

FMS 2010-11 Essay 1

12626003

This essay reads more like a set of observations about Marxism: the material has not been organised in such a way as to answer the specific essay question about the origins of capitalism out of feudalism. Though page 1 begins more promisingly, the essay soon degenerates. Also, the essay uses too many internet sources, and could profit by setting out a structure of what is to be argued and following it. Also, it is a good idea to double-space, and please use paragraphs.

Structure

Introduction good					x	No or weak introduction
Develops logically					x	Rambles
Conclusion sums up & answers					x	Drifts off
Legible/fluent					x	Unclear

Substance

Analytical				x		Descriptive
Accurate				x		Questionable
Transparent				x		Opaque
Independent				x		Uncritical
Relevant					x	Answers different question

45

only reading OK, and citing

12720302

would be good to set out competing ideas
not enough cites
talk of ~marx's influences comes out of nowhere

The essay's first part presents a more or less cogent answer to the question, albeit with minimal footnoting so we don't clearly understand which ideas are yours and which those of the writers you are reading. This technically borders on plagiarism. Please see the study aids section on the School web page and read the essay guidelines on this.

(<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polSOC/students/essays/essay-guideline>) Structurally, please use page numbers.

The second half reviews a number of developments in Marxist thought based on his writings, or abridged versions on the web. The transition to this section is abrupt, and does not clearly relate to the question, even though it shows a reasonably good degree of comprehension and initiative.

Overall, some excellent writing and comprehension, but footnoting practice and structure need to be improved - and the focus should fall more squarely on the essay question at all times. Please try to double space.

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Substance

Analytical		x				Descriptive
Accurate		x				Questionable
Transparent		x				Opaque
Independent		x				Uncritical
Relevant		x				Answers different question

conceptual- exc, struc - poor, footnoting style - poor

59

12416118

2 - not clear from the sentence why you include `eurasia and africa in north-south axis theory

4 - Diamond's thesis does not mention China losing out to Eurasia

A very comprehensive essay that does a nice job of summarising Diamond's key arguments and evaluating a set of important criticisms. The conceptual grasp is strong throughout, and the analysis shows a keen appreciation of some key criticisms of Diamond's work. In terms of improvement, the essay could have begun with a paragraph that sets out the structure to be followed. It might have mentioned that agricultural civilisations elbow hunter-gathers aside not only because of superior population, but because they put humans in touch with each other and animals in dense settlements which breed disease and thus resistance while hunter gatherers lack these immunities and are thus susceptible to being wiped out in the evolutionary struggle between civilisational types. A clear category error is evident on p4 where it is argued that Diamond's thesis mentions China losing out to Eurasia. In fact China is in Eurasia and Diamond does not differentiate between the Eastern and Western parts of this region. The rise of the West is completely orthogonal to this debate and takes place well after the period about which Diamond writes. The criticisms are nicely done, and show originality and breadth of reading. More space might be allocated to the argument about population density and the relative spread of human settlement - which is very interesting. Overall, a very strong essay with some areas for improvement.

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Relevant	x					Answers different question

68 some loss on concepts and struc; but exc reading and style and grasp

Essay 2. 12517744

A good range of reading, especially insofar as the role of technology on war. The essay could benefit from a statement of purpose and layout at the outset; from more frequent paragraphs, and from more of a sense of clash of ideas. In other words, set up a debate between different theories about the rise of the West.

This also brings up the fact that this essay does not really address alternative explanations to the technological: the separation of religion and state; the relatively fragmented nature of European political space that arguably followed from that separation of church and state; the nature of feudalism - which began to break down in the West of Europe; and finally the rise of finance-capitalism with the renaissance which created a new model of statehood different from the extractive states of the East. It also occasionally is too descriptive and not critical enough in its approach to the techno-determinism thesis. But this essay shows a range of reading, good footnoting practice and quite a high level of comprehension of readings.

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Relevant		x				Answers different question

60

Essay 3. 99007457

This is not an essay, but a series of loosely related observations based on a secondhand understanding of the lecture notes. There is no introduction, no competing arguments, no synthesis of different readings. Structurally, please use page numbers. Most important, you don't reference work, so we don't know which words are yours and which are those of Jared Diamond or others. In citing authors, try and specify the page number as well as the year of publication. This technically borders on plagiarism. Please see the study aids section on the School web page and read the essay guidelines on this. (<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/students/essays/essay-guideline>)

You have understood some of the major questions at stake and some of what Diamond has to say, but I am not certain you have read and understood it. For example, you really tell us little about Diamond's argument, which is not about Europe, but Eurasia (from Europe through Middle East to China). It has nothing to do with the rise of the West, and you follow a wrong path by tracing this as a 'rise of the West' argument. It is also not about population pressure or the environment, which is a competing explanation. You must supply far more detail on his argument (biogeographic advantage of Eurasia in terms of plants and animals, leading to domestication of animals and immunity to disease, leading to germ advantages against hunter gatherers). Also a mention about the rise of stratification and civilisation due to grain storage, animal wealth and accumulation.

So clearly a long way to go.

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15

12718992

An extremely interesting essay. It could have benefited from a sounder introduction which sets out the structure, and a neater division between an explanation of Marx's theory and the critique. Perhaps some of the dimensions of the transition to capitalism receive short shrift. But I have to say that the criticisms in the second section are very innovative, extremely original and insightful - and show an extremely sophisticated level of comprehension. Well done.

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70

12725901

This essay is a joy to read, and steeped in the work of several key authors. It mounts a critique of the directionality thesis after examining several variants of it. The writing is engaging and refined, and the use of citations and quotes is well-executed. One might have asked for more on the Durkheim-Parsons-Fukuyama differentiation concept. Also a more clearly delineated introduction paragraph, and more consideration of the 'accidents' theory of history critique that you find yourself agreeing with. Is it that great individuals matter, that causation operates as a complex system like climate, or that unintended consequences and chains of causation cause change ('the butterfly flapping its wings' thesis)? You might have set out a separate section to consider the arguments you support before weighing in on this side of the argument. In any case, a very interesting, high-level essay.

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68

12503767

While this essay shows correct footnoting and citation practice, is generally well-written and shows a range of reading, it does not meet the standard for a pass. First, the biographical material is extraneous to the story and incorrect: Weber did not grow up in America and was not influenced by his experiences as a businessman since he never was one. Your grasp of his theory of the Protestant Ethic is extremely superficial, gaining traction only when you paraphrase the insights of other writers. The ideas of the Calling and their link to a career, of Calvinist predestination and the connection between signs of election and wealth accumulation; this-worldly asceticism and the link to savings and capital accumulation - none of it figures in this essay. Unfortunately, much more is needed to show that you have understood Weber. Moreover, we do not have a proper structure for the essay, with a coherent argument and counterargument running throughout and a connection to the essay question maintained along the way.

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