

The Worldview of Modernity

The Dominant Social Paradigm, Transformations, & Moral Sources

3/10/2015

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Setting the Stage

- Global warming solutions require major changes
- What shapes our moral playing field?
- What shapes our sense of a **higher good**?
- Evolutionary Perspective
- Today: Historical perspective
 - Assumptions of Modernity
 - Individualism & Atomism & Atomism
 - Moral Sources
 - Goals for Lecture:
 - Open up deeper perspective on current behavior
 - critique current thinking
 - explore other possibilities

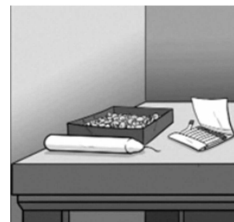
Key Perspectives for Systems Thinking

- Modernity
- Technology
- Capitalism
- Desire
- Consumption
- Career
- Food
- Nature
- Evolution
- Entertainment
- Wisdom
- Community
- Individual
- Dwelling
- Atomism
- Holism
- Freedom
- Good

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Seeing the Obvious in Modernity

(Question unspoken, widely shared assumptions)



Using these materials, mount the candle to the wall

Feudalism (Traditional) vs. Marxism (Modern)

Different conceptions of power and authority



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Assumptions at Work....

- Who do you trust best to address global warming:
 - Private Enterprise
 - Government
 - Individual Actions
- What will be the ultimate solution:
 - Technological innovation
 - Redefined values
- How to get out of current economic crisis?
 - Private spending
 - Government spending

Lecture Overview

- I. Dominant Social Paradigm (of Western Modernity)
- II. Key Transformations of Modernity
- III. Moral Sources
- IV. Moral Goods
- V. Case Studies

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I. Dominant Social Paradigm

- Reading: The Nature of Western Thought
 - Authors: Koger & Du Nann Winter
 - Modern World view as set of Assumptions
- Key features of New Environmental Paradigm
- Key features of Dominant Social Paradigm
- How is problem of sustainability a worldview problem?
- Why is the DSP Dominant?
- **→ Key Assumptions...**

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I. Nature is inert, just stuff (DSP)

- Difference between Indigenous and Modern views
- Where did mechanistic, clock-like view begin?
- How does Cartesian dualism separate us from the world?
- How did Newton build upon Descartes view?

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2. Control nature (DSP)

- Contrast contemplative knowledge with the sort of knowledge Francis Bacon envisioned.
- What might a feminist observe about Bacon's language?
- What's the relationship between Christianity and the DSP?
 - Pulpit time
 - James Dobson's concern.
 - Church Membership and Attendance correlated with what?
- Locke's views on land ownership and "wasted" land

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3. Seeking Private Economic Gain (DSP)

- Assume humans are basically....
- What was Hobbes' view of human nature?
- How does the Declaration of Independence emphasize a negative view of liberty?
- How did Calvinism promote industrial development?

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4. We Must Progress (DSP)

- Contrast pre-industrial and industrial conceptions of time.
- How is the idea of linearity or hierarchy reflected in the "Great Chain of Being"
- Economic Growth and climate change
- Linear processing of resources
- Limits of non-industrialized worldviews
- Nepal, caste, and external locus of control.
- **Key Points:** Worldviews (1) contingent and malleable – not set in stone (2) have often hidden influence

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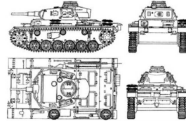
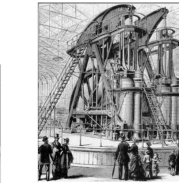
II. Key Transformations of Modernity

- Historical period (& now)
- Post-traditional, post-medieval
- Huge Changes
 - Rural → Urban
 - Agriculture → Industrial
 - Religious → Secular
 - Feudal → Nation-State



Components of Modernity

- Key components
 - Enlightenment & Rationality
 - Technology
 - Democracy
 - Individualism
- Five Key Engines/ Transformations.... →



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I. Protest. Reformation (1520)

Authority Divides

- Challenge to church's monolithic authority
- From Latin to Vernacular
- Individual Bibles
- Diversity & Pluralism
- Subjectivizes Belief
 - We Believe to...
 - I Believe



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2. Political Revolutions (1776 & 1789)

Rethinking Power & Rights

- Challenged divine right of kings
- Sovereignty shifts:
 - King to people
 - People to individual
- Individual Rights
 - Inherent
 - Inalienable
 - Self-possessing
 - Transcendent
 - Foundational
- Inherent Responsibilities?

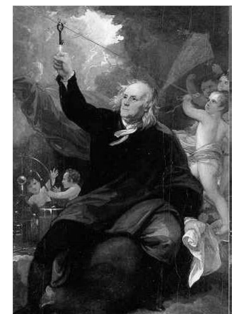


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3. Scientific Revolution (~1600)

Knowledge as progressing

- Understand nature
- Control nature
- Reductionism
- Instrumental knowledge
- Technology



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4. Industrial Revolution (1750-1800)

Industrial Revolution

Farm to Factory; Village to City
Independent Wealth
Labor Mobility
Control of Nature
Technological Power



Repeating machines on machinery
Art by Beth Reed/Peterborough Museum 1999. Photo by Keith Day



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5. Romanticism (~1850)

- Philosophical, Literary, Artistic
- Reaction Against (but within) Modernity
- Deeper truths in Nature (God?)
- Intuitive, aesthetic, personal, expressive
- Authenticity, Expressivism
- Self-determination, Nationalism



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III. Moral Sources

- Forces shaping conceptualizations of higher good
- Internalized Externalities
- Dynamic, fluid, enacted realities
- Example: “All men are created equal”
- Feel pull, can’t ignore, partly defined by
- Sources:
 - Charles Taylor (1992). *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modernity Identity*.
 - Robert Bellah, et al. (1985). *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.

– Four groupings....

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Moral Sources: Key Features

- Some push towards atomization
 - Utilitarian individualism & Expressive individualism
 - Higher goods illusory, dangerous
- Some push towards larger realities/ higher goods
 - Civic republicanism, Biblical tradition, & Attunement with Nature
 - Self emerges in/through dialogue with higher goods
- Moral Sources – subjective or objective realities??
 - Objective: Felt in culture; objectively real forces
 - Subjective: Enacted by individuals; sustained dynamically; fluid
 - Cf. reality of language
- Paradox of Individualism
 - Unique expression of individual?
 - Derived expression, conforming to cultural norm?

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I. Evolutionary

- Status/Fame
- Power/Wealth
- Beauty/Attractiveness

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2. Communal

- Biblical Tradition
 - John Winthrop; Puritans; City on Hill; Moral/religious Utopia
 - Brother’s keeper, collective responsibility, subordination to will of God; God as transcendent standard of justice and value
 - Freedom to do the right thing
- Civic Republicanism
 - Thomas Jefferson, shared enactment of self-ruling republic, political and economic equality; laws express virtues
 - Subordination/sacrifice for common good; social capital valued
 - Freedom to engage public/shared issues

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3a. Modern Individualism

- Utilitarian Individualism
 - Individual as agent; takes control; efficient production
 - Disengaged reasoning, self-mastery, dignity through agency
 - Dispassionate rationality, control, overpower limitations
 - Freedom to succeed; self-made businessman, toughness,
 - -Job skills, apps, power tools, clear-cutting, factory farming, cars, news you can use, TV on demand
- Expressive Individualism
 - Authenticity, inner-self, fulfillment, realization, uniqueness
 - Family and home as private sanctuary for self-development
 - Freedom to become best possible self, fullest self
 - Eg: Fashion sense, style, gracious living, self-expression, think different

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3b. Modern Individualism

- Atomism
 - Assumption (cosmological view) and Ideal (aspiration)
 - Self as fundamental element of reality (Society as illusion)
 - Ideally free, unique, & unbounded. Source of...
 - Identity ♦ Authority ♦ Power
 - No dependence, communities of choice, independent living
 - Liberalism & Libertarianism
 - Celebrate difference (see civil rights, multiculturalism)
 - Enabled/Enacted by new forms of being
 - New technologies (cars, a/c, 401K, iphone)
 - New institutions (career & family)
 - New moral sources
 - Instrumental individualism
 - Expressive individualism

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4. Environmental

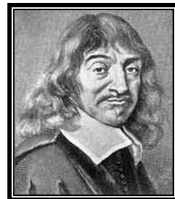
- Attunement with Nature
 - Roots in Romanticism, Scientific Revolution, & Evolution
 - Nature takes on (replaces?) God elements
 - Good comes from alignment /coherence/adaptation to Nature
 - Anti-modern in rejection of Instrumentalism & Dominance
 - Anti-traditional in rejection of Nature as “Bounty from God”
 - Injects moral worth into Nature
 - Can be morally complicated/problematic

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IV. Case Studies

- I. Descartes – The Inward Shift
 - Plato – Change direction of the soul's vision
 - Descartes – “I think therefore I am” (1637)



“We may find a practical philosophy ...[to]... render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature.”

Reason becomes instrumental tool

Reject passive, contemplative, gentile reason

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Cartesian view: Dualism & Disengagement

- Objectify world, divide body from mind, emotions from reason
 - World disenchanting – seek control
 - Reject natural order (teleology) – worldly merely mechanistic
- Disengaged reasoning
 - Be objective, reject passions (emotions)
 - “Be reasonable” – master your emotions
 - Freewill is noblest thing; independence & self-control
 - Reason as method, tool, deployed by independent mind

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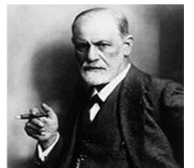
Cartesian Knowing

- What does it mean to Know something?
 - Control, instrumentality, completeness, competency
 - Knowing something as a “Fossil Fuel”
 - Knowing through technology- means/ends relationship
 - Standing within or standing over?
 - Part of ecology or outside ecology?

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2. Freud's Disengagement

- Freud's “Physics”
 - objectifies internal space of mind
 - 3 separate components:
 - Id
 - Superego
 - Ego
 - psychoanalysis – a method for knowing/controlling
 - Understand solely through internal dynamics
 - Mechanistic
 - Control self
 - Clinical detachment, objectify problems, no higher good
 - Extension of Cartesian view



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3. Up in the Air

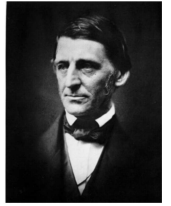
- Dangers and Delights of Modernity
- Clip [here](#)



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4. Emerson – Saint of Self Expression

- Ralph Waldo Emerson 1803-1882
- *Self Reliance* (1841)
- Transcendentalist – Nature Romanticized
- New Englander
- Former Unitarian Preacher
- Radical/Unconventional
- Conservative? Anti-abolitionist
- Stately Home, Upper Class
- Sued deceased wife's family



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Emerson Preaches Atomism

Insist on yourself; never imitate... Every great man is unique.

Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you.

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.

(Sarte -Hell is other people)

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Emerson in Context

- Moral Sources
 - Expressive Individualism
 - Utilitarian Individualism
 - (secular) Moral preacher
 - Blindspots? Poor, Slavery (self first!)
- Advances Protestant Reformation
 - Diminishes authority of church/society
 - God transposed – Sacred individuality
- Consumerism Foundation
 - Need Tools of Self-Expression and Individuation
 - Youth Culture; Novelty



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5. Maslow's Humanism (and Transcenders)

- Humanistic Psychology
 - Against Freudian/Psychoanalytic/Depth Psychology (too negative)
 - Against Behaviorism (too mechanical)
- Hierarchy of Needs
 - From Basic (hunger/thirst) to...
 - Self-Actualization
 - Realism
 - Spontaneity
 - External, problem-centered focus
 - Autonomy
 - Ethical sensitivity
 - Openness to experience
 - Downside?
- Late Maslow: Transcenders / Transpersonal Psychology



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6. Paul Wachtel: Dangers of Modernity

- Choose communities (Not pre-given)
 - Identities & place previously set: Smith, Taylor, Tyler, Carter
 - Finding social place. Cf. to fraternities and sororities
 - Choose (shop?) for religion, career, fulfilling life-partner, home
- Decline of community
 - Newspapers vs. TV
 - Agriculture non-local – Mega, industrial complex
- Financial insecurity
 - Buying at Wal-Mart vs. small local merchants
 - Home buying, outsourcing, technologies and freedom

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Wachtel (cont)

- Freedoms mixed blessings
 - Insurance, 401ks, Nursing homes
 - Quality of life higher than 1950s?
- Coping through Production & Consumption
 - Instrumental individualism
 - Expressive individualism
- Dominance of Economic System / Corporations
 - WalMart vs. Local Store
- Final (arguable) thoughts:
 - Modernity undermines notion of higher good
 - Modernity limits potential for collective action

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Conclusion: Key Dangers of Modernity

- Overshoot (Technological, Economic, Pop. Growth)
- Excess faith in technology
- Atomism deifies Freedom
 - Limits on Collective Identity/Action
 - Limits on Higher Goods
 - Denial of Limits
- Consumption

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