The Dark Side of Modernity. By Jeffrey C. Alexander. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2013. 187pp. Pb.: £15.99; ISBN 9780745648224.

Jeffrey C. Alexander's *The Dark Side of Modernity* offers an insight to the lack of engagement with the evils of modernity in social theory. Putting the image of Janus's face as the haunting theme, Alexander succeeds in presenting how modernity brings about the good and the evil simultaneously both in structural and cultural frameworks.

In this book, Alexander presents an eclectic selection on sociological theories from Weber, Simmel, Eisenstadt, Parsons, as well as approaches to the meaning of evil, the civil sphere and psychotherapy. These essays indeed demonstrate his contribution to the field of social theory as they reveal both good and *dark* sides of modern thought and scholarly work on modernity while recognising the liberating function of modernity. To summarise his book, Alexander succeeds in demonstrating ill-doings of rationalisation by examining Weber's connection of this-worldly asceticism with autonomy. He further presents Simmel's failure to problematise the stranger by examining otherness. He also demonstrates Eisenstadt's superficial recognition of barbarity by welcoming ethical transcendence in the Axial Age. He finally unfolds Parsons's silence to modern fragmentation by analysing the American community, the failure to acknowledge time and space boundaries on the civil sphere and the drawbacks of institutionalised psychotherapy in its quest for subjectivity.

One of the strongest arguments proposed by Alexander is his argument that binary representations of secularity fills the gap left behind the elimination of religion from the discourse of the civil sphere (110-113). Moreover, Alexander's portrayal of modernity as *Janus-faced* does not result in the dismissal of modernity by social theory. For instance, he explains the interplay between *the good* and *the evil* by giving Foucault's work as an example. Indeed, he demonstrates how 'the definition of social evil and the systematic effort to combat it' came into existence with 'the modern pursuit of reason and progress' (102). However, he criticises the 'binarism' that is presented by the postmodern critique. He sees post-modernism as 'ahistorical', having a superficial understanding of cultural process and argues that the institutional frameworks presented by post-modernism are inadequate. He suggests that post-modernism rejects modernity as a whole instead of ameliorating mistakes in modern systems. For instance, he states: '[post-modernism] throws the modernist baby out with the bathwater' (149). Therefore, he identifies social areas, such as hierarchy, nationalism, the culture industry and othering, which are embedded in modernity and need to be corrected. Alexander offers particular means to overcome those evils by using modernity itself.

The weaker aspect of *The Dark Side of Modernity* is that while rejecting anti-historicist claims of modern writers in his quest for absolute terms and truths, Alexander overlooks his own ahistorical stance in selecting examples

to support his position. This is perhaps very much embedded in the realm of social theory as this theory compares and contrasts events across time and space without focusing on the particularities of each instance. Moreover, Alexander's arguments on Marxism are limited to classical readings of Marx or Engels and do not incorporate insights from neo-Marxist thinkers such as Gramsci or post-Marxist such as Laclau and Mouffe.

Furthermore, in identifying the evils of modernity, Alexander could have put more emphasis on the examination of the dynamics of power and power relations both in society and sociology as a field. Power embedded within societal, cultural and political institutions, including academia, has covered the transcendental character and evils of social processes while presenting that day's phenomenon as the ultimate truth. Critiques of modernity, including Alexander's book, have not demonstrated, for instance, how the hegemony of capitalism commodified and presented psychotherapy as a market value under the disguise of 'therapy culture'. Alexander examines the institutionalisation of a therapy culture with modernity (140-146), and identifies commodification and the culture industry as the ill-doings of capitalism (151-152). However, it may have been better if he attempted to explain the inherited power relations which resulted in both institutionalisation of therapy culture and capitalism.

It should be noted that the emergence of the concept of capitalism is embedded in modernity. However, it can be argued that the very ideas of capitalism, such as surplus value, are transcendental and date back to the clan societies and the transfer of power from a matriarchal to a patriarchal culture (Fluehr-Lobban, 1979). Similarly, while rejecting perfectionism presented with modern rational thinking (11-12), Alexander fails to differentiate perfect Venus de Milo of 130-100 BC with supposedly *imperfect* Cybele of 6000 BC.

To sum up, I agree with Alexander that the evils of modernity can be ameliorated with the liberation and knowledge that are embedded in modernity. We should keep modernist progress but change the context within which the practices are carried out to eliminate the dark side. Modernity has become one of the contemporary *imaginary* that social theorists blame for the ill-doings of the modern system we live in, rather than offering an understanding of the binary oppositional nature of the social and political system within which modernity is embedded. Overall, Alexander greatly contributes to social theory by demonstrating the two sides of the coin of modernity in his explanation to diverse approaches and various thinkers in the field.

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Reference

Fluehr-Lobban, C (1979) A Marxist reappraisal of the Matriarchate. *Current Anthropology* 20(2): 341-348.