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Chapter 2: The Great Debate

Test Bank

Multiple Choice

1. According to Lenski, early radical social reformers included _____.
A. the Hebrew prophets
B. the Egyptian pharaohs
C. the Roman Senate
D. the Hindu priests
Ans: A

2. Although Confucius believed in justice, his idea of a social order was _____.
A. radical
B. hierarchical
C. antithetical
D. militaristic
Ans: B

3. According to Lenski, why should Plato be understood as a radical?
A. He thought that all people in society served important functions.
B. He believed that inequality was a natural result of humanity.
C. He contended the poor and the rich were at war with each other.
D. He argued that few people received benefits from their parents.
Ans: C

4. What happened to Christian thought after the church became institutionalized in the Roman empire?
A. It became more conservative.
B. It became more antithetical.
C. It emphasized priesthood of all believers.
D. It emphasized centralized religious authority.
Ans: A

5. The new social contract of the 18th century drew on _____ rather than _____ reform.
A. religious; radical
B. radical; religious
C. economic; political
D. political; economic
Ans: D

6. Marx contends that under capitalism, a society's class structure becomes _____.

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A. more egalitarian with more opportunity
B. more complex with many levels
C. more polarized into two classes
D. more based on prestige than property
Ans: C

7. Karl Marx's theories emphasized _____.
A. class and conflict
B. supply and demand
C. goods and services
D. prestige and status
Ans: A

8. Marx maintained that history has been shaped by _____.
A. economic relations
B. hegemonic ideologies
C. organic solidarity
D. proletariat revolutions
Ans: A

9. Marx believed that socialist revolutions would occur when industrial workers became _____.
A. alienated from their work
B. fully class conscious
C. fully exploited
D. employed for subsistence wages
Ans: B

10. According to Marx, industrial capitalism created the new _____.
A. peasantry
B. patricians
C. plebeians
D. proletariat
Ans: D

11. _____ refers to the argument that the debate between the thesis and its antithesis shapes the development of ideas and of history.
A. Marxist theory
B. Conflict theory
C. Dialectic
D. Class conflict
Ans: C

12. Ralf Dahrendorf contended that class conflict should be analyzed in terms of _____.
A. wealth and wages

B. alienation and homogenization
C. power and prestige
D. status and solidarity
Ans: C

13. According to Max Weber, people can signal their _____ by buying fancy clothes and luxury items.
A. class
B. privilege
C. party
D. status
Ans: D

14. Max Weber argued that social class is determined by an individual's _____.
A. ownership of property
B. life chances
C. level of social closure
D. class consciousness
Ans: B

15. According to Max Weber, privileged groups can maintain their power via _____.
A. revolutionary change
B. democratic reforms
C. social closure
D. life chances
Ans: C

16. Emile Durkheim uses _____ to explain how societies function.
A. the dialectic
B. class consciousness
C. improved life chances
D. the division of labor
Ans: D

17. Conflict theory is rooted in the work of _____.
A. Karl Marx and Max Weber
B. Emile Durkheim
C. Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton
D. Michel Foucault
Ans: A

18. Conflict theorists argue that stratification _____, while functionalists argue that stratification _____.
A. serves the interests of powerful groups; benefits all of society
B. benefits all of society; serves the interests of powerful groups
C. has become more extreme; has declined over time

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D. has declined over time; has become more extreme
Ans: A

19. Davis and Moore argue that social stratification is functional for society because it provides for _____.
A. greater solidarity
B. less alienation
C. greater motivation
D. less prestige
Ans: C

20. Gerhard Lenski's social institutional theory of inequality argues that inequality stems from _____.
A. differences in natural ability
B. one's position in a network
C. class conflict
D. technological advances
Ans: B

True/False

1. Ancient philosophers agreed that inequality was beneficial for society.
Ans: F

2. Prophets from Islam and Christianity spoke out against the ruling class.
Ans: T

3. Shari'a law has been used only to support the conservative thesis.
Ans: F

4. Confucius (Kong Fuzi) taught that people should obey and respect rightful authority.
Ans: T

5. Medieval European kings believed that their right to rule came from the consent of the people.
Ans: F

6. Adam Smith argued for greater control of the economy by kings.
Ans: F

7. Karl Marx contended that human history was the history of class struggle.
Ans: T

8. Karl Marx believed that capitalism could be fully reformed over time.
Ans: F

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9. Functionalists argued that inequality is necessary to keep society operating.
Ans: T

10. Max Weber argued that social class is shaped by one's power in the economic market.
Ans: T

Short Answer

1. List four historical proponents of the "conservative thesis" that inequality is right and proper, and briefly summarize what the "conservative thesis" argues.
Ans: Select from: Code of Hammurabi, Hindu caste system, Confucius, Aristotle, Apostle Paul, medieval theology, John of Salisbury, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Adam Smith, social Darwinism, functionalism. Responses should also state that the conservative thesis argues inequality is a natural product of society and that it helps society function.

2. List four historical proponents of the "radical antithesis" that inequality is wrong and destructive, and briefly summarize what the "radical antithesis" argues.
Ans: Select from Hebrew prophets, Lao Tzu, the Buddha, Plato, Jesus, James brother of Jesus, desert fathers, St. Francis of Assisi, Waldensians, Anabaptists, Levelers, Gerrard Winstanley, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx, Max Weber, conflict theory. Responses should also explain that the radical antithesis argues that inequality is the natural order of society, and that any inequality that persists must be addressed.

3. Describe how Karl Marx sees capitalism fitting into the history of society. Be sure to consider previous and imagined futures in society.
Ans: Answers should explain that Marx sees history as shaped by changing relations to material production and to the economy (i.e., the social relations of production). Society is always shaped by class conflict between the group in power (who controls the means of productions) and the group without power (who do the labor). Historically, this was the nobility versus the peasantry. Then, the capitalists emerged, and they benefited from industrialization and from owning the factories producing new goods. Now, the proletariat constitutes the exploited class, and they must develop a class consciousness to overthrow capitalism. The final stage of this process, according to Marx, is pure socialism.

4. Describe the two forms of solidarity and how they connect to economic development.
Ans: Mechanical solidarity exists in simple societies where everyone participates in similar tasks; because people are working together toward the same goal, they develop a sense of cohesion and belonging. In modern society, organic solidarity emerges because people complete separate, specialized tasks that together help society to function. Mechanical solidarity gives way to organic solidarity as society industrializes and capitalism develops.

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5. According to Marx, what makes capitalism a unique chapter in the advancement of society? Describe the contradiction that results from these characteristics.
Ans: Marx argued that capitalism led to greater accumulation of wealth; began funneling people into either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat; created more unskilled jobs that anyone could do; resulted in subsistence wages; and alienated laborers for their work. The growing class divide and the exploitation of workers' labor leads to a major contradiction: They are making more money, but they also have less.

Essay

1. What arguments have been offered in support of the social benefits of inequality, and what counterarguments have been offered to challenge these supposed benefits? How have these arguments formed the basis of conflict and functionalist views of social inequality?
Ans: Arguments in support of inequality have ranged from theological arguments that an unequal social order reflects the design of heaven or the will of God to sociological arguments that inequality provides social order, motivation to work hard and achieve, and a way to ensure that the most talented are recognized and rewarded. Arguments against inequality have included religious and philosophical arguments that all are created equal, have equal rights and dignity, and that inequality is oppressive and exploits the poor. Sociological arguments against inequality build on these to argue that inequality suppresses talent, alienates poor workers, rewards greed, and deprives the poor of the means and the motivation to use their abilities productively.

2. In what ways are Marx and Weber in agreement on the causes and nature of social inequality? In what ways do their views of stratification and class formation differ?
Ans: Both are conflict theorists who see powerful groups trying to maintain and extend their privilege. For Marx, the key factor is ownership of the means of production; wealth is power, and the wealthy use their economic power to dominate the government and social ideology. For Weber, power is multifaceted and also includes struggles to dominate political access and to monopolize high-status positions.

3. Is social inequality desirable for society? Defend your view with arguments from historical and sociological viewpoints discussed in the chapter.
Ans: Students arguing "yes" should be able to draw on the "conservative thesis" arguments from early philosophers up to structural–functional theorists and neoconservative economists. Students arguing "no" should begin with "radical" philosophers and religious thinkers and continue to a range of conflict theorists, perhaps including Marxist and feminist thought.

4. Analyze the relationship between religious prophets and ancient rulers. How did these prophets challenge the conservative thesis? How do some religious leaders come to support the conservative thesis?
Ans: When religious prophets emerge from outside established religious traditions or outside of society, they often challenge the existing social order and the rulers. For example, Hebrew prophets criticized rulers for their role in creating or ignoring poverty.

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However, when a prophet's religious group became more institutionalized and accepted in society, then the voices of the religious leaders became more conservative. When a religious group enjoys the protection of the rulers, then religious leaders may amend their message to encourage followers to support the existing structures.

5. Ecological-evolutionary theory, rational choice theory, and postmodernism all respond to and/or build on the conflict/functionalist debate. Pick two, and analyze their relationship to the debate.
Ans: Ecological-evolutionary theory, developed by Gerhard Lenski, aims to synthesize major points from both functionalism and conflict theory. He agrees with functionalists that some level of inequality is necessary and inevitable as societies need more specialized jobs, but he also agreed with conflict theorists that a society can become "too unequal." Although there may be some natural differences in abilities that lead to inequality, most inequality results from how society is structured. Rational choice theory is a new extension and modification of functionalism. This perspective argues that people are rational actors making choices that are best for them; any inequality that results is just the natural result of human decision-making processes. However, rational choice theorists break slightly from functionalism when they acknowledge that access to power shapes what choices are available. Postmodernism tries to address questions about modernism as the conflict/functionalist debate died down. Postmodernism focuses on understanding discourse and how discourse connects to power and to the ability to create social change. Ultimately postmodern theorists come down more on conflict theory, as they recognize that those in power shape the discourse and contribute to the marginalization of less powerful groups.

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