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Shmuel N. Eisenstad: Multiple Modernities – A Paradigma of Cultural and Social Evolution

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Contents

Introduction (*Gerhard Preyer*) 5

Part I:
Multiple Modernities and Structural Differentiation

1 Multiple Modernities: The Basic Framework and Problematic 20

2 The Dialogue between Cultures or between Cultural Interpretations of Modernity—Multiple Modernities on the Contemporary Scene 57

3 Social Division of Labor, Construction of Centers and Institutional Dynamics: A Reassessment of the Structural-Evolutionarys Perspective 73

4 Transformation and Transposition of the Thematic of Multiple Modernities in the Era of Globalization 90

Part II:
Religion, Ascriptive Solidarity and Collective Identity

5 The Protestant Ethic and Modernity— Comparative Analysis with and beyond Weber 126

6 The Transformations of the Religious Dimension in the Constitution of Contemporary Modernities..... 151

7 The Religious Origins of Modern Radical Movements 170

8 Cultural Programs, The Construction of Collective Identities and the Continual Reconstruction of Primordiality..... 203

Part III:
The Initial and the New Research Program

9 A Sociological Approach to Comparative Civilizations: The Development and Directions of a Research Program 1986..... 259

10 Collective Identities, Public Spheres and Political Order: Modernity in the Framework of A Comparative Analysis of Civilizations Report for 1955–2002 318
With the collaboration of Tal Kohavi, Julia Lerner, Ronna Brayer-Grab

S. N. Eisenstadt: List of the Major Publications 372

Publikationen auf Deutsch 375

Original Publications..... 380

Contributors 382

Impressum 383

On ProtoSociology..... 384

Published Volumes 385

Digital Volumes available 387

Bookpublications of the Project..... 388

Cooperations – Announcements 383

Introduction: The Paradigm of Multiple Modernities

Gerhard Preyer

1. The Axial Civilizations and the Ascriptive Complex as a Focus of Structural Evolution

During the last thirty years, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt has decisively developed and implemented a research program of comparative cultural studies at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Truman Research Institute of the Hebrew University (Jerusalem). While he developed his theory and during his research he focused on the evolutionary innovation and achievement of the Axial Age civilizations (K. Jaspers)[1], the so-called Hochkulturen. In cooperation with M. Abitbol and N. Chazan he carried out macro-sociological research which sets its focus on the origin of the evolutionary early political organizations (states), particularly taking Africa into account. During his research he came to the conclusion that the early states had different center and center-periphery-relations (E. Shiles) within the domain of different types or regimes, tribal societies, city states and patrimonial regimes.[2] For the history of Eisenstadt's paradigm it must be mentioned that his study on immigration to Israel was a milestone in the research on immigration.

The majority of sociologists agree that social evolution is an abbreviation of the processes of social change. The mechanisms of social change are the object of sociological theory and transdisciplinary research. Eisenstadt has accepted the classical basic implication of the theory of evolution that human populations have a strong tendency to expand. The impetus for structural evolution is expansion which is confirmed by different disciplines of evolutionary research such as sociology, economics, cultural anthropology, and population theory. He has investigated the properties of the development

1 In the early Israel and Greece, partially in Zoroastrianism in Iran, the early Imperial Period in China, later in Christianity with its broad varieties, in Hinduism and Buddhism, and in Islam. The so-called Axial Age civilizations are described by the basic tension between the transcendental and mundane orders.

2 S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political System of Empires*, New York 1963.

in different dimensions of such expansions in the process of evolutionary differentiation and change. Significant for the evolutionary change and its breakthrough are the orientation of belief systems (M. Weber: Weltbilder) and their institutionalization as well as religious, legal professional, bureaucratic or secular elite groups. Another problem that occurs in this context is the so-called legitimation as it plays a significant role for the social cohesion of the members of social systems within the process of their evolutionary expansion. Legitimation of social order is a functional imperative, in particular for the political system. The problem of legitimation is neither one of its validity nor of its value-standard nor is it the belief in legitimation as Weber argued. The problem that it faces is the functional imperative of the structural cohesion and the motivation of the opportunistic behavior among the members of social systems. This shift in sociological theory puts the legitimation problem into a new perspective as it is not an ideology, nor is it a problem that the members of social systems believe in the validity of value-standards of legitimation. It is a contribution by the political system to the cohesion of social structure.

2. The Mechanism of Structural Differentiations and their Anomalies

Contrary to the classical theory of evolution Eisenstadt's research comes to the conclusion that the different dimensions of the expansion of human populations do not necessarily play together. Therefore, social evolution is neither to be examined with the model of equilibrium between the components of structural differentiation, nor is it to be examined as an ideal equilibrium which is expected to be descriptive for the direction of evolutionary change. On the contrary, the structural evolutionary change is a change which is paradoxical, full of tensions, conflicts and revolutions which cannot be controled as a whole and in their continuation. The delay in the adaptation of the different dimensions of expansion is caused by the social division of labor and the basic elite functions.

They result of the challenges of the process of differentiation e.g. the continuation of trust among the members of social systems, the regulations of power and violence, the construction of meaning (on the problem of meaning, see Weber, P. Tillich, T. Parsons) and the legitimation of different

patterns of interaction. This is significant for traditional societies as the differentiation of particular action systems is not interpenetrated. It is important to stress the fact that differentiation of action systems is significant[3]for the traditional society. A possible solution of these challenges might be the elite-functions which have to be distinguished from the scope of the functional imperatives of the social division of labor. The sociological research on structural evolution has not taken these distinctions into consideration. When looking back in the history of sociological theory, one can recognize that, unfortunately, sociologists used the paradigm of social division of labor for a theoretical description of social structural evolution and social change. The result of this was that sociologists blocked themselves from understanding structural change.

3. Corrections and the Revised Versions of the Concepts: Modernity, Modernization, the Modern, and Modernism

Evolutionary comparison shows that the delaying of the expansion of the dimensions is initiated by distinguished different combinations of these dimensions. These combinations of dimensions are the impetus for different societies and civilizations to emerge. This is of great significance for the theory of modernization regarding the emergence of modern society systems, and also for the time of globalization. One has to distinguish between modernity, modernization, the modern, and modernism.[4] A brief description of the terms mentioned above is given in the following passages. Modernity is used for the characterization of the socio-structural innovation in the spheres of economics, politics and the legal systems as well as in the communities and scientific social systems. These innovations are the functional differentiation that occurred in Old Europe and throughout its history. This is the classical sociological attitude. Modernization is used when referring to a process which is determined by place and time and has

3 For example, the power system, the economic utilitarism (Weber: Außenmoral), traditional law (respect, brotherliness, religiousness of mass of people, Weber: Innenmoral), intellectual construction of meaning (Weber: religious virtuosos).

4 Mitgliedschaftstheoretische Untersuchungen, Wiesbaden 2006, 145-178. On the paradoxes of moral modernization, 140- 43.

to be understood as a unique evolutionary direction which leads to a modern cultural and societal innovation. This process is characterized by a long lasting structural tendency. Classical sociology has systematized this structural change as a differentiation of action systems, structural differentiation and the emergence of a global world system which itself emerged from evolutionary universals. The theory of modernization was systematized by American sociologists after World War II, who stand more or less in the tradition of Weber. The Modern describes the distinction of the contemporary and the old, e.g. modern art, literary, economics and so on. This expression is also used with an evaluative intent. It has been in use since the second half of the 18th century. In the mid 19th century the term modern times was re-interpreted as a new epoch and led to a new collective identity which was independent of the status of the members within a social system and within social stratification. It was the classical period of modernity between the French revolution and the end of World War I which set an end to the bürgerliche Gesellschaft and an end to the modern national state which had emerged from, and had been structured by the international political system since the mid 18th century in Europe. Since the mid 19th century, The Modern has been used synonymously with the West. This geographical metaphor served as a broad classification of Western Civilization in a rhetorical manner and in an intentional way. It plays also a significant role in highlighting differences and conflicts between cultural, political and economical systems and communities, e.g. the West versus the East, the South, South-East Asia, or Central Europe. Modernism is used to characterize the intellectual social movement and attitude of the so-called avant-garde, from the late 19th century until the 1930s. At the same time counter movements in culture and politics have played a significant role, too. When referring to Modernism, the modern epoch is a description of the autonomy and the abstraction of science, art, law, and social coherence.

4. The Initial Research Program of 1986

When looking back in time, we find evidence that there is a broader variability of, and more alternatives to, modernization than the classical theory, and also some of the contemporary theories of modernity and modernization, comprise. Modernization is not a set of fixed patterns of structural

changes. This emerged out of Eisenstadt's research on comparative macro-sociological studies. His analysis started with the political systems of empires. This analysis has led to a critique by Eisenstadt on the classical theory of modernization and results in an initial Research Program in this specific field of sociological research of comparative civilizations in 1986. The hard core of this program was that the construction of boundaries was essential for social systems and for their self-selection within their environments as well as for collectivities, organizations and the conditions of human life. These boundaries delineate the relations of the social systems with their environments. As we look at the beginnings of Eisenstadt's research and its elaboration throughout the research and the theorization by the Research Program of 1986, we can see that the re-systematization and the correction of the classical theory of modernity in the framework of Multiple Modernities is the immediate result of his work.

The paradigm of Multiple Modernities is rather an indirect response to the theorization and research on globalization since the end of the 1980s. Many sociologists, like M. Featherstone, S. Lash, J. Friedman, and R. Robertson, commonly agree that there were two assumptions in the research of globalization which represented the differentiation and spatialization of this matter in sociological theory at that same time. These so-called Heterogenizers, together with the work done in interculturalism by E. Said, H. K. Bahabba, S. Hall and the reflexive anthropologists (J. Clifford, G. Marcus) have argued that the distinction of universalism versus particularism is wrong as the West is de facto imperialist. This domination that is caused by its imperialist nature is a variation of particularism. Globalization is a diffusion that results from a mixing of American economy and the American life style with other particular cultures. This diffusion is structured hierarchically by the domination of Americanism which is the continuation of modernism. The researchers conclude that there is no convergence of structural changes. Globalization is an ideological product that stems from the domination of America's "Coca Cola culture". They have an ethno-methodological, constructive and a hermeneutical attitude towards the objects of sociological theory and studies as they assume that all of these objects are constructions which are not cut loose from the researchers' own social intercourse. The opposite is the case, the Homogenizers have more or less accepted the paradigm of a world system and a global modernity. They have made the assumption that there is a convergence tendency in the structural change behind the global scene (see A. Giddens, Wallerstein's world-system approach,

Parsonian functionalists, N. Luhmann's version of functionalism). They assume that there are evolutionary universals or that there is one universal. Modernity itself is a product of the modern world system that continuously emerges from the West and does so as one worldwide modernity. Implicitly there is a convergence in evolutionary change. Scientific realism (essentialism) and epistemology are accepted by these researchers because they assume that the entities of their research and their theories are as such given in the world. Therefore, these researchers are modernists. Their objects are given by science where heterogenizers go native, like ethno-methodologists in the tradition of H. Garfinkel, and write papers of cultural studies. The distinction between the two traditions goes back to R. Robertson and has a long past history in sociological theory and social science.

Multiple Modernities is an alternative paradigm. Partially it continues and re-interprets sociological knowledge. Since the 1950s, the paradigm of historicism has been substituted by The paradigm of Multiple Modernities. Historicism has evolved since the mid 19th century and is the self-description of the Western society as a normative orientation or a general prototype of societies. Theoretically, Multiple Modernities is not a type of sociology that enumerates historical events; it is a multi-dimensional theoretical description of structural evolution. Multiple Modernities does not assume that global modernity is derived from the West as a single pattern and does not describe a plurality of societal structures. Multiple Modernities has to be understood as a critique of the classical theory of modernization. We have evidence that modernization does not lead to a unification and convergence of social structures. Therefore, modernization is neither a way towards evolutionary universals, nor is it based on them. Multiple Modernities is a structural change that continuously modifies belief-systems and their implementation in a process of translation. There are many modernities, not only one single pattern of modernization. Paradigmatically the relationship between Axe Civilizations and modernity is re-systematized. Comparative research shows that modernity does not inevitably emerge from the European Axe Civilizations. Structural evolution shows the same features of modernity as the one of Multiple Modernties shows that emerges from the Axe Civilizations. There are multiple Axe Civilizations and Multiple Modernities. This is the reason why it is a new theory of modernity.

5. Max Weber's Sociology of Religion Revisited

This subject is of particular significance for the time of globalization. From his research Eisenstadt concludes that the expression „global modernity" is misleading. The global world system is structured by different dimensions e.g. cultural, economical, political, and technological ones. We come to recognize different structures and descriptions (symbol expressions) of modernization. It is wrong to define modernity as a European or a Western pattern. Modernization is not of a teleological or of a linear nature. This is significant for the paradigmatic change in the theory of social evolution. Modernization is not the de-traditionalization of the societal community as a whole, as the Weberian tradition would argue. This change leads to an end of Weberian sociology. Rationalization as intellectualization and its continuation as a societal rationalization (Weber: rationale Vergesellschaftung) is not, as some Weberians would argue, the initial process of rebuilding social structure. Eisenstadt's research shows that "multiple and divergent modernities" have had a historical focus since the 19th and 20th centuries. Nevertheless, Eisenstadt consulted Weber's Sociology of Religion. However, he does not re-read it as a contribution to an analysis of rationalization and an idealization of different types of rationalities, but as a study of the inner dynamic of large civilizations. The hard core of the re-interpretation of Weber's sociology is the relation of the Axial Civilizations with modernity. Modernity is intrinsically not the outflow of European Axiality. Modernity has neither a single nor a particular origin.

However, Weber's general insight of his comparative study on the sociology of religion is that there are different historical formations. Firstly, they are structured by the basic premises of cosmic and social order, and these cosmologies are existing in these societies and their orthodox and heterodox interpretations. This crystallized throughout their history. Secondly, there was a pattern of institutionalizations that developed in the course of their history caused by their experience and in their encounter with other civilizations. Thirdly, there are basic internal tensions, dynamics and contradictions caused by demographic, economic and political changes, and they are accompanied by the institutionalization of modern frameworks. Fourthly, the different programs of modernity are formed by the encounter and interaction of the mentioned processes. The result of these interactions determines in which way civilizations and societies position themselves in an international system, and in continuation their structural evolution takes

place in a global system. Fifthly, in European history structural evolution leads to the modern European state system. It crystallized in a world-system that began in the 17th and 18th centuries. Sixthly, shifts of hegemonies take place in the different international state systems, and they are caused by economic, political, technological, and cultural changes. Seventhly, in structural evolution confrontations of modernities caused by their expansions emerge in continuation. This is a result of their basic premises and their institutionalizations which emerged in Western and Northern Europe and other parts of Europe and later in the Americas and Asia (in the Islamic, Hinduist, Buddhist, Confucian and Japanese Civilizations).

This re-interpretation takes place not on the level of Weber's sociology, but on a new level. For the paradigmatic core it is not the question what is contributed by world religions and cultural religions in particular to the differentiation of modern marked systems, occupations and their social regulations and institutions, but a changed framework is the problem to deal with. Here, the frame of reference is the special nature of civilizations with their own concepts of rationality, and what function the heterodoxies and sect movements play in the dynamics of structural change. Therefore, the distinction between the European (Western) Primary Modernity and the token of the Later Modernities is significant for this framework. It is not to conclude that later modernizations will happen under the same conditions that caused the first.

The dynamics of divergent modernization was a process of social revolutions and the paradoxes of the modern cultural program that is shown in continuation by their institutionalization. The self-perception of society as modern, that is, with a distinct cultural and political program and relation to other societies, is a feature of modernization that is historical in different societies like, for example, in Europe, Japan, and China. Therefore, modernity is to re-interpret within the paradigm of structural social change, but not as a universalization a or generalizing of the social pattern of European modernization. Theoretically, the translation and re-interpretation of cultural and social articulations of members of social systems come into play when Multiple Modernities are systematized.

6. Globalization and Collective Identities in the Paradigm of Multiple Modernity

Eisenstadt goes partially along with the sociological researches on globalization that have been undertaken since the beginning of the 1990s, because indigenization, vernacularization, hybridization and the critique of metanarratives are in harmony with Multiple Modernities. Therefore, it follows from his researches that modernity is not universal in principle but a feature of structural changes of social systems. In this respect, he includes the postmodern/postcolonial critique of modernism in the framework of Multiple Modernities. The theoretical consequence for the rebuilding the theory of modernization is that modernity is not singular or plural, nor is it universal or particular. It emerges when within the process of the expansion of social systems. In this process the translation of cultural traditions is significant because there is a delimitation of the expansions of social systems within the process of their expansions. This is the place where Eisenstadt locates the research of social movements and their functions in the process of modernization. Fundamentalistic movements against modernity are involved in the structural change caused by the Western processes of modernization, as we have learned from Parson's sociology. Protestanic fundamentalism, fascism, communism and contemporary Islamic fundamentalism are particular responses against the process of modernization standing in the context of modernity; they are not pre-modern or traditional social movements themselves. In particular, communism and fascism are modernist projects. But in a comparative evolutionary perspective these movements are similar to religious movements, this program is the religious control of a total society, as, for example, historical Islam, because Mohammed, God's own prophet, became the religious and political leader of the Arab community and at the same time of the community as a whole that was formed exclusively by the law of God as written in the Koran. This is exactly the specific difference to the construction of Medieval Christianity that must be characterized in terms of evolution by a structural differentiation between the church and the state. Neither of them is a politically organized society.

The research on social movements in the paradigm of Multiple Modernities has further sociological significance in the research of structural change that is redescribed as modernization. Structural social changes restructure collective identities. In some cases, this process leads to more abstract identities like, for example, universalistic orientations of human rights and civic

patterns of behavior of the higher education elites in the West. However, primordial solidarities and identities do not disappear. Collective identities like ethnic, national, religious, civilizational and ascripitive solidarities of different, regional identification are elementary social relationships of the cohesion of the members of social systems, all defined by membership conditions. This is not a contingent fact, nor is it epiphenomenal as is often argued, but it evolved in continuation from the delimitation of the expansions of social systems. This explains us also the significant role that religious movements play not only in the processes of modernizations in the past, but also in contemporary scene. The social construction of collective identities and borderlines indicates the condition of membership in social systems and is a symbolic and organizational construction of the borderlines of the collectivities within social systems of different sorts. Within this frame of reference of sociological theory, we have an account to explain charismatic activities that we ascribe to elite members as single persons or groups. The combination of identity and membership is coded as membership condition, and the range of the membership code fixes the participation in the relevant collectivity. The fixed social properties define the pattern of behavior, like, for example, a bad guy, good Confucian, civilized member, and the like. These evaluations of social properties also as natural ones, like gender, generation, kinship, territory, have a social function because they fix the borderline between in- and outsider on different levels of social status and, at the same time, the exclusion of the members of social systems. In this context, one must mention the research of D. N. Schneider and R. T. Smith on the function of the coding of similarities of members as conditions of participation in different collectivities, that is, fixing the relationship to other collectivities and their members, something that tends to be forgotten in the sociological community of investigators.

Eisenstadt and B. Giesen have distinguished the primordial from the civic, like implicit and explicit rules, traditions, social routines, and the sacral/transcendent code.[5] The construction of collective identities and the selection of membership conditions is not without continual tensions, conflicts and contradictions. In the West, the conflict between citizenship and member in a primordial community, state and nation is a classical one. Sociologists analyze this as self-awareness of the social, caused by the self-

5 E. Eisenstadt, B. Giesen, "The Construction of Collective Identity", in: European Journal of Sociology, 36 1 1995: 72-102. Axial religious ontology conception and orientations: Weber: this world and other world (Welt and Überwelt).

selection of social systems and their recognition of their borderlines from inside and outside by their members. Collective identities and the mechanisms of their stabilization are labeled by the distinction between member and stranger. Collective identities are not residual, as some theorists of modernization in the 1950s, for example, G. Myrdal and also contemporary sociologists have argued. They do not disappear in the processes of modernization. It is significant in this context that the new social movement in the West among women, the ecological movement but also the fundamentalist the communal religious, and similar movements shift to a local orientation and a new particularism. In particular the anti-globalization movement in the United States of America of the last decade can be characterized in this way.

The classical sociologist Durkheim and in particular Weber have analyzed modernity and modernization to be the cultural and institutional factors and constellations which come together historically in Europe. They assumed more or less that this cultural program would be adopted globally in the process of Westernization. Extension of education, modern means (technology) of communication, individualist orientation, and economic rationality take effect in most societies. Modernism as a world culture has spread since the beginning of the 20th century. Modernity has influenced most institutional domains of societies. But in the process of modernization since the mid 19th century, after World War II and in the contemporary scene of most societies, the anti-modern political movement has reacted against the structural change of modernization with different interpretations of modernity, like, for example, the reformist, the socialist, and the nationalist movement, and also contemporary fundamentalism. In particular in Germany under the regime of the German Reich after 1871, anti-Westernization and anti-Semitism were not only a symptom of Rückständigkeit but also a cultural program of the political and intellectual elites. Prototypical was Wagner's and Wagnerian anti-Semitism not only in Germany and Austria, but also the Dreyfus affair in France, for example, that divided French society. A book that was typical of the construction of German culture, personal identity and mentality – the German Innerlichkeit –, self-identification and an anti-Semitic intent was August Julius Langebehn's Rembrandt als Erzieher (1890) which sold well in the Weimar Republic and then also under the Nazi regime. This tradition goes back to German Romanticism and is continued in the anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in Germany after World War II among social movements of the political left and right. Yet, this is

not an attitude of some Germans only but a general European problem. In contemporary researches, Dan Diner has shown that again.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, Modernization theorists have argued that a convergence of so-called industrial societies emerges and that modernization is not only a diachronic, but also a structurally synchronic process. It was a new, optimistic view of modernity and of the chance to be successful in modernization. Parsons assumed that evolutionary universals for reinterpretation modernization are not only caused by the global expansion of modernity in different cultural spheres of the emerged so-called world society, but are also developed under particular internal societal conditions. R. Bellah, for example, analyzed the Togugawa regime and society as a functional equivalent to the role of Ascetic Protestantism in the modernization of Old Europe. For the classical theory of modernization in the 1950s and the 1960s, the Japanese society and the changes of their social structure in the Meiji Restauration were the counterexample of its confirmation, as Eisenstadt has also analyzed.

7. The New Research Program of 2002

The re-systematization of modernity as Multiple Modernities leads to a second New Research Program 2002. This program succeeds the previous one on a higher and respecified level of the paradigm. It focuses partially on the weakening of the function of the national state, on cultural dominance and, at the same time, on the new types of social movements, Diasporas (Muslim, Chinese, Russian minorities in the new Baltic and Asian republics) and minorities, as we observe in this context. These are feminist, ecological, fundamentalist, and peace movements which build a new social identity for their members. Communal religious movements with their anti-modern and anti-Western attitudes and violent strategies against economic, cultural and political globalization emerge in the global scene at the same time. The New Program is directed towards the new and different changes caused by the dynamics of the global world system, not as a single entity but as a network of social systems that has already led to new tensions between their socially interrelated units. In particular, it is to assume that within the social universe other and new cultural and symbolic programs will be set up: not only postmodernism but new syncretism and symbiotic arrangements of

cultural symbolism in public places, for example in architecture. Networking and segmental differentiation have a new relevance for the restructuring of the borderlines of social systems.

We find these new social movements in the non-western sphere but simultaneously in Europe and the United States of America. The turn of analyzing collective identities is not the traditional one - that is, to describe such identities with natural properties -, but to describe them as a modern social unit and an imaginary entity. Such movements give evidence that we live in a time of continuous changes. Collective identities change because of hybridization and the mixture of social units and cultures by glocalization. This is one of the properties of cultural globalization. This is not at all a new distinction between the pattern variable *universalism* versus *particularism*, but a cultural and social syncretism all over the world. In particular, in the political system political regulations (orders) and citizenship do not harmonize in the societal community. However, it is not argued that primordial collectivities play no significant role in the social universe. Another focus of the Research Program 2004 are the changes in the public sphere because the societal self-observation of the members of social systems within this medium is restructured. The tendency of these structural changes is that the observations within the public sphere are no longer organized by a civil society as in the classical period of modernization. The new media take effect in the public sphere and change its system of communication and symbolization. The world of simulations rules out reality (J. Baudrillard). The new research program takes in changes of social structure in all subsystems which are caused by globalization. Such changes are not a unification of social intercourse and do not result in a global village, quite contrary to hybridizations, fragmentation, and the change of collective identities by new social movements. All this will happen in a global world system and is not at all caused only by different social structures.

The paradigm of Multiple Modernities has given up the paradigm of modernization as Westernization and at the same time the opposition of universalism and particularism. From my point of view, the switch in sociological theory is reasoned by the structural changes coming from globalization. This has also consequences for the redescription and re-interpretation of the Western processes of modernization. In sociological theory, we were continually dominated by the self-description of modernization that originated in the intellectual history of the West of the 18th and 19th centuries, for example state centered society, civil society, the ideologies of the social

movement, by the paradigm of the division of labor and of community and society as well, whatever it may have been. This is the legitimation of postmodernism as antimodernism because the sociological theory and common mind as well were dominated by the self-descriptions of modernity coming from the 19th century. Western modernization is no longer a project, we re-interpret or rationalize within Multiple Modernities. On the contrary: postmodernity without the self-descriptions of modernity since the 19th century is in harmony with Multiple Modernity, because there is no unified pattern of modernization. Both describe and re-interpret theoretically the changed social structures beginning in the early 1960s of the last century. But one aspect has to be mentioned. If plural modernity cannot be analyzed by the evolutionary basic assumption of the classical theory of modernization, the expression "modernity", "modernization" and "modern" change their meanings in sociological theory. It can be assumed that this change also takes effect continuously in the common mind of all members of social systems. We are greatly pleased to edit parts of S. N. Eisenstadt's studies and theorizing, and we thank him and the collaborators of The Harry S. Truman Institute and the Van Leer Institute (Jerusalem) for their commitment and their helpful co-operation in carrying out this project.[6]

6 I use the expression „society" in the Introduction like Eisenstadt does, that is, in a way comparable with T. Parsons' use, as a term that refers to a relative autonomous regional domain of social intercourse and to homogeneity in the cultural program. This does not exclude that in such domains heterodox social movement, groups, and cultures exist. Parsons, for example, characterizes society as a type of social system by self-sufficiency relative to its environments within the analytical action frame of reference. But in sociological theory, for example, N. Luhmann introduces a concept of society which is not delimited by regions or cultural programs but theoretical placed as a unification concept for the theory of societal system in general. Therefore for him, world society emerges by functional differentiation of the societal system with high complexity. Within this domain, the social intercourse is not fixed by regional domains with less or no overlapping of the social universe like in premodern traditional societies. But I think the use of the expression is not misleading if we do not restrict the extension of the term to particular social units only, to elementary systems of interaction as model of the social and society, or juridical construction like the concept of societas. We simply use the expression to refer to the decision of membership that takes place in general in the society about what form of social system or social structure or condition of membership of it we have under study.

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The Bigger Picture
Anita Avramides

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Richard N. Manning

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Stephen Schiffer

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Helen Steward

The Metaphor of Correspondence
Marga Reimer

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Jennifer Hornsby

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Teil 1: Soziologie der Mitgliedschaft

Kapitel I: Mitgliedschaft als Letztelement sozialer Systeme
1. Mitgliedschaftssoziologie statt Handlungstheorie
2. Mitgliedschaftssoziologie als Theorie sozialer Systeme
3. Die Autokatalyse von Mitgliedschaft durch Kommunikation
4. Zur Theorie der selbstrefentiellen Systeme

Kapitel II: Die Problemstufenordnung
1. Das Gesellschaftssystem und seine Differenzierung
2. Das Organisationssystem
3. Das Interaktionssystem

Kapitel III: Funktionale Differenzierung
1. Funktionale Differenzierung als strukturelle Überschneidung
2. Die Interpenetrationszonen
3. Die Struktur funktionaler Differenzierung
4. Die Medientransformation
5. Die gesellschaftsinterne Schließung

Kapitel IV: Von der Moderne zur Postmoderne
1. Die veränderte Problemstellung: Korrekturen und Begriffsklärungen
2. Die normative Kultur der Moderne und ihre Paradoxien
3. Revisionen der Moderne

Teil 2: Soziologie der Globalisierung

Kapitel V: Was heißt Globalisierung?
1. Zur veränderten Problemstellung soziologischer Forschung
2. Dimensionen von Globalisierung
3. Probleme einer Theorie der Globalisierung
4. Mitgliedschaft in der glokalisierten Gesellschaft

Kapitel VI: Strukturprobleme der sozialen Integration
1. Die klassische soziologische Integrationstheorie
2. Die evolutionären Inklusionen
3. Das struturelle Integrationsproblem
4. Desillusionierung
5. Veränderte Problemstellungen

Soziologie der Mitgliedschaft und die Neufassung der Theorie sozialer Integration: Folgerungen

1. Mitgliedschaftstheoretische Beschreibung sozialer Systeme
2. Funktionale Differenzierung
3. Neufassung der Theorie sozialer Integration

Literatur
Register

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Lebenswelt – System – Gesellschaft

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Vorbemerkung
Zur Argumentationstrategie

I Die Entwicklungslogik von Weltbildern
1. Die Rationalisierung von Weltbildern
2. Strategien der Analyse der Weltbildentwicklung
3. Folgeprobleme und Kritik

II Gesellschaft als Lebenswelt und System
1. Die Strukturen der Lebenswelt
2. Allgemeine Bezugsprobleme der soziologischen Evolutionstheorie
3. Die Verständigungsformen
4. Kommunikationsmedien und generalisierte Kommunikationsweisen
5. Folgeprobleme und Kritik
6. Zum Problem der sozialen Ordnung und T. Parsons Erklärung von Sinnverlust, Anomie und Pathologien

III Die formal-pragmatische Bedeutungstheorie
1. Die sprechakttheoretische Grundlegung
2. Interpersonal geltende Bedeutungskonventionen
3. Regelbewußtsein und Handlungskompetenz
4. Die Expansion des semantischen Gehalts
5. Verständigung und die Herstellung interpersonaler Beziehungen

IV Der Erwerb des moralischen Bewusstseins

1. Die sozial-kognitive Grundausstattung
2. Diskurs und moralisches Bewußtsein
3. Folgeprobleme

V Konstruktionsprobleme und Kritik

1. Die Rekonstruktionshypothesen
2. Zu den Konstruktionsproblemen

VI Zur Rechts-, Demokratie-, Diskurs- und Religionstheorie

1. Entscheidung – Rechtsgeltung – Argumentation
2. Wahrheit in Diskurs und Lebenswelt Handelns
3. Zur Diskursethik
4. Philosophie und Religion in der säkularen Gesellschaft
5. Das Verschwinden des Menschen

Literatur
Personenregister

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Gerhard Preyer, Georg Peter (eds.)

In epistemology and in philosophy of language there is fierce debate about the role of context in knowledge, understanding, and meaning. Many contemporary epistemologists take seriously the thesis that epistemic vocabulary is context-sensitive. This thesis is of course a semantic claim, so it has brought epistemologists into contact with work on context in semantics by philosophers of language. This volume brings together the debates, in a set of twelve specially written essays representing the latest work by leading figures in the two fields. All future work on contextualism will start here.

Contents

Gerhard Preyer, Georg Peter
Introduction: The Limitation of Contextualism

I Contextualism in Epistemology

Contextualism and the New Linguistic Turn in Epistemology
Peter Ludlow

The Emperor's ‚New Knows'
Kent Bach

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Timothy Williamson

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Jonathan Schaffer

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Andy Egan, John Hawthorne, Brian Weatherson

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François Recanati

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Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore

Semantics in Context
Jason Stanley

Meaning before Truth
Paul M. Pietroski

Compositionality and Context
Peter Pagin

Presuppositions, Truth Values, and Expressing Propositions
Michael Glanzberg

Index

Oxford University Press: Oxford 2005, 410 pages

Context-Sensitivity and Semantic Minimalism

Essays on Semantics and Pragmatics

Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter (eds.)

Preface
Introduction: Semantics and Pragmatics: The Central Issues
Herman Cappelen

Part I
The Defence of Moderate Contextualism

Content, Context and Composition
Peter Pagin, Francis Jeffry Pelletier

A Little Sensitivity goes a Long Way.
Kenneth A. Taylor

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Kepa Korta and John Perry

How and Why to Be a Moderate Contextualist
Ishani Maitra

Moderatly Insensitive Semantics
Sarah-Jane Leslie

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Eros Corazza and Jerome Dokic

Prudent Semantics Meets Wanton Speech Act Pluralism
Elisabeth Camp

Part II
On Critiques of Semantic Minimalism

Meanings, Propositions, Context, and Semantical Underdeterminacy
Jay Atlas

Semantic Minimalism and Nonindexical Contextualism
John MacFarlane

Minimal (Disagreement about) Semantics
Lenny Clapp

Minimal Propositions, Cognitive Safety Mechanisms, and Psychological Reality
Reinaldo Elugardo

Minimalism and Modularity
Philip Robbins

Minimalism, Psychological Reality, Meaning and Use
Henry Jackman

Back to Semantic Minimalism

Minimalism versus Contextualism in Semantics
Emma Borg

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