|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Neo-Marxist  LEARNING TABLE 5 – NEO-MARXIST/WEBERIAN THEORY  *Neo Marxists can be to evaluate Marx in a Marxist essay or as support for the argument that religion acts as a force for social change* | Weber’s action theory  *Religion as a force for social change* |
| * Neo-Marxism is development of Marxist thought maintaining the view that religion is an **ideological force** that keeps the proletariat in **false class consciousness**. * However Neo Marxists concede that traditional Marxist theory ignores a number of global examples where religion has supported the working class. For example the make poverty history campaign is supported by all major faiths * These global examples led **Neo Marxist Manduro (1982)** toargue that religion can disrupt **social harmony** and promote **social change**. * Manduro agreed with traditional Marxism that in a majority of cases the church backed up the ruling party. However in very poor South American countries the church was the only outlet for the peasant population. This has led to the development of **liberation theology** the belief that religion can free the poor from their chains and promote revolution. * http://www.clubfuji.com/Ash/BurningMonk.jpgFather Camillo Torres is a real life example of Neo-Marxism theory in action. He saw Christ as a revolutionary and took up arms against the Colombian ruling party. Further examples of Liberation theology can be seen in Poland and South Africa. | Weber was an action theorist. Unlike structuralist theories such as Marxism, Functionalism action theory was concerned with the way an individual’s actions shape society. He looked at the way in which individuals acted but more importantly the reasons for this action.  http://lefteyeonthemedia.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/puritan.jpgWeber’s theory differs from that of other modernist thinkers as he argues religion can disrupt **social harmony** and be a dynamic force for **social change**. He theorised that industrial revolution had a massive impact on society. He argued that religion created ‘the spirit of capitalism’ that was responsible for the economic shift towards factories and towns starting **industrialisation**, **urbanisation** and the **exploitation** of the working class. It was Weber’s life work that explained why capitalism quickly caught on in some countries but not in others.  In Weber’s ‘The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism’ he sought to explain how capitalism developed in Western societies rather than anywhere else. He argued that spirit of capitalism is characterised by:   * ‘Profit forever renewed’ meaning that all profits were reinvested into better machinery and bigger factories. * Rejection of any waste, time and money was extremely important to the Calvinists * Rejection of enjoyment * The need for consumption   Weber argued that Calvinist Protestantism religious group were responsible for the creation of capitalism. They are characterised by:   * God was beyond human comprehension and man was an instrument of god to do his work on Earth * Followers should be frugal and avoid any kind of enjoyment * A belief in **predestination** – meaning that a small number of followers were chosen at birth to be admitted into heaven. Financial success was a sign that a person had been accepted * A belief that work was a calling decided by god and time wasting was against religious rules.   There are clear links between the ideal view of capitalism and the ideal view of Protestantism. Weber concludes that the success of capitalism in Western and not in Eastern countries is due to the numbers of Calvinist present in western societies. Therefore religion can be responsible for disrupting **consensus** and **social harmony** and being the catalyst for large scale **social change**.  It is important to note that Weber was not arguing that Calvinist beliefs were the cause of modern capitalism but simply that they were one of the causes of it. The Protestant ethic of the Calvinists was not sufficient on it own to bring modern capitalism into being. One the contrary, a number of material and economic factors were necessary such as natural resources, trade, a money economy, towns and cities, a system of law and so on. |
| Theoretical evaluation | Theoretical evaluation |
| * Neo-Marxist theory has been criticised on a theoretical level. **Weber's social action** theory is critical of Neo-Marxism. Neo- Marxist's claim that religion can cause a small amount of change within the unequal capitalist society. However, Weber argues that religion is responsible for creating capitalism society. This suggests that the Neo-Marxist approach only offers a partial view on how religion functions within society. | * Action theory has gained theoretical support from Neo-Marxists. **Neo-Marxists** back the idea suggested by Weber that religion can be a force for social change. Although they disagree to what extent that religion can influence the make up of society’s structures. Neo Marxists believe that occasionally religion can oppose ruling class ideology. This suggests that the ideas have wider theoretical appeal. * Social action theory has been criticised on a theoretical level. **Functionalists** view religion from a structrualist perspective. They see religion as being based on consensus, binding society together by creating a collective consciousness. Therefore the norms and values that are passed over by religion create social solidarity and aid social cohesion rather than any kind of wide scale social change. This suggests that the social action theory only offers a partial view on how religion functions within society. |
| Empirical evaluation | Empirical evaluation |
| * Neo-Marxist ideas have empirical support. Manduro has found in poor South American countries liberation theology was developing. He defined Liberation theology as religion acting on behalf of the working class to raise issues with the ruling class. This could take the form of direct action against those unwilling to help the working people. According to Manduro this opposition has the potential to unite the poor and cause a revolution and so social change. This suggests that there is some validity in the Neo-Marxist ideas. | * Weber's social action theory has empirical support. Pahl (1996) argues that Webers ideas still have relevance today. The underlying principals of the protestant are still present in capitalist society. People still value the creation of wealth and still wish to possess status items such as bang and Olufsen phones and Paul Smith watches, a clear indication that people value trinkets over social justice. This suggests that there is some validity in the Weber's ideas. * Marxists such as Karl Kautsjy (1927) argue that Weber overestimates the role of ideas and underestimates economic factors in bringing capitalism into being. He argues that in fact capitalism preceded rather than followed Calvinism. * Furthermore Capitalism did not develop in every country where Calvinists were. For example Scotland had a large Calvinist population but was slow to develop capitalism. |
| * Fundamentalism seems to support both Neo-Marxist and Weberian theory. Fundamentalists seek to represent the poor and dispossessed, for example Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon are fundamentalist governments who oppose developed countries treatment of their people. Also Fundamentalist are capable of creating massive change within countries For example Afghanistan and Pakistan backing the ideas that religion can lead to social change * It is also difficult to use Britain as an example of Neo-Marxism or Weberian theory in action being a correct interpretation of religion’s role in society. **Secularisation** has been continuing to reduce the power of religion over British people. If only 24% of people in the UK regularly attend religious service how can it be argued that religion has **ideological** and **social control**? | |

**Extra reading**

Haralambos and Holborn – pages 416 – 421

Pilkington – pages 27 – 32

Giddens 539 – 540