

Sociology - Year 12 to 13 Summer Independent Learning 2022

Part One – Compulsory Work

Introduction

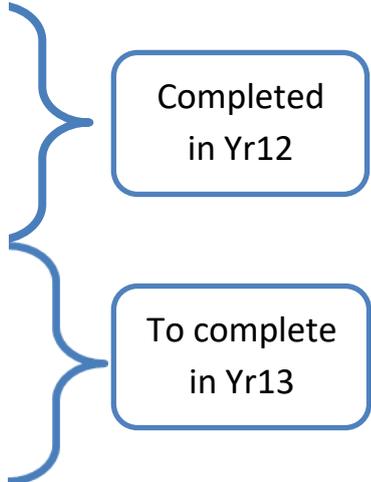
One of the topics you study in A Level Sociology is “Theory and Methods”. This topic appears on both Papers 1 and 3 of your AQA Sociology exams in June 2022. In April/May, you learned about the “Methods” that sociologists use to do their research. In Sept/Oct we will be learning the “Theory” part. This builds on the knowledge you have already gained from learning about the theories in Family/Education, and also the Methods topic.

The specification detail – Theory and Methods:

4.1.3 Theory and Methods

Students must examine the following areas:

- quantitative and qualitative methods of research; research design
- sources of data, including questionnaires, interviews, participant and non-participant observation, experiments, documents and official statistics
- the distinction between primary and secondary data, and between quantitative and qualitative data
- the relationship between positivism, interpretivism and sociological methods; the nature of ‘social facts’
- the theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research
- consensus, conflict, structural and social action theories
- the concepts of modernity and post-modernity in relation to sociological theory
- the nature of science and the extent to which Sociology can be regarded as scientific
- the relationship between theory and methods
- debates about subjectivity, objectivity and value freedom
- the relationship between Sociology and social policy.



Completed
in Yr12

To complete
in Yr13

On the following pages are the first few core handouts for the “Theory and Methods” topic. You will need copies of these in your folders in September.

Complete the work and tasks in this booklet on additional paper.

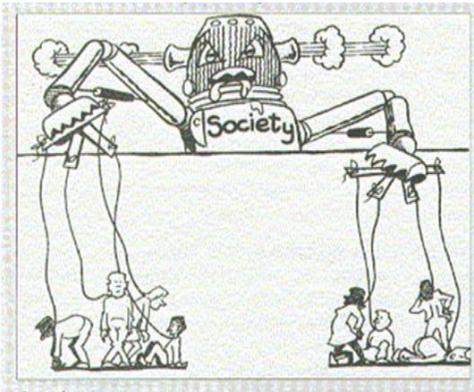
Introduction to Sociological Theories

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the difference between structural and social action theories.
- Understand the difference between consensus theories and conflict theories.
- Understand the difference between modern and postmodern theories.
- Understand the relationship between theory and methods.

A sociological theory is a set of ideas that seeks to explain human society. Each theory tends to be selective – it cannot explain everything in society. Therefore, they tend to explain only a particular or partial view of society.

One of the most important distinctions between different sociological theories is between **structural** perspectives and **social action** perspectives. There is also a distinction between **modern** and **post-modern** perspectives.



Structural Perspectives

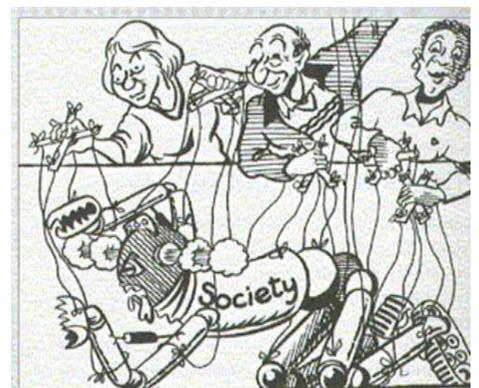
Also known as **macro** perspectives, structural perspectives look at the way society as a whole fits together and works. For example, **functionalist** theory tries to explain how different elements of the social structure fit together to create order and stability (also known as a consensus theory). They are interested in how shared values (value consensus) create a harmonious and stable society.

On the other hand, **Marxist** theory looks at how there is a lack of fit between the different parts, particularly social classes, and so emphasises the potential for social conflict (also known as a conflict theory). They are interested in the way the economic system of capitalism controls the masses and how it creates inequality.

Feminism is also regarded as a conflict theory, but it focuses on conflict between men and women.

Social Action Perspectives

Also known as **micro or interpretivist** perspectives, these aim to examine how society is a product of human activity. They stress the meaningfulness of human behaviour, denying that it is primarily determined by the structure of society. Therefore, society is made up of individual human beings “acting”. Examples of social action perspectives are **interactionist** theory and **ethnomethodology**. They focus more on the interaction between individuals and groups.



Combining Structural and Social Action Perspectives

Some sociologists have attempted to combine the two approaches to understand society. For example, **Paul Willis** in his study of young lads and their attitude to school and work (Learning to Labour) used both a Marxist (structural) and interactionist (social action) approach. Anthony **Giddens** has gone even further than this and developed a new theory of society known as **structuration** which attempts to combine the two approaches.

Modern and Postmodern theories

Modern theories are those that came out of the “modern period” in Western societies. They include theories such as Marxism, Functionalism and Interactionism. Between the 18th and 20th centuries, Western societies developed and became “modern”. Sociology as a subject was created in this period, partly as a response to the rapid social change that was occurring in society.

Postmodernism is a theory that has developed over the last few decades. This theory believes that we have reached the end of the “modern” period in our history and are now in “postmodern” times. Postmodern society is characterised by diversity and choice, and the social norms and rules are far more fluid than in the modern period. Postmodern theories are therefore critical of the modern theories – functionalism, Marxism, feminism – as they believe they no longer apply to the social world we live in now.

Bear in mind that not all recent sociologists are postmodernists. Some sociologists argue that we are not in a period of postmodernity, but instead are in the **late modern period**, which is still possible to study and understand using sociological theories.

TASK 1:

1. Explain in your own words the difference between structural and social action theories.
2. Explain in your own words the difference between consensus and conflict theories.
3. Explain in your own words the difference between modern theories and postmodern theory.
4. Draw a chart to show how the different theories are categorised.
Include: structural approaches, social action approaches, functionalism, Marxism, new right, feminism, interactionism, ethnomethodology.

The relationship between theory and methods

Sociology is made up of sociological theories – theories discussed on previous pages that focus on trying to explain societies and human behaviour within those societies.

However within sociology, there are also methodological theories. You will have looked at these before. They are:

- Positivism
- Interpretivism

These theories try to explain how sociologists should do their research. There is a relationship between methodological theories and sociological theories of society. How sociologists see the world affects what methods they choose to study that world.

As a general rule, structural theorists prefer positivist research methods and interpretivists favour interpretivist methods.

For example:

An interactionist who is interested in social interaction between people is more likely to use a method that allows them to understand the meaning of human interaction. They can achieve this through using a method such as observation (qualitative). So sociologists who follow the interactionist theory are more likely to use interpretivist methods.

A functionalist who is interested in how whole societies work and function would be more likely to use a positivist method which reflects the whole of society, for example social surveys or official statistics (quantitative).

TASK 2: Write down what you know about Durkheim’s research into suicide. How did he do his research and what did he find out?

There are exceptions to this. **Feminism** is generally regarded as a structural theory, examining large-scale structures such as patriarchy, yet feminists prefer interpretivist methods. Feminists argue that interpretivist methods are more likely to uncover the truth about women’s lives, for example the **Dobash and Dobash** study of domestic violence used **unstructured interviews**. They are also critical of positivist methods as they associate them with “malestream” sociology, which tries to take a more scientific approach.

Postmodernists are also critical of the use of positivist methods, as they believe they are used to study a period that no longer exists – modernity. Postmodernists argue that these methods can no longer be applied to a postmodern society.

TASK 3: Go back to your theory chart produced for TASK1, no.4. Add in this information about research methods and how it connects to the sociological theories.

TASK 4: Test yourself – fill in the gaps on the statements below.

1. Structural theories include _____ and _____
2. Conflict theories argue that society is based on conflict between _____.
Marxism argues this is between the _____ class and the subject class. Feminists argue that it is between _____ and _____.
3. Consensus theories argue that societies contain agreement on _____. They include _____ and _____.
4. Some sociologists, such as _____ have tried to combine structural and social action approaches.
5. _____ argue that we are no longer in the modern period and that the old theories don't apply.
6. Social action theories are likely to use _____ methods.
7. Structural theories are likely to use _____ methods.
8. Feminists argue that positivist methods are _____ methods.

Positivist	Malestream	Values	Ruling	Interpretivist
Functionalism	Men	Giddens	Women	Postmodernists
Marxism	New Right theory	Social groups		

Functionalism: A structural and consensus approach

Learning Objectives

- Understand the functionalist perspective.
- Understand the views of different functionalists – Durkheim, Parsons, Merton.
- Evaluate the functionalist perspective.

Introduction

Functionalism is a structural theory that focused on the needs of the social system as a whole and how these needs shape all the main features of society – from the form that social institutions such as the family take, right down to the behaviour patterns of individuals and the roles they perform.

Functionalism is also a consensus theory. It sees society as based on the basic consensus or agreement among its members about values, goals and rules.

Functionalism is a modernist theory of society and shares the goals of the Enlightenment project. Functionalists believe that we can obtain true knowledge of the functioning of society and that this knowledge can be used to improve society.

This theory has its origins in the work of one of the earliest sociologists, Emile Durkheim. Durkheim believed that society contains a “**collective conscience**” – a shared set of norms and values – which creates a feeling of “**social solidarity**” amongst individuals. This results in societies which are ordered and stable.

This idea was developed by later sociologists in the 1940s and 50s to create the theory of “functionalism”. Functionalists believe that society is a social system based on **consensus** (agreement).

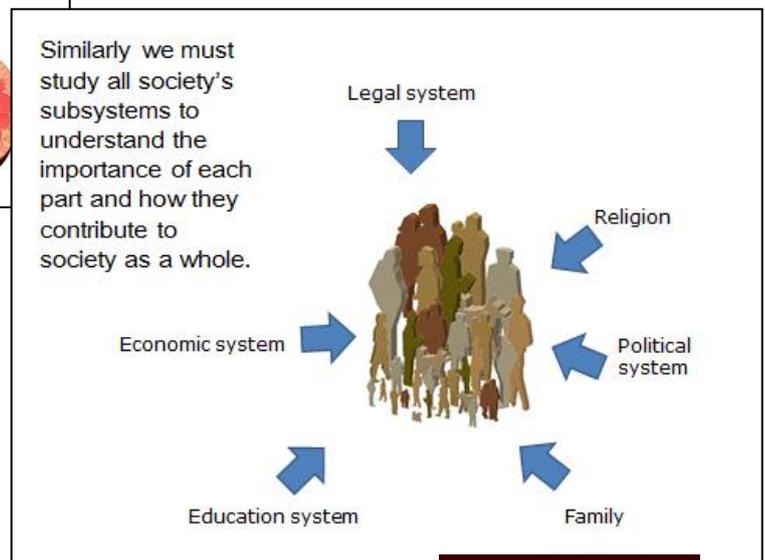
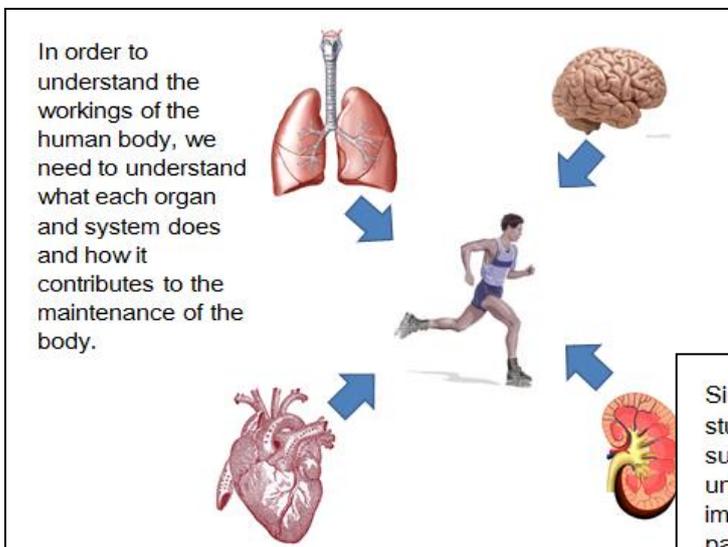
The theory begins from the assumption that society has certain basic needs which must be met if it is to survive. Firstly, there is a need for **social order** – a smooth running, well ordered society in which people know what is expected of them. This social order requires a certain degree of cooperation and **social solidarity** (social unity). This is made possible through **shared norms and values** which are passed down to members of society through **socialisation** and reinforced through **social control**.

The Organic Analogy

Functionalists believe society is like a living organism. Every part has its function but each part is interrelated with other parts.

Parsons identifies three similarities between society and a biological organism:

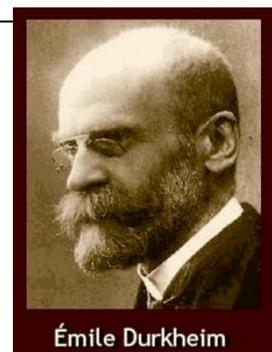
1. **System:** organisms like the human body, and society, are both self-regulating systems of inter-related and interdependent parts that fit together in fixed ways. In the body, these parts are organs, cells and so on. In society, the parts are institutions (education, family), individual roles (teacher, father) and so on.
2. **System needs:** Organisms have needs such as nutrition, for example. If these are not met, the organism will die, Functionalists see society as having certain basic needs that must be met if it is to survive. For example, its members must be socialised if society is to continue.
3. **Functions:** The function of any part of a system is the contribution it makes to meeting the system's needs and thus ensuring its survival. For example, the circulatory system of the body carries nutrients and oxygen to the tissues. Similarly, the economy helps maintain the social system by meeting the need for food and shelter.



Emile Durkheim 1858-1917

Emile Durkheim was the most important forerunner of functionalism. He was concerned by the rapid social change that was occurring during the transition to modern industrial society. He saw this change from a simple social structure to one with a complex, specialised division of labour.

Durkheim said that traditional society was based on “mechanical solidarity” with little division of labour and where all its members were fairly alike. A strong



collective conscience (shared set of values) bound people tightly together. However, in modern society, the division of labour promotes differences between groups and weakens social solidarity. It brings greater freedom for the individual, but this must be regulated to prevent too much individualism destroying all social bonds. Similarly, rapid change undermines old norms without creating clear new ones, throwing people into a state of anomie (normlessness) that threatens social cohesion. These ideas are echoed in the functionalists' concern with social order and value consensus.

Another contribution of Durkheim's is the idea that society exists as a separate entity over and above its members – a system of external “social facts” shaping their behaviour to serve society's needs. Durkheim argued that members of society are constrained by “social facts” – “ways of acting, thinking and feeling which are external to the individual”. It is not the consciousness of the individual that directs behaviour, but common beliefs that are outside the individual and shape his or her consciousness.

Social order and human nature

Durkheim argued that society has certain prerequisites (things that are needed), the most important one being the need for **social order**. Durkheim argues this is because of the “homo duplex” model of human nature.

There are two sides to human nature:

- Human beings are selfish.
- Human beings have the ability to believe in moral values.

Society makes use of this second side of human nature in order for social life and society to be possible. This prevents people acting solely in the interests of themselves and instead, are able to follow society's norms and values to create social order.

The collective conscience and social stability

Durkheim argues that it is the **collective conscience** that allows social life to be achieved. I.e. a collective idea about morals and values. It is this which makes individuals act in terms of the requirements of society.

Threats to social solidarity

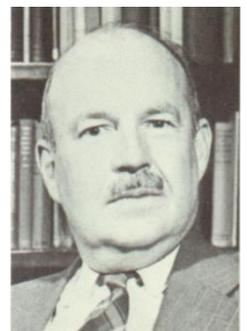
Durkheim did recognise that there was a possibility of conflict in society. However, he said it could be kept within manageable limits through the teaching of moral values in the education system, and through society functioning in a way which treated all its members fairly.

Talcott Parsons 1902-79

The central question that sociology tries to answer is “how is social order possible?” and “how are individuals able to cooperate harmoniously?”

Parsons argues it is agreement on central values which keeps society together. The “**value consensus**” (shared value system) is passed on through generations through socialisation.

The basic function of the value consensus is to make social order possible – it does this by integrating individuals into the social system, thereby directing them towards meeting the system's needs. For example, the system has to ensure that people's material needs are met (food, shelter etc) so the value consensus may include a general value about the need for people to work. To achieve this goal, there also needs to be a set of specific rules of conduct or norms – for example about punctuality, how to obtain jobs etc.



For Parsons, the system has two mechanisms for ensuring that individuals conform to shared norms and meet the system's needs:

1. **Socialisation:** this is done through the different agencies of socialisation such as the family, education, media and religion.
2. **Social control:** positive sanctions reward conformity while negative ones punish deviance. For example, if the value system stresses individual achievement through educational success, those who conform may be rewarded through qualifications and high paid jobs. Those who don't may have fewer qualifications and lower pay.

Because individuals are integrated through socialisation and social control into a shared value system their behaviour is orientated towards pursuing society's shared goals and meeting its needs. The behaviour of each individual will be relatively predictable and stable, allowing cooperation between them. This integration into the shared normative order makes orderly social life possible.

Parsons goes on to argue that societies are made up of 4 subsystems (functional prerequisites) which are needed for it to survive:

Functional prerequisites	Concerned with	Institution
1. Adaptation	Economic production to meet its members' material needs.	Economic system
2. Goal Attainment	Legitimate use of power through leadership – to set goals and allocate resources to achieve them.	Government
3. Integration	Formal and informal social control	Police, family, media, religion, peer groups
4. Pattern maintenance / Latency	Socialisation and reinforcement of core values	Family, media, religion

All aspects of society and institutions meet at least one of these functional prerequisites. They are functional and keep society going.

Social change

Parsons argues that societies do change over time, but this change is a gradual, evolutionary process. Parsons argued that traditional societies changed gradually into modern societies and as this happens, institutions adapt and develop to meet society's needs. For example, in traditional societies, family and kinship groups perform a range of functions such as education, economic production and socialisation. As these evolved into modern societies, separate, functionally specialised institutions develop to meet different needs, for example the education system, the economic system and so on.

Robert Merton 1968

Criticisms of Parsons comes from both outside and inside functionalism. Within functionalism, the most significant criticisms come from Robert Merton.

Merton argues that we cannot simply assume, as Parsons does, that society is always and necessarily a smooth-running well-integrated system. He argues:

- We cannot assume that everything in society – the family, religion etc – is essential in its existing form. There are possible alternatives, for example single parent families may provide the function of socialisation as well as nuclear families.
- Complex modern societies have many parts that are only distantly related to one another – they may not always be as inter-dependent as Parsons assumes. For example, the values held by religion may not necessarily be connected to those held by the economic system of production.
- Parsons assumes everything in society performs a positive function for society as a whole. But some things may be functional for some groups and dysfunctional for others. Conflicts of interest may arise and some groups may have the power to keep arrangements in place that benefit them at the expense of others. Critics who write from a conflict perspective have developed this idea further.



Therefore, Merton addresses problems in society – conflicts, by allowing for the fact that not everything is functional. This is sometimes known as “strain theory”.

Merton also identified the difference between manifest functions and latent functions.

Manifest functions: the intended function of an institution or action. Merton gives the example of the Hopi Indians who, in times of drought, perform a rain dance with the deliberate aim of magically producing rain.

Latent functions: the ritual may also have an unintended consequence or function – such as promoting a sense of solidarity in times of hardship, when individuals might be tempted to look after themselves at the expense of others.

TASK 4: Answer these questions on the functionalist perspective:

1. Explain in your own words what is meant by the “organic analogy” in functionalism.
2. Explain what is meant by the “collective conscience” and why it is important for society.
3. Explain what is meant by the homo-duplex model of human nature. Which part is more important for society and why?
4. According to Parsons, what does society need to remain stable and ordered?
5. In what ways is Merton a critique of functionalism (despite being a functionalist himself?)
6. What does Merton mean by manifest and latent functions? Give a different example to the one in the text.

For the last two questions, you will need to think more broadly about how other theories might disagree with functionalism...

7. Write a paragraph explaining how a Marxist would criticise a functionalist.
8. Write a paragraph explaining how an interactionist might criticise a functionalist.

Evaluation of Functionalism

Strengths

- This approach shows how a part of society can work at two different levels, both fulfilling the needs of each individual and meeting the needs of the whole society at the same time.
- Functionalists show how each of the parts of society are functional, each contributing to the stability of the whole society.
- It provides a useful focus on the importance of social structure and social institutions like the family or education.

Weaknesses

- Functionalism overemphasises the harmonious nature of society.
- It therefore tends to ignore the conflict stressed by Marxists.
- Similarly, functionalism fails to recognise the importance of power and the dominance of those who have power.
- It takes a politically conservative view, appearing to support the status quo.
- Interactionist sociologists have accused functionalism of being too deterministic seeing people as programmed and socialised by the social system, with little choice of action.
- Postmodernists argue that functionalism tries to create a model of the workings of society as a whole, which is no longer possible because society today is more diverse and increasingly fragmented.

TASK 5: Using the strengths/weaknesses above and the work you did on functionalist theories of the Family (and Education, consider the ways that functionalism is useful and helpful in explaining the role/function of family/education in society, and how it is not so useful (how it can be criticised).

Present your work in a table, illustrated below:

	USEFUL	NOT SO USEFUL
Family		
Education		

The New Right Theory

Learning Objectives

- Understand the New Right theory of society.
- Understand the similarities between New Right Theory and Functionalism.
- Evaluate the New Right theory.

The New Right theory developed in the 1980's around the time when Thatcher (UK Prime Minister) and Reagan (US President) were in power in Britain and America. It is often regarded as a political theory, as well as a sociological one and had an impact, particularly on UK and US governments, during that time.

In terms of the economic system, the theory believes strongly in free markets and free enterprise, so it is supportive of the capitalist system. It also believed that there was a great dependency on welfare benefits by certain sections of the population and that this was stifling people's initiative and competitive instincts. The New Right believes people should be encouraged to look after themselves as far as possible and the only way this was going to happen was for the state to become less involved in the workings of industry and welfare.

This theory is particularly associated with the concept of the underclass but in a critical way. It believed that there was a new group in society which was dependent on welfare through their own laziness. I.e. It is the fault of the underclass that they are in that position.

Charles Murray - key New Right Theorist

Charles Murray argued that single parenthood and illegitimacy was bad for society and that the nuclear family was the ideal family type in order to maintain stability in society.

He compared the illegitimacy rates of the "New Rabble" (the underclass) with the "New Victorians" (upper middle class).

Murray admired the New Victorians because he believed they had family responsibility, fidelity, loyalty and discipline. He believed that single parenthood was linked with crime, drug abuse, unemployment and educational underachievement.

Characteristics of the underclass:

- Low skilled working class, poorly educated.
- Single parent families are the norm.
- Dependent on welfare and moonlighting (informal economy).
- High levels of crime, child abuse and drug abuse.
- Great resistance to changing their behaviour.
- Exploit welfare benefit system.
- Unwilling to get a job.
- Children have truancy and discipline problems.

The New Right theory is particularly linked with the concept of the family and much of the political debate during this time was about the breakdown of “traditional” family structures.

New Right theorists believed that the nuclear family was the most desirable family type and that other forms caused social disorder and disruption.

The New Right was concerned about:

- divorce
- more single parent families and children born to unmarried parents
- more cohabitation
- increasing sexual promiscuity.

They believe that these factors contribute to:

- higher crime rates
- juvenile delinquency
- educational failure
- the development of a “dependency culture”.

Similarities with functionalism:

- It focuses on the idea of “shared values” in that it argues we should return to the more traditional values of family responsibility, discipline and hard work.
- It argues that if one aspect of society fails (i.e. The family) then this will affect the rest of society (i.e. Higher crime rates, undisciplined children).
- It stresses the importance of the family in socialising children, as functionalism also does. New Right theory points out the problems that happen in society when children are inadequately socialised, particularly in single parent families.

Criticisms of the New Right theory

- The New Right theory blames the poorest sections of society for their own poverty – seeing the underclass as lazy and uninterested in supporting themselves and their families.
- There is a danger that all benefits claimants will be labelled in this way, when many people need state help through no fault of their own.
- Some feminists argue that the New Right theory favours more traditional roles for women, and that single mothers are being blamed for wider problems in society.

TASK 6: Write a paragraph on each of the following:

- What the New Right theory says about the family.
- What the New Right theory says about the education system.

Marxism: a Conflict Theory

Learning Objectives

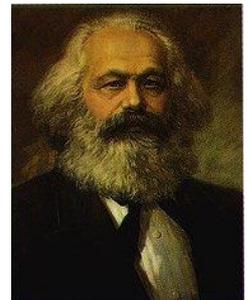
- Understand and be able to criticise the Marxist explanation of society.
- Understand the Neo-Marxist theory, including the views of Gramsci and Althusser. Know some criticisms of Neo-Marxism.

Like functionalists, Marxists also believe that society is a structure or system that shapes individuals' behaviour and ideas. Marxism differs from functionalism in two ways:

- **Conflict of interests:** Marxists reject the functionalist view that the social structure is a harmonious one based on value consensus. Instead, they see it as based on conflict of interests – between social classes of unequal power and wealth.
- **Instability and change:** Marxists also reject the functionalist view of society as stable, and stress the possibility of sudden revolutionary change. Stability is merely the result of the dominant class being able to impose their will on society.

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Karl Marx was a German-born philosopher, economist and sociologist. He attempted to explain the social world in which he lived which, at that time, was seeing the development of industrialisation and capitalism.



Marx's theory

1. Historical materialism

Materialism is the view that humans are beings with material needs such as food, clothing and shelter and must therefore work to meet them. In doing so, they use the **forces of production** (or means of production). In the early stages of human history, these forces were just unaided human labour, but over time, people develop tools and machines to assist them. In working to meet their needs, people cooperated with one another – they enter into the **social relations of production** – ways of organising production. As this develops, so does a division of labour. This creates a division between two classes:

- A class that owns the means of production – the ruling class (bourgeoisie)
- A class of labourers – the subject class (proletariat).

2. The history of class societies

Most societies through history have been divided:

- Primitive communism – early human history, where there were no classes, no private ownership and no exploitation.
- Ancient society – based on exploitation of slaves legally tied to their owners.
- Feudal society – based on the exploitation of serfs legally tied to the land.
- Capitalist society – based on the exploitation of free wage labourers.

In capitalist society, the subject class do not own the means of production and therefore can only survive by selling their labour to the capitalist in exchange for wages. According to Marx, this is a system of

exploitation and oppression. This is because the workers do not receive the value of the goods that their labour produces, only the cost of their subsistence (keeping them alive). The difference between the two is **surplus value** – the profit the capitalists make by selling the commodities that the proletariat have produced. Competition forces capitalists to pay the lowest wages possible. This produced class polarisation – society divides into a minority capitalist class and a majority working class.

3. Alienation

Marx believed that our true nature as human beings is based on our capacity to create things to meet our needs. Alienation is the result of our loss of control over our labour and its production and therefore our separation from our true nature.

Alienation exists in all class societies, because the owners control the production process for their own needs. However, under capitalism alienation reaches its peak for two reasons:

- Workers are completely separated from and have no control over the forces of production.
- The division of labour is at this most intense and detailed. The worker is reduced to an unskilled labourer mindlessly repeating a meaningless task. The worker is “alienated” from the goods they produce.

4. False consciousness and Class consciousness

Marx believed the subject class were in a state of “false consciousness” in that they were unaware of the exploitation of capitalism.

The reason for this false consciousness is that the economic base of society influences the superstructure of society (the system of values and beliefs). Therefore, capitalism influences what the subject class thinks through society’s institutions. The ruling class have power in all areas of social life and this allows their ideology to be passed down to the rest of society through the superstructure. In other words, what occurs in the economic system directly affects what occurs in the education system, the political system and the legal system (the institutions of society).

Eventually, Marx believed that the polarisation of the classes would lead to the “class consciousness” of the subject class and result in them beginning the revolution. Class consciousness means that the subject class will develop an understanding of the exploitative and unfair nature of capitalism. Marx wished for a “communist utopia” in which everything was shared equally amongst the people.

TASK 7: Evaluation of Marxism

1. Outline how a functionalist might criticise Marxism.
2. Outline how a postmodernist might criticise Marxism.
3. Outline three ways in which Marxism may no longer apply to contemporary society.
4. Briefly outline any other ways we could criticise Marxism.

Neo-Marxism: Humanistic Marxism: Gramsci



Gramsci was the lead of the Italian Communist Party during the 1920s. He developed the concept of **hegemony** to explain how the ruling class maintains its position. He argues the proletariat (subject class) must develop its own “counter-hegemony” to win leadership of society from the bourgeoisie.

He rejects economic determinism as the main explanation of social change. He believes that the change from capitalism to communism will never come about simply due to economic forces (e.g. unemployment and falling wages).

Economic determinism – the idea that the way society is organised is based on the economic system (capitalism).

Instead, Gramsci believes that ideas play a central role in determining whether or not change will actually occur. This is seen through his concept of **hegemony**.

Gramsci sees the ruling class maintaining its dominance over society in two ways:

- **Coercion** – through force (army, police, prisons, courts) – forces the subject class to accept the rule of the ruling class.
- **Consent (hegemony)** – the ruling class uses ideas and values to persuade the subject class that its rule is legitimate and acceptable.

In advanced capitalist societies, the ruling class rely heavily on consent to maintain their rule. They use the institutions such as the media and education to make the rest of society accept their rule. They do this through the spreading of values and ideas that make the subject class accept capitalism (i.e. they consent to it)

Gramsci believed the hegemony of the ruling class is never complete because:

The ruling class are the minority – therefore, they must create a power bloc by aligning themselves with other groups, such as the middle classes. They do this by making compromises to take account of the interests of their allies.

The subject class have a dual consciousness – their ideas are influenced not only by ruling class ideology, but also by the material conditions of their life – poverty and exploitation they experience. This means they can see through the dominant ideology to some degree. There is always the chance of the ruling class being undermined by the subject class as they begin to question the status quo.

Gramsci believed this will only lead to revolution if the proletariat are able to construct a **counter-hegemonic bloc** – in other words, they must be able to offer moral and ideological leadership in society and an alternative to ruling class hegemony.

He believed the subject class can only win this battle by producing their own organised body that are able to formulate an alternative vision of how society could be run.

Evaluation

- The subject class may accept capitalism because they feel they have no choice, not because they accept the leadership of the ruling class.
- Gramsci may underestimate the role of economic factors in developing a revolutionary working class.

Neo-Marxism: Structuralist Marxism: Althusser

While Humanistic Marxism sees humans as creative beings, able to make history through their conscious actions, for Structural Marxists, it is not people's actions but social structures that really shape history. The task of the sociologist is to reveal how these structures work.



Louis Althusser was a leading intellectual of the French Communist Party. He rejects both economic determinism and humanism.

Althusser is critical of Marx's base-superstructure model (the belief that everything in society is shaped by the economic system). Instead, he sees capitalist society as having three levels:

1. The Economic level – all activities that involve producing something to satisfy a need.
2. The Political level – all forms of organisation.
3. The Ideological level – the ways that people see themselves and their world.

In the base-superstructure model, there is only **one way causality** – the economic level affects everything in the other levels. In Althusser's model, the political and ideological levels have relative autonomy or partial independence from the economic level. They are not mere reflections of the economic level, and they can even effect what happens to the economy. Instead of one-way causality, we have **two way causality**, in Althusser's theory.

In Althusser's model, the state performs political and ideological functions that ensures the reproduction and continuation of capitalism. He divides the state into two apparatuses:

1. **The repressive state apparatus:** army, police, prisons – they coerce the working class into complying with the will of the ruling class. This is how Marxists have traditionally seen the state.
2. **The ideological state apparatus:** the media, the education system, the family. These manipulate the working class into accepting capitalism as legitimate and right.

This is similar to Gramsci's idea of coercion and consent.

Althusser's criticism of humanism: Humanistic Marxists believe that people can use their free will to change society. They believed that a revolution will come about as a result of the working class actively choosing to develop class consciousness and actively choosing to overthrow capitalism.

Althusser is critical of this point of view. He argues that we are not free agents. In reality, we are merely the products of social structures that determine everything about us, preparing us to fit into the structure of capitalism.

He argues that change will not come about because of a change in consciousness, but because of a crisis in capitalism. This crisis will come about when the contradictions in the three structures results in the collapse of the system as a whole.

Evaluation

Humanistic Marxists would argue that Althusser's scientific approach discourages political action because it stresses the role of the structural factors that individuals can do little about.

TASK 8: Marxism and Neo-Marxism – Explain the following key terms/concepts:

Karl Marx:

- Capitalism
- Ideology
- Superstructure
- Ruling class
- Alienation
- Historical materialism
- Surplus value
- Polarisation of the classes
- Class consciousness

Gramsci:

- Counter-hegemony
- Coercion
- Consent
- Power bloc
- Dual consciousness
- Dominant ideology
- Counter-hegemonic bloc

Althusser:

- The economic level
- The political level
- The ideological level
- Base-superstructure model
- One-way causality
- Two way causality
- Repressive state apparatus
- Ideological state apparatus

Paragraph 4: Merton (critical of Parsons)

Paragraph 5: Marxist criticism of functionalism

Paragraph 6: Interpretivist (social action theory) criticism of functionalism.

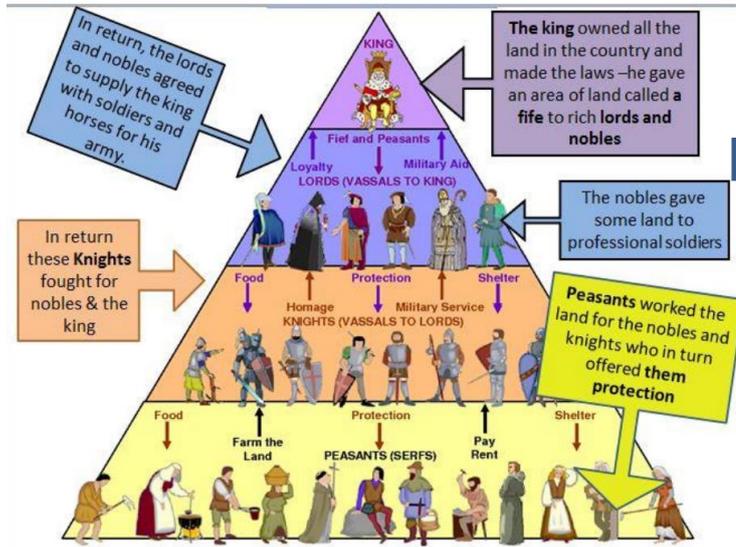
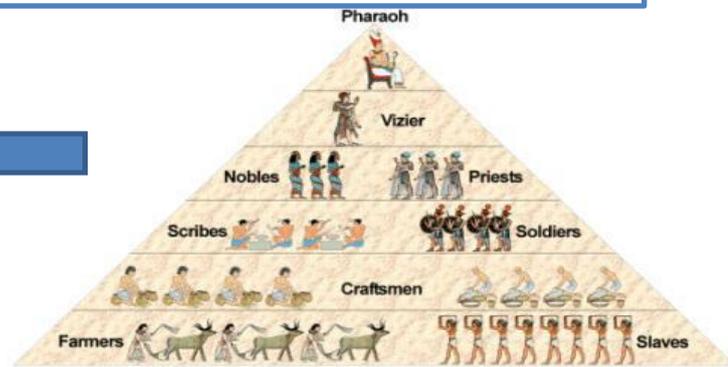
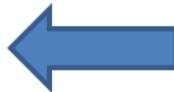
Paragraph 7: Postmodernism criticism of functionalism.

Challenge paragraph!

Conclusion:

Task 2: Complete the following activities on Marxism:

- Briefly explain the four historical stages of the development of class societies.



2. Explain in your own words how humans working to meet their material needs has led to a divided society.

3. Explain how this picture could illustrate the Marxist idea of alienation.



4. What capitalist or ruling class values can be passed on through these elements of the superstructure?

The family	
Education system	
The media	
The legal system	

5. What did Marx think would be the result of a proletarian revolution?

Task 3: Fill in the gaps on this model essay

Item B

Marxist theory criticises the economic system of capitalism and argues it creates exploitation and conflict. Marxism believes that the subject class are indoctrinated to accept capitalist ideology through the institutions of the superstructure.

However, other sociologists would argue that societies have changed since Marx's time, and that the theory is no longer valid.

Applying material from the Item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that Marxist explanations of the nature of contemporary society are no longer valid. (20 marks)

There is continuing debate over the nature of Marxism, whether it is still valid in the contemporary world or whether Marx's ideas are now outdated. The main criticism is that there has not been a r_____ as Marx once predicted, and this has led to the question of whether Marx's ideas are still valid.

Marx argues that capitalist society is based on the exploitation of free wage labourers by the ruling _____ that own the means of _____. This society is one of three that has featured exploitation, the _____ society with the exploitation of slaves and the _____ society with the exploitation of the serfs. However, it can be argued that society is no longer divided between the bourgeoisie and the p_____ as many people are now middle class.

However, due to the low wages that are paid by Capitalists, Marxism argues that this leads to the proletariat becoming poorer. Then capitalism eventually expands and technological advances cause the workforce to need fewer skills which produces class p_____. On the other hand, it could be argued that because we now have a welfare state, fewer people live in poverty, which shows this to be an outdated idea in contemporary society.

Marx believed that the d_____ ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class who control the tools of oppression (i.e. the media and religion) in order to justify the system. However, sometimes these institutions do encourage social change and do not oppress as Marx suggests.

Marx also argued that state organisations such as the police, courts and prisons serve to protect the interests of the owners and the ruling class. For a revolution to take place, the proletariat must overthrow the _____ system. He predicted that a revolution would take place on a global scale and would begin in advanced capitalist societies. However, it can be argued that communism is not as good a system as Marx suggested as it collapsed in Soviet Russia and in other parts of the world where it has been tried.

Marx can be criticised for being too deterministic and ignoring diversity in society and it can be argued that society has developed to a level where Marx's ideas are now outdated. Firstly, many members of the subject class have seen a rise in living standards in contemporary society. Also, Marx's idea of polarisation is also criticised because the _____ class has grown enormously with jobs in the professions and service sector. However, one of Marx's predictions could be valid in contemporary society as there has been evidence of class conflict in society – workers may go on strike, for example. But the biggest flaw in Marx's predictions is that the revolution in modern Western societies has not materialised.

However, there are some strengths to Marx's theory. He drew attention to the plight of the disadvantaged in capitalist society and demonstrated how the social structure can create large scale social i _____. Marxism is realistic about the potential for conflict in society whereas consensus theories are over-optimistic.

Neo-Marxists have also criticised Marx and his ideas. Their main criticism is related to the prediction of a revolution; they argue that this is a weakness because Marx never actually said when the revolution would take place. They argued that Marx placed too much emphasis on the economy. According to _____, a Humanistic Marxist, the ruling class maintain their power through h _____. They control the subject class by consent, using social institutions to spread the values and ideas that persuade the subject class that capitalism is legitimate and acceptable. Gramsci believed a revolution was possible if the subject class developed a counter-hegemony.

Althusser argued that it was not just the economic base and superstructure that makes up capitalist society but it exists on three levels; on a _____ level through the government and organisations in charge of society; on an _____ level, known as the ideological state apparatus, reinforced by the media, education and religion. Finally, on an _____ level, through the economy and production of goods. Althusser argued that the revolution would only happen when the contradictions in these three structures results in the collapse of the system as a whole.

_____ would further criticise Marxism as an outdated theory of modernity and argue that one theory no longer explains fully the society in which we live.

In conclusion, based on the sociological evidence it is very possible that Marx's ideas are outdated and are not relevant to contemporary society. Neo-Marxists have developed Marx's ideas by explaining that the ruling class use ideologies to control the proletariat and there is too much emphasis on the economy in Marx's original ideas. However, Marx's ideas could be seen to be relevant because Communism has only collapsed because of distorted implementation in certain countries.

Task 4: Functionalism and Marxism are Structural theories. This means that they both analyse how society shapes the individual and they focus on the structures and systems of society. Structural theorists are more likely to use Positivist research methods. Complete the questions below which all relate to the process of doing positivist research.

1. Which of these methods is preferred by positivists? (tick all that apply)

- a) Closed-ended questionnaires
- b) Unstructured interviews
- c) Participant observation
- d) Official statistics
- e) Personal and historical documents
- f) Structured interviews
- g) Experiments
- h) Non-participant observation
- i) Structured observation

2. Label the dependent variable and the independent variable in the following hypotheses:

Working class girls are more likely to underachieve in schools compared to middle class girls.

Children who regularly play computer games are more likely to engage in violent behaviour in adulthood.

Working class women spend more time on domestic work in couples than middle class women.

3. Identify three indicators of the following concepts:

Domestic violence:

Working class:

Emotion work:

4. Which of the following are more likely to have high reliability? (tick all that apply)

- a) Crime statistics.
- b) A personal diary.
- c) An unstructured interview where the respondent is allowed to answer questions in their own words.
- d) An observation of a lesson in a primary school where the researcher takes notes describing what they see.
- e) An observation of a lesson in a school where the researcher uses a structured observation schedule.
- f) An anonymous questionnaire containing fixed response questions that asks young people about drug use.

5. Explain why objectivity is likely to be higher in....

a) A study that uses questionnaires rather than unstructured interviews.

b) A study that uses official statistics rather than media reports.
