Is Modernity and Progress Always Good? A Reflection on the ideas of Max Weber

Modernity is the ideal of a modern society based off of socio-cultural norms and practices that emerged in post medieval society. The idea of a modern society leads to images of success, progress, and power, but Max Weber, a renowned sociologist, challenged these thoughts by raising the question, is modernity and progress always good for a society? Weber, who's views on comparative politics and sociology from an individual basis rather than a structural basis, shared his poignant thoughts regarding this question in his works *The Protestant Ethic*, which has been called “one of the most renowned, and controversial, works of modern social science”\(^1\), as well as *Economy and Society*.

In these famous works, Weber shares his unpopular opinion that there are many dangers to modernity that are often overlooked. Weber argues that increased modernization led to increased rationalization, which in turn is harmful by rationalizing modernity we are masking the true issues that lie within it. One of these issues is the fact that success, which is a key aspect of the desire of modernity, ultimately makes us less human.\(^2\) As Weber put it, "Each man becomes a little cog in the machine and, aware of this, his one preoccupation is whether he can become a bigger cog".\(^3\) When we are focused only on being successful, we lose key elements of humanity such as compassion, and dedicate our time to getting ahead in business rather than to our relationships to our family and community. Relationships with others is arguably one of the key elements that enrich and define the human experience, and increased modernity and rationalization challenges the importance of this. Especially in our modern society today, culture is being crushed by materialism.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Introduction by Anthony Giddens

\(^2\) Ideal found from lecture notes

\(^3\) Max Weber Quote from lecture

\(^4\) Ideal from lecture notes