeable existence. The Italian cities of the Renaissance, too, provided a distinctly [urban culture](#).

Industrial urbanism differs from preindustrial urbanism in two ways. The first is in its quantitative reach and intensity; the second is in the new qualitative relationship it sets up between the city and society.

For all the culture and sophistication of the preindustrial city, it remained a minority experience. Full participation in urban life was available to no more than the 3 or 4 percent of the population who were city dwellers in 3rd-millennium-BC Egypt and Mesopotamia and to the 10 to 15 percent of Romans who lived in cities at the zenith of imperial Rome (but who were heavily dependent on food supplies from North Africa). These latter represent a high point of preindustrial urbanism.

Industrialization brings a growth in trade and manufactures. To serve these activities it requires centralized sites of production, distribution, exchange, and credit. It demands a regular system of communications and transport. It multiplies the demand that political authorities establish a dependable coinage, a standard system of weights and measures, a reasonable degree of protection and safety on the roads, and regular enforcement of the laws. All these developments conduce to a vast increase in urbanization. Whereas in typical agrarian societies 90 percent or more of the population are rural, in industrial societies it is not uncommon for 90 percent or more to be urban.

The growth of cities with industrialization can be illustrated by the example of the United Kingdom. In 1801 about a fifth of its population lived in towns and cities of 10,000 or more inhabitants. By 1851 two fifths were so urbanized; and if smaller towns of 5,000 or more are included, as they were in the census of that year, more than half the population could be counted as urbanized. The world's first industrial society had become its first truly urban society as well. By 1901, the year of Queen Victoria's death, the census recorded three-quarters of the population as urban (two-thirds in cities of 10,000 or more and half in cities of 20,000 or more). In the span of a century a largely rural society had become a largely urban one.

The pattern was repeated on a European and then a world scale as industrialization proceeded. At the beginning of the 19th century, continental Europe (excluding Russia) was less than 10 percent urbanized, with respect to cities of 10,000 or more; by the end of the century it was about 30 percent urbanized (10 percent in cities with 100,000 or more), and by 1998 the urban population was roughly 78 percent. In the United States in 1800, only 6 percent of the population lived in towns of 2,500 or more; in 1920 the census reported that for the first time more than half of the American people lived in cities. By 1998 this had risen to 77 percent—about the same as Japan's urban population—and just under two-fifths of the population lived in metropolitan areas of one million or more. Taking the world as a whole, in 1800 no more than 2.5 percent of the population lived in cities of 20,000 or more; by 1965 this had increased to 25 percent, and by 1980 it had reached 40 percent. By this measure,

slightly less than half of the world's population could be classified as urban in 2000. This trend has been accompanied by a great growth of very large cities, of a type virtually unknown in the preindustrial world. In 1800 the world's largest city, Beijing, had 1.1 million inhabitants. One hundred years later the world's largest city was London, with 6.5 million people. Cities of more than 1 million inhabitants numbered 16 in 1900, 67 in 1950, and 250 in 1985. In 2000, 16 cities had populations exceeding 6 million.

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As with population growth, it was in the underdeveloped nations that the fastest rates of urban growth were to be found. The rapidly expanding population of a countryside unable to support it sought the city for both escape and opportunity, though in many cases it was a perilous choice. Between 1900 and 1950, while the world's population as a whole grew by 50 percent, the urban population grew by 254 percent; in Asia urban growth was 444 percent and in Africa 629 percent. In the early 21st century, Africa and Asia were nearly 40 percent urbanized. Cities such as São Paulo and [Mexico City](#) (both with populations of roughly 18 million), Mumbai (16 million), and Shanghai (approximately 13 million) had mushroomed to rival and even exceed the size of large cities in the developed West.

But while urbanization in the underdeveloped nations repeats some of the more distressing features of its Western counterpart—overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and unemployment—the compensation and eventual remedy of [economic growth](#) has been largely lacking. With some partial exceptions, such as Brazil, Mexico, [South Korea](#), [Taiwan](#), southern coastal [China](#), and Singapore, the underdeveloped world has known urbanization without industrialization. The result has been the rapid growth of [shantytowns](#) on the edges of the big cities. It has been estimated that about four or five million families in [Latin America](#) live in shantytowns.

Urbanism cannot be understood simply by statistics of urban growth. It is a matter, too, of a distinctive culture and consciousness. Urbanism is a way of life, as classically analyzed by the German sociologist [Georg Simmel](#) and the American sociologist [Louis Wirth](#). City life, with its tendency to nervous overstimulation, may lead to a bored and blasé attitude to life. It may encourage frivolous and fleeting cults and fashions. It can detach people from their traditional communal moorings, leaving them morally stranded and so inclined to harbour unreal expectations and feverish dreams. In the very number of social contacts it necessarily generates, it may compel individuals to erect barriers to protect their privacy. Individuals may be forced into an attitude of reserve and isolation. Hence, as Simmel noted, the superficial paradox that “one nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd.”

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At the same time, cities promote diversity and creativity. They attract the best and the brightest. If anything is to be accomplished in modern society, it almost certainly will be in the city. [Karl Marx](#) spoke of “the idiocy of rural life.” Only in cities, many sociologists have felt, are [human](#) beings able to realize to the full all their potentialities. Cities are the forcing house of change and growth. “Great cities,” declared the French sociologist [Émile Durkheim](#), “are the uncontested homes of progress; it is in them that ideas, fashions, customs, new needs are elaborated and then spread over the rest of the country. . . . Minds naturally are there oriented to the future.”

But whether they deplored or praised urban life, most commentators have agreed that, with industrialism, the city moved into a pivotal new relation with society as a whole. Preindustrial cities were islands in an agrarian sea. They hailed each other across vast alien tracts of nonurban life, which remained largely indifferent to and unaffected by their practices. Essentially they were parasitic on the countryside and on the peasant masses whose agricultural labour sustained them. Their disappearance not only would not have mattered to the peasants but would in most cases have been welcomed.

With industrial urbanism, this relationship was reversed. The countryside now became dependent on the city. It became an integral but peripheral part of a single [economic system](#) revolving around trade and commerce that was centred on the cities. Largely emptied of people, the countryside was now in effect simply another theatre of industrial operations for city merchants and bankers. Political and economic power resided in the city; industrial and financial corporations became the dominant landowners, replacing individual proprietors. Except in pockets largely maintained as quaint retreats for tourists, rustic life virtually disappeared; certainly it no longer significantly affected the values and practices of the larger society. What remained of “country life” was often little more than a persuasive and nostalgic motif in the hands of advertising copywriters, preying on the fantasies of city dwellers.

The city became both the symbol and the reality of industrial society as a whole. No longer, as in the past, standing in a merely mechanical relation to other parts of society, the city took its place at the centre of an increasingly organic whole. Industrialism created a centralized web of social relationships, and the city was the node. It dictated the style and set the standard for the whole society, imposing on all its own economic, political, and cultural framework.

- **Work and the family**

In preindustrial or nonindustrial society the **family** is the basic unit of production. All its members engage in a cooperative set of subsistence activities. In a typical example from early 18th-century **England**, the **man** might be a weaver and his wife a spinner, with the younger children acting as assistants in the joint domestic enterprise. Mixed in with this wage or piece labour would probably be the cultivation of a small plot of land, together with access to common land to forage for fuel and to hunt small game. The family need not necessarily be very large—in northwestern Europe and **North America** it seems to have been relatively small—but on the whole additional members are an economic asset as the value of extra hands to work outweighs the cost of extra mouths to feed. The family is a collective enterprise; all its members regard themselves as part of that collectivity and their contributions as adding to a common store; servants or other nonfamily members, such as apprentices, are “adopted” or treated as family members, for no other binding personal relationships but family ones are recognized. The family and its members are society in miniature.

Industrialization radically disrupts this more or less autonomous family economy. It takes away the economic function of the family, and reduces it to a unit of **consumption** and **socialization**. **Production** moves away from the household to the factory. The commons are enclosed, and the land commercially exploited for national and international markets. Some individuals become the owners and the managers of the new system. But the bulk of family members must become either landless agricultural labourers or, increasingly, workers in the factories of the new industrial towns. In either case, the family becomes immediately dependent for its livelihood on structures and processes external to itself. It lives by the jobs and wages of its members, and these are affected by forces which it barely comprehends, still less controls.

In the early stages of **industrialization**, the family will likely struggle to maintain its traditional collective unity. Its members, whether employed as farm workers in the country, industrial workers in the towns, or domestic servants in well-to-do urban homes, continue to pool their resources. They make regular visits home and continue to think of themselves as a collectivity. Their wages still contribute to a common family fund, which is used to support the nonworking young as well as temporarily unemployed members and to provide for members in sickness and **old age**. In the absence of a comprehensive system of **social security**, the family itself continues to fulfill the role. In these circumstances, as in the past, a

large family can be as much an asset as a burden. For a considerable time, therefore, large families, especially among the working classes, continue to be the norm in industrializing society.

Eventually the forces of [individualization](#), whose gross effects on the industrial economy and the society at large are so striking, also affect the family. Its members, male and female, increasingly come to think of their wages as their own, to be disposed of as they individually see fit. This attitude is encouraged by the increasing availability of attractive consumer goods. At some point it becomes economically and politically necessary for the [state](#) to step in to provide for those members unable to earn their own living, either because they are chronically unemployed, or because they are too young, too sick, or too old. The family role thus shrinks further to little more than child-rearing, and even here it has to compete with the school, peer groups, and child-care agencies. For its older members, the family becomes merely the domicile and the locus of recreation and a certain amount of sociability. Its members may spend a good deal of time at home, but their minds are formed more by influences operating outside it. Their lives are led largely outside the family, in their work and in association with nonfamily friends and colleagues. They no longer find their principal identity within a collective family identity. Hence the tendency of young adults to marry young, to break away from their families of origin, and to set up their own independent families.

Shorn of so many traditional functions, the family becomes almost exclusively the sphere of private life. It attends to the needs of children and the emotional and sexual satisfaction of the spouses. A small unit is best suited to these tasks. The [extended families](#) of the preindustrial and early industrial periods, which sometimes included grandparents and married offspring to three or more generations, give way to the small, two-generation [nuclear family](#) of parents and dependent children only. Whether or not the nuclear family precedes industrialization—as, for instance, it seems to have done in England—in industrial society it certainly becomes the norm.

With the shrinking and privatization of the family, the importance of [work](#) grows correspondingly. It becomes one of the principal sources of individual identity. In preindustrial society, the question of who one is is likely to be answered in terms of place of origin or family membership: I am John of Winchester, or John, Robert's son. In industrial society the question is typically answered in terms of one's occupation in the formal economy. The occupational role, as miner or machinist, clerk or cleaner, becomes the determining and defining role. It is the source of one's identity, status, and income. Work,

throwing off its religious justifications, itself becomes a religion. Not to work, to be unemployed, is to be stigmatized as much in one's own eyes as in the eyes of society.

Work is redefined as applying almost exclusively to formal employment in the industrial economy. All other kinds of work—unpaid domestic work, voluntary work, work done for friends or family, child-rearing—are devalued and treated as marginal or “unproductive.” The paradox is that the elevation of employed work is accompanied by a decisive fragmentation of work as an activity. Industrialization brings about a massive increase in the division of labour. But this involves not just, as in preindustrial urban life, a specialization of crafts and the rise of new occupations. More significant is a new kind of division of labour, what [Adam Smith](#) and [Karl Marx](#) called the “detailed” division of labour, in the work task itself. The set of tasks involved in the making of a whole product, which was previously performed by a single artisan or worker, is now broken apart and allocated to a number of different individuals. In his famous example of a pin manufactory, Adam Smith showed how, by dividing the task of pin-making into some 18 distinct operations, each performed by “distinct hands,” productivity could be increased more than a thousandfold. It was this form of the division of labour that became the source of the fantastic productivity of the industrial system, especially once [Henry Ford](#) had organized it around the continuously moving assembly line and the American pioneer in scientific management [Frederick W. Taylor](#) had supplied an engineering method for the splitting of any task into its simplest operations.

The English social critic [John Ruskin](#) pointed to one consequence of this new division of labour when he said that “it is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided, but the men.” The problem of motivating the workforce, of providing sufficient inducement to work discipline and performance when the tasks themselves were so intrinsically uninteresting, haunted all industrial societies. But the new division of labour itself pointed, rather ominously, to the likely resolution of this problem. Once tasks had been so minutely subdivided that the least skilled worker could do them, the next step was to mechanize the tasks and dispense with the human worker altogether. Full automation was in some sense implicit in the principle of the division of labour from the very start. It is ironic that a social process that had in its early stages put work at its very centre should also, in its further evolution, threaten to take it away altogether from its citizens.

- **Social structure**

Given the importance of economic institutions in general, and of employment in particular, it is not surprising to find that industrial society tends to produce a new principle in the ordering and ranking of individuals. **Economic position** and relationships become the key to **social position** and **class** membership. This is new, at least in its extent. While wealth or the lack of it were always important in determining social position, they were not usually the sole or even the central determinant. In all nonindustrial societies, attributes of tribal membership, race, religion, age, and gender are of equal and often greater importance in assigning individuals to a position in the social hierarchy. In the traditional Indian **caste system**, for instance, the religious eminence of even the poorest Brahman marks him out as a member of the highest and most esteemed caste.

Industrial society introduced a new, parallel ranking system that came to exist alongside, and in some cases to supplant, the preindustrial one. According to this hierarchy, one's position in the system of production or, more generally, in the marketplace, assigns one to a particular class or group. Ownership of **property**, level of **education**, and type and degree of training all affect one's market position. Karl Marx was convinced that in the course of its development capitalism—the only form of industrialism he considered—would eventually throw up only two main economic classes, the propertyless workers, or proletariat, and the capitalist owners, or bourgeoisie.

One reason why Marx's prediction has not come to pass in any developed society is that, though perhaps dominant in the long run, economic relationships have not so sweepingly eliminated other noneconomic considerations. Older sources of identity have continued to exert considerable power. Groups based on ethnic, religious, and regional ties have overlapped with and occasionally submerged those based solely on the tie of economic interest. Thus, the working class of **Northern Ireland** has preferred to stress its Protestant identification over its proletarian one. Workers and capitalists in the Basque and Catalan regions of Spain have united in a long, drawn-out opposition to the central government in Madrid. In the United States, racial and ethnic identity has continued to override any other based on income or occupation.

This is one way in which it is brought home that even radical changes do not necessarily disrupt all continuities. There are gainers and losers in the process of change, and both groups are apt to hark back to past ways and values if they think that doing so will help them gain more or lose less. Industrialization, while making a fundamental break with earlier forms of society, does not abolish all the elements of traditional society. In fact, the competition for

scarce resources that it generates often creates an impetus for the revival of traditional societies.

- **Secularization and rationalization**

At the most abstract level of analysis, modernization leads to what Max Weber called “the disenchantment of the world.” It calls into question all the superhuman and supernatural forces, the gods and spirits, with which nonindustrial cultures populate the universe and to which they attribute responsibility for the phenomena of the natural and social worlds. In their place it introduces as a competing cosmology the modern scientific interpretation of nature by which only the laws and regularities discovered by the scientific method are admitted as valid explanations of phenomena. If it rains, or does not rain, it is not because the gods are angry but because of atmospheric conditions, as measured by the barometer and photographed by satellites.

In short, modernization involves a process of secularization; that is, it systematically challenges religious institutions, beliefs, and practices, substituting for them those of reason and science. This process was first observable in Christian Europe toward the end of the 17th century. (It is possible that there is something inherently secularizing about Christianity, for no other religion seems to give rise spontaneously to secular beliefs.) At any rate, once invented in Europe, especially Protestant Europe, secularization was carried as part of the “package” of industrialism that was exported to the non-European world. Wherever modern European cultures have impinged, they have diffused secularizing currents into traditional religions and nonrational ideologies.

Although secularization is a general tendency or principle of development in modern societies, this does not imply that religion is driven out altogether from society. In fact, as one of the most modernized countries in the world, the United States is also among the world’s most religious. Against a deep background of tradition, modernization inevitably leaves many religious practices in place and may even stimulate new ones. Religious rituals, such as Christian baptism and church weddings, persist in all industrial societies; the church may, as in England and Italy, continue to play an important moral and social role. The majority of the population may hold traditional religious beliefs alongside more scientific ones. There may even be, as in the United States and in industrializing societies such as India, waves of religious revivalism that involve large sections of the population.

It is nonetheless true that all such religious phenomena, real as they may be in the lives of believers, lose their centrality as an organizing principle for the society as a whole. As compared with their place in traditional society, religious practices increasingly take on the character of individualized activities. They no longer embody that crucial legitimizing power that religious activities have in all nonindustrial societies. To many, baptisms, church weddings, and other rituals persist as much for social reasons as from belief in their religious significance.

Secularization is but one manifestation of a larger cultural process that affects all modern societies: the process of rationalization. While this process is epitomized by the rise of the scientific worldview, it encompasses many more areas than are usually associated with science. It applies, for instance, to the capitalist economy, with its rational organization of labour and its rational calculation of profit and loss. It applies also to artistic developments, such as the rational application of the geometry of perspective in painting and the development of a rational system of notation and rational harmonic principles in music. For Max Weber, the most careful student of the process, it referred above all to the establishment of a rational system of laws and administration in modern society. It was in the system of bureaucracy, seen as the impersonal and impartial rule of rationally constituted laws and formal procedures, that Weber saw the highest development of the rational principle. Bureaucracy meant a principled hostility to all traditional and “irrational” considerations of person or place, kinship or culture. It expressed the triumph of the scientific method and scientific expertise in social life. The trained official, said Weber, is “the pillar both of the modern state and of the economic life of the West.”

Weber was aware that bureaucracy has two faces. It can also be despotic and irrational in actual operation. The triumph of the principle does not guarantee its strict performance in practice. Rationalization is a process that operates at the highest, most general level of social development. It would be surprising if its effects were to be found in every nook and cranny of modern society. Everywhere one should expect to find the persistence of nonrational and even antirational attitudes and behaviour. Superstition is one example; the occasional rise of personal, charismatic leadership breaking through the rationalized routines of bureaucracy is another. These should not be thought of simply as vestiges of traditional society. They are also the expressions of essential needs, emotional and cultural, that are in danger of being stifled in a scientific and unillusioned environment.

Weber stressed another significant point. Rationalization does not connote that the populations of modern societies are, as individuals, any more reasonable or knowledgeable

than those of nonindustrial societies. What it means is that there is, in principle, scientifically validated knowledge available to modern populations, by which they may, if they choose, enlighten themselves about their world and govern their behaviour. In practice, as Weber knew, such knowledge tends to be restricted to scientifically trained elites. The mass of the population of a modern society might in their daily lives be relatively more ignorant than the most primitive savage, for the savage usually has a comprehensive and working knowledge of the tools he uses and the food he consumes, whereas modern man may well use an elevator without the slightest idea of its working principle or eat food manufactured in ways and with materials of which he is totally unaware.

- **Social problems**

As with bureaucracy, so with most other features: they show the two faces of **modernity**. One is dynamic, forward-looking, progressive, promising unprecedented abundance, freedom, and fulfillment. The other shows the dark side of modernity, the new problems that modernity brings in its wake by virtue of the very scale and novelty of its achievements. Social progress is matched by social pathology.

Thus, the historic achievement of becoming able to feed a large population brings with it crowding, pollution, and environmental destruction. Quiet, privacy, and space become scarce and increasingly treasured commodities. Massed together in cities, seeking rest and **recreation**, the populations of industrial societies force open the whole world to tourism. Soon every rural haven, every sunswept coast, is turned into an administered holiday camp, each a uniform replica of the rest. The industrial principle of **mass production** and distribution can readily be turned from the production of goods to that of services, including those of **leisure** and entertainment.

Urban-industrial life offers unprecedented opportunities for individual mobility and personal freedom. It also promises the attainment of dazzling prizes, in wealth and honours, for those with the enterprise and talent to reach for them. The other side of the coin is the loneliness of the **city** dweller and the desolation of failure for those many who cannot win any of the prizes. As Durkheim analyzed it, the individual is placed in the pathological condition of **anomie**. He experiences “the malady of infinite aspirations.” The decline of religion and community removes the traditional restraints on appetite, allowing it to grow morbidly and without limit. At the same time the competitive modern order that stimulates these unreal

expectations provides insufficient and unequal means for their realization. The result is an increase in suicide, [crime](#), and [mental disorder](#).

Industrial [work](#), too, exacts a high price for the enormous increase in productivity brought about by the intensified [division of labour](#). [Karl Marx](#) offered the most systematic analysis of this price under the heading of “[alienation](#).” The industrial worker feels estranged from the activity of work because his task is so fragmented, undemanding, and meaningless. He does not realize himself, his human potential, in his work. Unlike traditional craft work, for instance, it does not call on his constructive and creative faculties. The industrial worker also feels alienated from the product of his work, for he has no control over its manufacture, nor over the terms and conditions of its disposal. As the dynamic sum of its parts, the industrial system of production is phenomenally powerful; but this power is achieved at the cost of reducing one [class](#) of those parts, the human workers, to mere “hands,” mere semblances of humanity. Eventually, Marx hoped, the surplus wealth produced by the industrial system would free workers altogether from the necessity of work; but until that time the degraded condition of the worker would be the most eloquent testimony to the dehumanization wrought by the system.

Marx’s optimism about the future was perhaps as excessive as his pessimism about his present. But he was by no means the only one who felt that [industrial society](#) demanded too high a price of many of its members. Repeatedly, industrialism was found to have created new and apparently ineradicable pockets of poverty. Despite steady [economic growth](#), it was the persistent finding throughout the industrial world that between 15 and 20 percent of the population remained permanently below officially defined levels of [poverty](#). It appeared that industrialism by its very mechanism of growth created a “new poor,” who for whatever reason—deprived backgrounds, low enterprise, low intelligence—were unable to compete according to the rules of the industrial order. The communal and kinship supports of the past having withered away, there was no alternative for the failed and the rejected but to become claimants and pensioners of the state.

There were other victims, too. The small [nuclear family](#) offered, to a greater extent than ever before, the opportunity for intense privacy and emotional fulfillment. But the very intensity of these relationships seemed to put an intolerable burden on it. Added to that, the family survived as the only remaining primary group in society, the only social unit where relationships remained primarily personal and face-to-face. Elsewhere bureaucratic or commercial relationships prevailed. The nuclear family was called upon to do all the work of restoration and repair of its members on their return from the impersonal, large-scale,

bureaucratic world of work and, increasingly, play. Under this unprecedented pressure it began to show all the classic symptoms of distress. Adolescent alienation and teenage rebellion became accepted features of modern family life. **Divorce** rates soared; and when people sought to remarry—“the triumph of hope over experience”—their second **marriages** proved even less stable than their first. There was a steady increase in the incidence of one-parent families, usually headed by a woman.

Modernization, finally, put a number of new political and cultural problems on the agenda. The **plethora** of choices about how to spend leisure time and the **urbanization** of life gave rise to so-called postmaterialist **values** in advanced industrial societies, reflecting the greater importance attached to quality-of-life issues such as entertainment, self-improvement, and the environment. The decline of local **communities**, the great growth in the scale of all social institutions, and the acceleration of political centralization put a strain on civic loyalties and the willingness of people to participate in **political life**. As mass political parties came to monopolize civic life, individual citizens retreated increasingly into private life. Political **apathy** and low turnouts at elections became matters of serious concern, calling into question the democratic claims of modern liberal societies. A similar concern centred on the spread of **mass communications**, which in the 20th century came to dominate the cultural life of modern societies. The uniformity and conformity bred by the press, radio, and television threatened—albeit passively rather than directly—the **pluralism** and **diversity** on which liberal society prided itself and which it regarded as its chief security against totalitarian challenge.

Together, political and cultural centralization and uniformity were interpreted as evidence of the creation of a “**mass society**.” Tocqueville had warned that individuals lacking strong intermediate institutions with which to identify would become atomized and in their anonymity and powerlessness might look to the protection of strong men and strong governments. Once more, this outcome had to be seen as a possibility, not an inevitability. **Pluralism** remained strong in many societies. But the rise and success of totalitarian movements in some industrial societies showed that the tendencies were real and suggested that they were present in some degree in all modern societies.

- **Modern Society And World Society**
- **Western and non-Western routes to modernity**

The Western experience of [industrialization](#) was the model for world industrialization. To become modern was to become something like Western industrial society. Non-Western societies were not always given much choice in the matter. As formal colonies or informal clients of Western powers, they often found themselves being “developed” in a Western direction before they were permitted to take political control of their own destinies. Once on the way, there was no turning back. But, even where an element of choice existed, it remained the [consensus](#) that the only viable form of society in the modern world was industrial society. Only industrial societies could be active agents in the world system. All others must remain clients or dependents. [Japan](#) demonstrated this better than any other nation. From a poor nation humiliated at the hands of the West in the mid-19th century, Japan rose through industrialization to become one of the most powerful societies in the world. More pointedly, Japan showed that, by meeting the challenge of industrialization, a non-Western society could become not merely the equal but the superior of some of the strongest Western powers.

Japan confirmed what Western experience had already made clear: There are several routes to [modernity](#). In the 19th century Britain, Belgium, France, and the United States industrialized largely on the basis of the individual [entrepreneur](#) and the [free market economy](#). In Germany, and even more in Japan, the state and political elites played a major role, organizing credit, coordinating and planning development, and restricting foreign access to home markets in the interests of native industry. Later still came the even more centralized [authoritarian](#) model of modernization under the aegis of the one-party state. Taking their lead from the [Soviet Union](#) following the [Russian Revolution](#) of 1917, many developing countries in Asia, Africa, and [Latin America](#) sought to industrialize according to economic plans drawn up by political elites and stringently imposed on their populations. Even where, as in [India](#), formal liberal [democracy](#) was instituted, industrialization was largely guided by a single national party—usually the one identified with the struggle for independence from colonial rule, as was the [Indian National Congress](#) party. In any case, there were plenty of socialisms to choose from. There were the African socialisms of [Kwame Nkrumah](#)’s Ghana and [Julius Nyerere](#)’s Tanzania, the Chinese socialism of [Mao Zedong](#), the Cuban socialism of [Fidel Castro](#), or the Yugoslav socialism of [Josip Broz Tito](#). All could aspire to be models of development to [Third World](#) societies. None, however, were able to achieve successful records of economic development under central planning.

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Japan and the Soviet Union (until its dissolution in 1991) suggested, in their different ways, that there was a general pattern of late development appropriate to all those nations that attempted to industrialize in the shadow of already formidable industrial powers. This pattern variously involved strong protectionism, directed labour, control of unions, and central supervision of banking and credit. It also meant circumventing the sharp division between management and workers that hampered most early Western industrializers and that continued to worry them in their later industrial history. Above all, late developers put the power of the state at the centre of the modernizing effort. The state was the prime mover and guardian of the whole enterprise. Unlike Britain or the United States, where the state—at any rate in the early stage—encouraged development more or less passively, keeping the peace and enforcing the laws and perhaps arranging for some free land (as for the railroads in the United States), in countries such as Japan, the former Soviet Union, and China the state directed the industrializing process from the start and supervised it closely throughout. The state made the major decisions about investment, transport and communications, and education. It developed the media of mass communications as agencies of mass socialization. Therefore, whether or not the economy was formally nationalized, in practice economic development was placed firmly under national auspices and directed to nationalist ends.

- **One world or many**

Japan and Singapore have been, so far, the only non-Western countries in the world to become fully industrialized (though South Korea and Taiwan are well on their way). It may be significant that those countries embarked on industrialization in the 19th century, while the West was still itself industrializing and before it had built up a truly commanding lead. The same is true of Russia, the only other major case of industrialization outside western Europe and North America (taking South Africa and Australia as “European”). In the 20th century it became increasingly clear that industrialization is not something that nations can decide to do or how to do entirely by themselves. They operate within a context of world industrialization, in a world system of states of decidedly unequal wealth and power. This system provides both constraints and opportunities for the economic development of the states within it.

Throughout most of the 20th century the nations of this world system were categorized according to political or economic criteria. Applying the former resulted in the familiar “West–East” divide. This was primarily an ideological division between the developed

capitalist nations, such as the United States, Germany, and Japan (counted ideologically as Western), and the developed communist or state-socialist nations, such as the countries of the former East European bloc. Attached to these were, respectively, underdeveloped capitalist nations, such as Bolivia and [Bangladesh](#), and underdeveloped communist nations, such as China and Cuba. The West–East distinction became obsolete in the early 1990s with the [collapse of the Soviet Union](#) and of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe.

A more significant and in many ways more interesting division arises from placing primary emphasis on the level of economic development, with political or ideological differences as subsidiary matters. This approach yields the “North–South” divide. With some anomalies—South Africa, Australia—the world is seen as divided essentially between the wealthy and powerful countries of the Northern Hemisphere and the poor, less-developed countries of the Southern Hemisphere.

A further refinement of the economic model looks past the North–South distinction to a single underlying and developing world system. Based on a historical perspective, this view, advanced especially by the American theorist [Immanuel Wallerstein](#), argues that there is but a single world economy, the capitalist world economy, which has been expanding since the 17th century. This economy has, over the centuries, been expanding outward from its northwestern European base to take in an increasingly large portion of the globe. Even under the communist regimes, the Eastern European societies were seen as full participants in this system and were accordingly regarded not as aberrant socialist economies but as “collective capitalist firms.” In this model, countries are classified according to their nearness to the centre of the system. There are “core countries,” such as the United States and Japan; “semi-peripheral countries,” such as Brazil, most eastern European states, and China; and “peripheral countries,” such as Cuba and most of the poor countries of Africa and Asia. Depending on economic fortunes and fluctuations, as well as the logic of the developing system itself, countries can move in and out of these categories.

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The plausibility and appeal of this model lie in its recognition of the growing internationalization of the industrial economy. Nation-states, whether capitalist or communist, are becoming increasingly subordinate to world economic developments. The politics of energy—oil, gas, nuclear power—are world politics (just as, for some considerable time, military strategy has been world strategy). Decisions about capital investment and growth are made in a world context and on a global scale. The giant [multinational](#)

corporations are the most significant new actors on the world stage. They have been establishing a new international **division of labour**. From their point of view, it makes more sense to manufacture goods in Vietnam or Mexico, where labour is comparatively cheap, than in the United States or Britain, where labour is expensive and **regulation** stringent. Such high-level functions as central planning and **research and development** can be retained in their Western homelands, where there are the necessary reserves of highly trained professional and scientific personnel. Profits can be declared in those countries where taxes are lowest. In such a way do the multinationals illustrate, even embody, the interdependence of core and periphery nations.

- **Postmodern And Postindustrial Society**
- **New developments in economic and social structure**

Industrialism, at least within our experience of it for more than 200 years, never reaches a point of equilibrium or a level plateau. By its very principle of operation, it ceaselessly innovates and changes. Having largely eliminated the agricultural workforce, it moves on manufacturing **employment** by creating new automated **technology** that increases manufacturing productivity while displacing workers. **Manufacturing**, from accounting for a half or more of the employed **population** of industrial societies, shrinks to between a quarter and a third. Its place is filled by the **service sector**, which in fully industrial societies comes to employ between a half and two-thirds of the workforce and to account for more than half of the **gross national product**. Most service occupations—in government, health, education, finance, **leisure** and entertainment—are white-collar. The typical industrial worker is now not the blue-collar worker but the white-collar worker.

The move to a service society is marked by a great expansion in education, health, and other private and public welfare services. The population typically becomes not just healthier, better housed, and better fed but also better educated. Most young people complete secondary- or high-school **education**; between a quarter and a half of them go on to full-time **higher education**. Professional and scientific knowledge becomes the most marketable commodity. The “knowledge class” of professional, scientific, and technical workers becomes the fastest-growing occupational group. The link between pure science and technology, loose and uncertain in the early stages of **industrialization**, becomes pivotal. New industries, starting with chemicals and pharmaceuticals and later including the aeronautical, space, and computer-related industries, are created by developments in pure science and

depend largely on theoretical research. Theoretical knowledge in the social sciences also comes to be widely applied, as in Keynesian management of the national economy and in complex models of technological and [economic forecasting](#).

Most of the changes characterizing late industrialism can be seen as the results of long-term developments [implicit](#) in the process of industrialization itself. The rise of service industries has emerged in part from the increase in leisure and in disposable wealth and in part from the continuing process of mechanization and technical [innovation](#), which constantly raises manufacturing productivity by replacing [human](#) labour with machines. It can also be seen as the consequence of the growth of multinational corporations; this, too, is the result of the increase in scale and complexity of industrial organization, a clear tendency from the very start. The growth of knowledge-based industries is most clearly an outcome of investments in the depth and breadth of education, particularly in science and mathematics. Science has always been at the base of industrialism, and its closer union with industry and society in the 20th century was simply the fulfillment of modernization's rationalizing drive.

- **New patterns of urban life**

Many features of [modernity](#), intensified beyond a certain level, produce a reactive response. [Urbanization](#), having reached some practical saturation point, leads to [suburbanization](#), the desire to live in neighbourhoods with green spaces and at least a breath of country air. As the [suburbs](#) fill up, the more prosperous citizens become exurban: they colonize the villages and small towns of the countryside within commuting distance of their work in the [city](#). Aiding this trend is the industrial decentralization and depopulation of many [cities](#) as old manufacturing industries decline and new service industries move out to the suburbs and small towns. For the first time since the onset of industrialization, the countryside begins to gain population and the cities begin to lose it. According to the 1980 U.S. census, cities such as St. Louis, Buffalo, and Detroit lost between 35 and 47 percent of their populations over a 30-year period. London lost almost 15 percent of the population of its inner boroughs between 1961 and 1971, and Liverpool almost 25 percent of its population in the 20-year period to 1971.

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But there is a deceptive aspect to this movement. The familiar forces of industrialism, here as elsewhere, continue to dominate the process. Suburbanization and exurbanization do not mean deurbanization. On the contrary, they amount to a spreading of urban life over greater and greater areas. They are simply the filling up, at lesser but still urban densities, of larger

areas and regions. From the old city develops the **metropolitan area**, comprising a large city of about 10 million people together with a surrounding community socially and economically dependent on it. The metropolitan areas themselves tend to merge into even larger urban agglomerations, the **megalopolises**, which serve populations of 40 million or more. The biggest of these is “Boswash,” the chain of contiguous cities and surrounding regions that stretches from Boston to Washington, D.C., along the northeastern seaboard of the United States. Others in the United States include the Chicago–Pittsburgh area around the Great Lakes and the San Francisco–San Diego region along the California coast. There are emerging megalopolises in Britain in the region between London and the Midland cities, in Germany in the industrial basin of the Ruhr, and in **Japan** in the Tokyo–Osaka–Kyōto complex.

The Greek architect and city planner Constantinos Apostolos Doxiadis argued that this process is part of a long-term evolution that must eventually culminate in the world-city, or “Ecumenopolis.” This remarkable object will incorporate areas reserved for recreation and agriculture as well as desert and wilderness conservation areas, but essentially it will be a web of interconnected cities throughout the world, all closely linked by rapid transport and **electronic communication**, and all contributing to a single functional unity. In Ecumenopolis the entire land surface of the globe will have become recognizably the dwelling place of urbanized humanity.

Embedded in this process is a contradictory pattern typical of late industrial life. Subjectively, individuals wish to escape from the city. They leave the congested and declining older urban centres only to find themselves cocooned by larger urban structures in the region at large. The objective structural forces of industrialism have in no way abated. But increasingly they give rise to reactions and behaviour that have a de-modernizing character.

Thus there is reaction against large-scale bureaucratic organization. “Small is beautiful,” declare the protesters as they seek to reestablish communal and craft environments characteristic of the preindustrial period. Parallel with this is a movement to promote “alternative” and “intermediate” technology, which aims to design tools that restore to the human worker the potential to use and express skill and creativity.

At the political level, too, there is reaction against large scale and centralization. In many industrial societies, such as those of Britain, France, and Canada, there have been strong regional movements demanding autonomy or outright independence. Often these are areas, such as Scotland in Britain, where at least substantial minorities wish to restore historic

nations that have been incorporated into larger, more centralized states. Such movements derive momentum from the internationalization of the world economy and polity, which, over the world generally, gives rise to wholly new **nationalisms** as well. Lacking economic and often genuine political self-government, small societies assert their cultural identity and clamour—and sometimes fight—for autonomy. This was particularly evident in the 1990s with the **dissolution of the Soviet Union**, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and other nationalist movements in Africa and throughout the world. In less extreme cases, new nations may emerge, although their main symbols of independence may be no more than a **national anthem** and an international airport.

The assertion of cultural values opposed to modernity is a general characteristic of late industrialism. This may take the form of a revival of **ethnicity**, a claim for a culture and way of life that often harks back to older communal traditions and which denies the legitimacy of any uniform culture propagated by the large nation-state. Thus in the United States blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and many other groups have made strong claims on behalf of a distinctive ethnic way of life that they variously seek to defend against the encroachments of the national culture. Protests against rationality and uniformity are seen, as well, in the successive waves of youth cultures and religious revivals that have marked late industrial society. Objectively, it is clear that the large-scale bureaucratic institutions of society continue to give the main direction to national life. All revolts break against their indispensability to modern society. But subjectively these institutions are incapable of satisfying the emotional and social needs of individuals. The consequence is the repeated rise of **subcultures**, often of bizarre mystical or hedonistic kinds, which aim in their practice to reverse the main features of modernity and which give their members a sense of participation and belonging of an almost tribal nature. Central to most of these antinomian movements and ideologies is a wholesale rejection of the scientific worldview, which is depicted as alienating and dehumanizing.

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A nation that modernizes is set upon a path of development that carries its own logic and an inseparable mixture of good and bad. Without question, modern society brings progress in the form of material abundance. Less certainly, it brings increasing control of the natural and social environment. But its scientific and technological achievements are bought at some cost to spiritual and emotional life. In unifying the world, modernization establishes uniform standards, albeit higher ones in many cases than previously prevailed. At the same time, it ensures that failures and disasters will also be magnified globally. There are no retreats and

escape routes, except those that modern society itself invents as pastimes. The world becomes one and its fate that of all its inhabitants.

To measure the balance of gains and losses in modernity and to increase the former against the latter require forms of social accounting and social engineering that have so far largely defied the efforts of [social science](#) and government. But in practice this does not matter. No one can wait for that problem to be solved, if it ever can be. To modernize is to take everything, the bad with the good, and not to modernize is to play no part in the life of contemporary humanity. One of the unusual, and historically unprecedented, aspects of modernization is that it leaves no choice in the matter.