

Karl Marx

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Karl Marx (1818 - 1883)

Karl Marx was born in 1818 in Trier in Germany into a prosperous middle-class family. His parents were Jewish but his father converted to Protestantism so that he could retain his job as a senior lawyer in the Court of Appeal. This was due to the increased pressure and persecution of the Jews under the newly established Prussian regime following the fall of the more lenient Napoleonic government. Born in a bourgeois household and brought up by a highly educated lawyer, Marx naturally thought of pursuing an advanced university education upon completing his early studies at the Trier gymnasium. At age 17, in 1835, Karl Marx entered the University of Bonn to study law. The following year, unlike most German students who attend several universities before sitting for the university degree examinations, he journeyed to Berlin to study on the university faculty. Though Hegel had died in 1831, the university was still very much under the spell of his theory of history. Quickly succumbing to Hegelianism, he joined a rather loosely knit band of young radicals marginally affiliated with the university, who called themselves unabashedly the *Doktorclub*. Law was abandoned, and joining these Young Hegelians, Marx took up the study of philosophy.

Finally, in 1841 at the age of twenty-three, he received the doctorate degree from the University of Jena for his thesis on Greek natural philosophy. Having destroyed his chances at a university teaching career due to his radical and outspoken views, shortly after completing his studies, he began writing for a radical left-wing paper in Cologne, *Rheinische Zeitung*, and became its editor in 1842. Following the forced closure of the paper by the government because of a series of radically controversial articles by Marx on social conditions, Marx and his fiancée, Jenny, married and moved to Paris in 1843. The move to Paris was crucial for Marx for two reasons. First, still aged only 26, he wrote his most important philosophical work known as the 1844 *Paris Manuscripts*. Although these were not published until 1930 (and were not widely read until the 1950s), it is here that he introduced the concept of alienation, and laid the philosophical foundations for much of his later work. The second important event was meeting his lifelong friend Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). Despite being heir to flourishing textiles business with factories in Germany and a mill in Manchester, Engels had developed a reputation as a forthright critic of capitalist industry in his book, published in 1845, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Sharing many ideas with Marx, and certainly also favouring a socialist political outlook, Marx and Engels began a 40 year collaboration that lasted until Marx's death in 1883.

But, as in Germany two years before, the governmental authorities, this time of Guizot in Paris, expelled Marx and many of his associates. In 1845 Marx and his family were forced to leave Paris by the authorities there and they spent the next

three years in Brussels. Moving to Brussels, he re-established contact with like-minded German refugees there, especially a socialist organization called the German Workers' Educational Association. This organization interestingly had headquarters in London and was federated with the Communist League of Europe. With a draft from Engels, and under commission from the G.W.E.A., Marx wrote *The Communist Manifesto* which was sent on to London headquarters in 1848. Just prior to that, he had published *The Holy Family* (1845) and *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847). Another book, *The German Ideology*, was written in 1845-6, but was not published until 1932.

Under what appeared to be favourable but later proved unfavourable circumstances, Marx and Engels returned to Paris in 1848 following the outbreak of revolution in Germany, assuming the editorship of the radical paper, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. Failing to work out a working-class/bourgeoisie alliance against the feudal government, Marx was presented an ultimatum by the government in August 1849, of retiring to the French hinterlands or leaving the country. Opting for the latter, Marx migrated to London where he established permanent residence. The first few years in London proved productive, intellectually and literally, producing such works as *The Class Struggles in France* (1850) and *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). During these years, Marx also spent a great deal of time researching for his major work, the three-volume *Das Kapital* (or simply *Capital*). The first volume was published in 1867 and volumes two and three, edited by Engels after Marx's death, in 1885 and 1894. Also important from the period around 1859 is his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and a collection of 'fragments' or 'notes', which he wrote as a "preliminary work" to *Capital*, were eventually published in 1953 as *Grundrisse*.

Arriving in London in 1849 at the age of thirty one, Marx's life was just half over-a refugee thrice, twice exiled as an editor of a radical political paper, and once as the author of *The Communist Manifesto*, it would appear he had much to live and hope for. But in London, he withdrew with Engels into a close-knit circle composed of his family and a select few devoted disciples. This self-enforced isolation continued throughout the remainder of his life. After securing an admission card to the British Museum's reading room, much of the remainder of his active life centered around the analysis and the criticism of the industrial capitalism of the day. During this period, he was desperately impoverished, and save for the loyal assistance of Engels, all might have been lost. Three children died in the Marx household owing to malnutrition and impoverishment during the time he was completing the first volume of *Das Kapital* (or simply *Capital*). Except for the one pound sterling he received for each article he wrote for the New York Daily Tribune, he had nothing.

For a brief time, Marx came out of seclusion and was saved from continued poverty due to the appearance of and subsequent leadership offered by him to *The International*, an international federation of European and English workers committed to altering the present economic system. From 1864 to 1872 Marx worked with the First International, which was filled with strife and in which various anarchists, in particular, were opposed to Marx. Marx quit the organization after writing *The Paris Commune*, following the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. Marx, now wrecked by illness and broken health due to early poverty, and unfulfilled dreams, produced little during his last remaining years. Though a little comfortable towards the end of his life financially, and a distinct celebrity, for socialist leaders from all over the world came to visit him in London, he sustained two blows – the deaths of his eldest daughter and wife – from which he never recovered. Marx died on March 14, 1883.

As is the case with all philosophers and social theorists, Marx's social theory was a critical response to the leading theories and intellectual traditions of the day. His approach was to become fully engaged with a particular set of issues, reach conclusions about them and then fashion his own variations. In many ways, Marx's impact on social theory comes from the fact that his theory does not simply amount to a moderate reworking of what went before, a slight modification here and a bit of tinkering there, but is instead a complete transformation of it. It is this radical intellectual technique that makes Marx a *revolutionary thinker* rather than somebody who writes *about* revolution in capitalist society. A common thread that runs throughout is Marx's preoccupation with conflict in society. One could say that, whether as a philosophy, an approach to social theory or as a political strategy, Marxist social theory specialises in the analysis of social conflict. This contrasts with the emphasis on social order in the work of Durkheim.

Dear Candidate, before I proceed further, I would like to throw some light on the social and intellectual background of Karl Marx.

Karl Marx's life coincided with the beginning of a change in the European countries from agrarian to industrial societies. It was in England, particularly, in the late eighteenth century that the Industrial Revolution began a concentration of the new working class into factories and housing areas; and Marx obtained most of his basic empirical data for his theory of the development of capitalism from England. Just as important to Marx's theory, however, was the French Revolution of 1789 with its abolition of feudal conditions, the growth of a bourgeois society, and appearance of an anti-bourgeois socialist left.

When Marx appeared on the scene, Germany, compared to England and France, was still a feudal country that was not united until 1871. The direct intellectual background for Marx's theories involved Germany's chances of catching up with more developed countries, and this debate was carried on by the radical successors of the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831). With his grand philosophical system, Hegel had attempted to show that human history had a goal, the most salient features of which were the creation of a reasonable state and the realization of the concept of freedom. Since Hegel believed that the Prussian state of his time had made the greatest advances toward realizing freedom and reason, as a professor in Berlin he became somewhat of a "state philosopher" for Prussia. The radicals among Hegel's followers, the young Hegelians objected to this and criticized the dominant position of religion in Prussia. Marx belonged to the young Hegelian movement for a time, but he soon came to criticize its belief that philosophical analysis would lead to change in and liberation of Germany. Instead, he was more influenced by Hegel's historical method in which development and change through *dialectic contradictions* are the primary components, although he rejected Hegel's emphasis on spiritual forces in history. In contrast, Marx stressed human social conditions, particularly their material production, as crucial to historical development.

Another important source of inspiration for Marx was the French Socialist tradition that arose during the French Revolution of 1789 and continued through the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. The most important aspect of this tradition was the idea and goal of a new and more radical revolution than that of 1789. In the coming revolution the new class, the industrial workers or proletariat, would take power and abolish all classes. Beside these revolutionaries who were oriented toward class struggle, these were more reform oriented socialists such as the "utopian socialists," Claude Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Charles Fourier (1772-1837). Like the Englishman, Robert Owen (1771-1858), they wanted to build a socialist society through state reforms or by creating small local societies in which the division of labour was abolished and people lived in harmony with one another and with nature. Although Marx was critical of these socialists and based his thinking more on the "theory of class struggle," he incorporated some of their criticism of the modern capitalist industrial society into his own theories.

A third tradition of importance in Marx's scientific work was British political economy, with names such as Adam Smith (1723-90) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). They had analyzed the new capitalist market economy and Marx continued their analyses, although to a great extent he reached different conclusions. Of particular importance was the fact that Marx took up their *labour theory of value*, the idea that the value of commodity is determined by the quantity of work put into it. Other socialists also took up this tradition, particularly the so-called *Ricardian socialists*, who tried to demonstrate the injustice of a

system in which the workers created all value but received only part of it for themselves. Marx objected to their moral criticism of the distribution of value and in his own theory of surplus value he tried to explain why the workers received only a part of the value they created. These three traditions – German philosophy and Hegel in particular, French socialism, and British political economy – form the most important intellectual background for the theories of Marx. Which of them is most important depends on what perspective one has on Marx whether we see him primarily as a philosopher, a revolutionary, or a scientist. Whatever the case, we may say that all three traditions are present in Marx's lifework and that this work is characterized by the special way in which he synthesized these (and other) traditions.

Hegel: Idealism

When Marx entered university in the 1830s the German intellectual world was dominated by the work of the German idealist philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831). In his key works, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) and *The Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel developed a very ambitious philosophical system based on the premise that the ultimate purpose of human existence was to express the highest form of what he called the human Geist or 'Spirit'. This Spirit was not a physical or material entity but an abstract expression of the moral and ethical qualities and capacities, the highest cultural ideals, which, he argued, were the ultimate expression of what it is to be a human being. For Hegel, material life was the practical means through which this quest for the ultimate realisation of human consciousness, the search for a really truthful awareness of reality, could be expressed. Material life, and this included such things as the economy, the political institutions of the state and other social organisations in civil society, are a means to this higher end and not an end in themselves.

In saying all this Hegel was building on the philosophical system of his great German predecessor Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant was a rationalist philosopher believing that the human mind is uniquely equipped with the capacity to understand the exterior physical world *before* we encounter it. This understanding is generally well organised and sensible, and thus 'rational'. It is well-established, for example, that all humans are born with the capacity to learn language. We learn the words and grammar of a language through experience but *the capacity* to do so in an orderly fashion comes before the learning process, or is *a priori*, which would in fact not be possible without it. We do not learn the capacity to learn, this is something that we already have.

For rationalists, and especially rationalist idealists, human knowledge and understanding are more about what goes on inside our minds than outside of them. Real reality, or the most significant version of reality, is not the physical stuff that surrounds us, but the reflection of it we hold or create in our minds. For Hegel, then, reason and thought are not simply part of reality *they are reality*. It follows from this that the laws and principles that govern human thought must also be the laws and principles that govern the whole of reality.

Combining a strongly rationalist position with his own idealist system based on the idea of Spirit as the search for a really truthful understanding of human consciousness and its real relation with material or objective reality, Hegel goes beyond Kant by suggesting that, because the minds of all human beings are essentially the same (physiologically and in terms wired-in capacities for interpreting the exterior world), we are all part of *the same* overarching consciousness. My consciousness of the highest human ideals and my desire to find the most truthful ways of expressing them are essentially the same as yours because my consciousness works in the same way as yours does. If Hegel is correct in arguing that thought and reality are one and the same thing, and that the laws that govern human thought are therefore also the laws that govern reality, then in a sense all of humanity will eventually have the same thoughts. Differences between social actors in terms of their thoughts are to do with differences in their stages of development, how far they have progressed in the capacity for reason, not with differences in how they think.

According to Hegel, the process by which this quest for the ultimate truth is carried on involves a *dialectical* process in which one state of awareness about the nature of reality (thesis) is shown to be false by a further and higher state of awareness (antithesis) and is finally resolved in a final and true state of awareness (synthesis). The idea of the dialectic comes from Ancient Greek philosophy and describes a situation in which truth is arrived at through a process of debate or conversation. A particular point of view is stated, this is challenged by an alternative view and eventually a third view emerges, which is superior to them both. Hegel refines the term to refer to the pattern or logic that human thought must follow. The dialectic is his explanation of the intellectual and philosophical process, inherent within and throughout human consciousness, by which social actors finally come to realise the truth of the idea that thought is reality. Hegel uses the same triadic approach in suggesting that the contradictions or imperfections of the family and of civil society (corresponding with thesis and antithesis) are finally resolved by the institutions of the state, which correspond with the new ethical synthesis. The state thus provides the practical means of expressing the universal Spirit.

A further important analytical device used by Hegel is the idea of *sublation*. He uses this term to describe the need social actors have to feel at ease with their understanding of reality and how they fit into it. Lack of sublation shows itself as a feeling of **estrangement**, of not fitting in, of being at odds with the world and being confused about the nature of reality. Moving away from home for the first time, starting an unfamiliar job or being let down by a friend are all situations where, in Hegel's terms, the social actors experience a sense of estrangement and insecurity, a lack of sublation. Hegel felt that at its root, estrangement arose because uncertainty about the nature of reality 'out there' caused us to be uncertain about reality 'in here'. The extent to which we do not fully understand the objective world around us is also the extent to which we are ignorant about our own subjective inner nature. However much we live inside our heads and build up versions of reality there (and it is very difficult to see where else consciousness could come from), we are ourselves also physical objects that are a part of the exterior world we are trying to understand. We are both subjects (things that do things) and objects (things that have things done to them) at one and the same time. Hegel believed that his system of idealist rationality offered a solution to this fundamental dilemma and that his ideas presented the highest synthesis of philosophical thought so far achieved. The fact that he had discovered the underlying principle of the dialectic process as it applies to the development of true human awareness of the nature of reality made Hegel even more convinced of the value of his contribution. The Spirit had become self-aware in terms of understanding the mechanism of its own creation.

Although Hegel's work was extremely popular in Germany in the 1830s, not least because it led people to believe that the German state of the time represented the most advanced and civilized kind of society yet achieved, it was eventually challenged by a new generation of intellectuals who proposed a counter-thesis of their own. The Young Hegelians as they were known applied the triadic apparatus of thesis, antithesis and synthesis to Hegel's own philosophical system. The most influential of this group was **Ludwig Feuerbach** (1804-72), who argued that by subordinating the material world to the realm of consciousness and ideas, Hegel's obsession with the coming of the great universal Spirit, was not in the least bit rational or objective in the scientific sense and was in fact nothing more than a form of religious mysticism. Rather than describing how social actors might overcome their sense of estrangement from material reality, Hegel simply made matters worse by suggesting that it was not objective reality that was the problem but simply the inadequacy of social actors' understanding of it. As Marx puts it: 'Feuerbach's great achievement is to have shown that philosophy is nothing more than religion brought into thought and developed in thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form....of the estrangement of man's nature.'

At university Marx soon became interested in the ideas of the counter thesis group and of Feuerbach in particular and eventually rejected much of the Hegelian thesis. Crucial to his own development, however, Marx retained key elements and adapted them for his own use. While giving Hegel, 'that mighty thinker', credit for developing a number of very important insights, Marx argued that he had applied them incorrectly, and had thus reached incomplete conclusions about true nature of real reality. Marx's social theory can be thought of as the new synthesis that emerged out of the collision of Hegel's thesis and the Young Hegelians' antithesis. The key to Marx's critique of Hegel is very simple; he takes a number of his most useful conceptual tools and uses them the other way around.

Marx: Historical Materialism or Dialectical Materialism

For Marx, it is quite inadequate to regard human history, the development of society itself, as merely a by-product of the quest for ultimate knowledge in the abstract realm of human consciousness. So Marx reverses Hegel's approach by arguing that the quest for knowledge should not begin with abstract conceptions in the realm of ideas, but with a positive analysis of actually existing material things in the real physical world. While Hegel, in common with all idealist thinkers, argues that the most truthful version of the world is the one that we hold in our consciousness, Marx proposed the opposite or **materialist view**, which is that the most real version must be the one we can actually touch and feel. For materialist thinkers, the really real world is not the one we create in our minds but the untidy, crowded, noisy physical matter that surrounds us. If we want to know about real reality, and provide a truthful account of it, social theory must begin with an analysis of real things and not become preoccupied with their 'ideal' representation in our thoughts. Even the most perfectly polished mirror needs something to reflect or it has no purpose at all. Worse still, it might be used to project a completely false image or ideology.

Let us now try to understand the underlying assumptions of this materialist view of Marx. In Marx's view man is essentially a social being. Marx regards man as both the producer and the product of society. Man makes society and himself by his own actions. History is therefore the process of man's self-creation. Yet man is also a product of society. He is shaped by the social relationships and systems of thought which he creates. An understanding of human history therefore involves an examination of these relationships, the most important of which are the relations of production. A society forms a totality and can only be understood as such. The various parts of society are interconnected and influence each other. Thus economic, political, legal and religious institutions can only be understood in terms of their mutual effect. Economic factors, however, exert the primary

influence and largely shape other aspects of society. The history of human society is a process of tension and conflict. According to Marx, apart from the communities based on primitive communism at the dawn of history, all societies are divided into social groups known as classes. The relationship between classes is one of antagonism and conflict. Class conflict forms the basis of the dialectic of social change. Social change is not a smooth, orderly progression which gradually unfolds in harmonious evolution. Instead it proceeds from contradictions built into society which are a source of tension and ultimately the source of open conflict and radical change. In Marx's view, *'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggle'*.

It is often argued that Marx's view of history is based on the idea of the dialectic. From this viewpoint any process of change involves tension between incompatible forces. Dialectical movement therefore represents a struggle of opposites, a conflict of contradictions. Conflict provides the dynamic principle, the source of change. The struggle between incompatible forces grows in intensity until there is a final collision. The result is a sudden leap forward which creates a new set of forces on a higher level of development. The dialectical process then begins again as the contradictions between this new set of forces interact and conflict, and propel change. **As stated earlier, the idea of dialectical change was developed by the German philosopher Hegel. He applied it to the history of human society and in particular to the realm of ideas. Hegel saw historical change as a dialectical movement of men's ideas and thoughts. He believed that society is essentially an expression of these thoughts. Thus in terms of the dialectic, conflict between incompatible ideas produces new concepts which provide the basis for social change. Marx rejects the priority Hegel gives to thoughts and ideas. He argues that the source of change lies in contradictions in the economic system in particular and in society in general. As a result of the priority he gives to economic factors, to 'material life', Marx's view of history is often referred to as 'dialectical materialism'. Since men's ideas are primarily a reflection of the social relationships of economic production, they do not provide the main source of change. It is in contradictions and conflict in the economic system that the major dynamic for social change lies. Since all parts of society are interconnected, however, it is only through a process of interplay between these parts that change occurs.**

History begins when men actually produce their means of subsistence, when they begin to control nature. At a minimum this involves the production of food and shelter. Marx argues that, *'The first historical act is, therefore, the production of material life'*. Production is a social enterprise since it requires cooperation. Men must work together to produce the goods and services necessary for life. From the social relationships involved in production develops a *'mode of life'*

which can be seen as an expression of these relationships. This mode of life shapes man's nature. In Marx's words, 'As individuals express their life so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, with what they produce and how they produce it'. Thus the nature of man and the nature of society as a whole derive primarily from the production of material life.

Thus, according to Marx, the major contradictions which propel change are found in the economic infrastructure of society. At the dawn of human history, when man supposedly lived in a state of primitive communism, those contradictions did not exist. The forces of production and the products of labour were communally owned. Since each member of society produced both for himself and for society as a whole, there were no conflicts of interest between individuals and groups. However, with the emergence of private property, and in particular, private ownership of the forces of production, the fundamental contradiction of human society was created. Through its ownership of the forces of production, a minority is able to control, command and enjoy the fruits of the labour of the majority. Since one group gains at the expense of the other, a conflict of interest exists between the minority who own the forces of production and the majority who perform productive labour. The tension and conflict generated by this contradiction is the major dynamic of social change.

For long periods of history, men are largely unaware of the contradictions which beset their societies. This is because man's consciousness, his view of reality, is largely shaped by the social relationships involved in the process of production. Marx maintains that, '*it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousnesses*'. The primary aspect of man's social being is the social relationships he enters into for the production of material life. Since these relationships are largely reproduced in terms of ideas, concepts, laws and religious beliefs, they are seen as normal and natural. Thus when the law legitimizes the rights of private property, when religious beliefs justify economic arrangements and the dominant concepts of the age define them as natural and inevitable, men will be largely unaware of the contradictions they contain. In this way the contradictions within the economic infrastructure are compounded by the contradiction between man's consciousness and objective reality. This consciousness is false. It presents a distorted picture of reality since it fails to reveal the basic conflicts of interest which exist in the world which man has created. For long periods of time man is at most vaguely aware of these contradictions, yet even a vague awareness produces tension. This tension will ultimately find full expression and be resolved in the process of dialectical change.

To conclude it may be argued that historical materialism is a methodological approach to the study of society, first articulated by Karl Marx. Marx himself never used the term but referred to his approach as “the materialist conception of history,” which was later referred to as “historical materialism” by Engels.

Marx drew heavily from Hegel in terms of his “manner of approach” to social phenomena and his analysis of it. However, Hegel was an idealist who asserted the primacy of “mind” or “ideas”, whereas Marx was “materialist” who asserted the primacy of “matter.” Marx was not satisfied with Hegelian idealism but Hegel’s use of the dialectical methodology did grab Marx’s imagination. By turning from idealism to materialism (i.e., inverting Hegel), Marx was able to make good use of the dialectic in what came to be called “historical materialism” or “dialectical materialism.” Please note that it was Georgi Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, who later introduced the term *dialectical materialism* to Marxist literature.

According to Friedrich Engels, historical materialism “designates that view of the course of history, which seeks the ultimate causes and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, with the consequent division of society into distinct classes and the struggles of these classes.”

Historical materialism is thus both, a perspective as well as the methodology. As a perspective, it looks for the causes of development and change in human society in the material conditions or the economic structure of society. As a methodology, it seeks to examine the social structure and explain social change in terms of the dialectical movement of forces of production and relations of production in the mode of production of a given society.

Although Marx did not consistently argue for a crude economic determinism, he left no doubt that he considered the economy to be the foundation of the whole socio-cultural system. Throughout their study, Marx and Engels emphasized the primacy of economics in human relationship and the centrality of the economic dimension in political structures. The economic system of production and distribution, or the means and relations of production in the Marxian sense, constitute the basic structure of society on which are built all other social institutions, particularly the state and legal system. According to Engels,

“... the production of immediate material means of subsistence, and consequently, the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, the ideas on art, and even on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved.”

All other factors in the human experience of social relations were subservient and dependent upon the economic factor in the Marxian theory of social relationships. “The political, legal, philosophical, literary, and artistic development,” Marx wrote, “rests on the economic. But they all react upon one another and upon the economic base. It is not that the economic situation is the sole active cause and that everything else is merely a passive effect, there is, rather a reciprocity within a field of economic necessity which in the last instance always asserts itself”. He would argue, even, that human thought, human awareness, and human consciousness, were not self-originating but were derivatives of the economic principle. Consistent with his economic interpretation of history, Marx developed a variant of the sociology of knowledge which stressed the primacy of the economic principle in the evolution of ideologies, philosophical systems, politics, ethics and religion. The central thesis of Marx is this: “It is not the unfolding of ideas that explains the historical development of society (as Hegel and Comte would have argued), but the development of the social structure in response to changing material conditions that explains the emergence of new ideas.”

According to Marx, ideas belong to the realm of the superstructure and are determined by the economic infrastructure. He believed that the ideologies prevailing at any particular point in time reflect the worldview of the dominant class. In other words, ideas depend on the social positions – particularly on the class positions of their proponents. These views, moreover, tend either to enhance or undermine the power and control of whatever class happens to be dominant at the time. If generated from the dominant class, they tend to be supportive and reinforce the predominance of the social structure. “The ideas of the ruling class”, Marx pointed out “are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the dominant *material* force in society is at the same time its dominant *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production.” Marx warned that we will fail to understand the historical process “if...we detach the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute to them an independent existence, if we confine ourselves to saying that in a particular age these or those ideas were dominant, without paying attention to the conditions of production and the producers of these ideas, and if we thus ignore the individuals and the world conditions which are the source of these ideas.” Thus Marx sought to trace the evolution of ideas to the life conditions in general, and the forces and relations of production in particular. As it is with conservative ideas, so it is with revolutionary ideas: the former originate in the worldview of the ruling class and the latter in the material conditions of the revolutionary class.

Dear Candidate, it would be wise at this point of our discussion to briefly examine what many see as the central issue of Marxism, the question of 'economic determinism'. Critics have often rejected Marxism on this basis though they admit that the charge of economic determination is more applicable to certain of Marx's followers than to Marx himself. It is possible to select numerous quotations from Marx's writings which support the views of his critics. In terms of these quotations, history can be presented as a mechanical process directed by economic forces which follow 'iron laws'. Man is compelled to act in terms of the constraints imposed by the economy and passively responds to impersonal forces rather than actively constructing his own history. Thus the proletariat is 'compelled' by its economic situation to overthrow the bourgeoisie. The contradictions in the capitalist infrastructure will inevitably result in its destruction. The superstructure is 'determined' by the infrastructure and man's consciousness is shaped by economic forces independent of his will and beyond his control. In this way Marx can be presented as a crude positivist who sees causation solely in terms of economic forces.

On closer examination, however, Marx's writings prove more subtle and less dogmatic than many of his critics have suggested. Marx rejects a simplistic, one-directional view of causation. Although he gives priority to economic factors, they form only one aspect of the dialectic of history. From this perspective the economy is the primary but not the sole determinant of social change. The idea of the dialectic involves an interplay between the various parts of society. It rejects the view of unidirectional causation proceeding solely from economic factors. Instead it argues that the various parts of society are interrelated in terms of their mutual effect. Marx described the economic infrastructure as the 'ultimately determinant element in history'. Yet he added that, 'if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract and senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure . . . also exert their influence upon the course of the historical struggle and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*'. Thus the various aspects of the superstructure have a certain degree of autonomy and a part to play in influencing the course of history. They are not automatically and mechanically determined by the infrastructure.

Marx consistently argued that 'man makes his own history'. The history of human society is not the product of impersonal forces, it is the result of man's purposive activity. In Marx's view, 'It is not "history" which uses men as a means of achieving – as if were an individual person – *its* own ends. History is *nothing* but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends'. Since men make society only men

can change society. Radical change results from a combination of consciousness of reality and direct action. Thus members of the proletariat must be fully aware of their situation and take active steps in order to change it. Although a successful revolution depends ultimately on the economic situation, it requires human initiative. Men must make their own utopia.

Marx: Class, Class Struggle and Social Change

Dear Candidate, Marxist theory offers a radical alternative to functionalism. It became increasingly influential in sociology during the 1970s, partly because of the decline of functionalism, partly because it promised to provide answers that functionalism failed to provide, and partly because it was more in keeping with the tenor and mood of the times. 'Marxism' takes its name from its founder, the German-born philosopher, economist and sociologist, Karl Marx (1818-83). The following account is a simplified version of Marxist theory. It must also be seen as one interpretation of that theory: Marx's extensive writings have been variously interpreted and, since his death, several schools of Marxism have developed.

Marxian theory begins with the simple observation that in order to survive, man must produce food and material objects. In doing so he enters into social relationships with other men. From the simple hunting band to the complex industrial state, production is a social enterprise. Production also involves a technical component known as the **forces of production** which includes the technology, raw materials and scientific knowledge employed in the process of production. Each major stage in the development of forces of production will correspond with a particular form of the **social relationships of production**. Thus, the forces of production in a hunting economy will correspond with a particular set of social relationships. Taken together, the forces of production and the social relationships of production form the economic base or infrastructure of society (**mode of production**). The other aspects of society, known as the superstructure, are largely shaped by the infrastructure. Thus the political, legal and educational institutions and the belief and value system are primarily determined by economic factors. A major change in the infrastructure will therefore produce a corresponding change in the superstructure. Marx maintained that, with the possible exception of the societies of prehistory, all historical societies contain basic contradictions which mean that they cannot survive forever in their existing form. These contradictions involve the exploitation of one social group by another, for example in feudal society, lords exploit their serfs, in capitalist society, employers exploit their employees. This creates a fundamental conflict of interest between social groups since one gains at the expense of another. This conflict of

interest must ultimately be resolved since a social system containing such contradictions cannot survive unchanged.

Thus, according to Marx, the major contradictions in society are between the forces and relations of production. The forces of production include land, raw materials, tools and machinery, the technical and scientific knowledge used in production, the technical organization of the production process and the labor power of the workers. The relations of production are the social relationships which men enter into in order to produce goods. Thus in feudal society they included the relationship between the lord and vassal and the set of right, duties and obligations which make up that relationship. In capitalist industrial society they included the relationship between employer and employee and the various rights of the two parties. The relations of production involve the relationship of social groups to the means and forces of production.

The **means of production** consist of those parts of the forces of production that can be legally owned. They therefore include land, raw materials, machinery, buildings and tools, but not technical knowledge or the organization of the production process. Under capitalism, labour power is not one of the means of production, since the workers are free to sell their labour. In slave societies, though, labour power is one of the means of production, since the workforce is actually owned by the social group in power. In feudal society, land, the lord owns the major means of production, and the serf has the right to use land in return for services or payment to the lord. In Western industrial society, the capitalists own the means of production, whereas the workers own only their labour, which they hire to the employer in return for wages.

The idea of contradiction between the forces and relations of production may be illustrated in terms of the infrastructure of the capitalist industrial society. Marx maintained that only labour produces wealth. Thus wealth in capitalist society is produced by the labour power of the workers. However, much of this wealth is appropriated in the form profits by the capitalists, the owners of the forces of production. The wages of the workers are well below the value of the wealth they produce. There is thus a contradiction between the forces of production, in particular the labour power of the workers which produce wealth, and the relations of production which involve the appropriation of much of that wealth by the capitalists. A related contradiction involves the technical organization of labour and the nature of ownership. In capitalist society, the forces of production include the collective production of goods by large numbers of workers in factories. Yet the forces of production are privately owned, the profits are appropriated by individuals. The contradiction between the forces and relations of production lies in the social and collective nature of production and the private

and individual nature of ownership. Marx believed that these and other contradictions would eventually lead to the downfall of the capitalist system. He maintained that by its very nature, capitalism involves the exploitation and oppression of the worker. He believed that the conflict of interest between capital and labour, which involves one group gaining at the expense of the other, could not be resolved within the framework of a capitalist economy.

Marx saw history as divided into a number of time periods, each being characterized by a particular mode of production. Marx believed that Western society had developed through four main epochs: primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society and capitalist society. Major changes in history are the result of new forces of production. For example, the change from feudal to capitalist society stemmed from the emergence, during the feudal epoch, of the forces of production of industrial society. This resulted in a contradiction between the new forces of production and the old feudal relations of productions. Capitalist industrial society required relations of production based on wage labour, rather than the traditional ties of lord and vassal. When they reach a certain point in their development, the new forces of production lead to the creation of a new set of relations of production. Then, a new epoch of history is born which sweeps away the social relationships of the old order. However, the final epoch of history, the **communist** or **socialist society** which Marx believe would eventually supplant capitalism, will not result from a new force of production. Rather, it will develop from a resolution of the contradictions contained within the capitalist system. Collective production will remain but the relations of production will be transformed. Ownership of the forces of production will be collective rather than individual and members of society will share the wealth that their labour produces. No longer will one social group exploit and oppress another. This will produce an infrastructure without contradiction and conflict. In Marx's view this would mean the end of history since communist society would no longer contain the contradictions which generate change.

Note: In view of the contradictions which beset historical societies, it appears difficult to explain their survival. Despite its internal contradictions, capitalism has continued in the West for over 200 years. This continuity can be explained in large part by the nature of the superstructure. In all societies the superstructure is largely shaped by the infrastructure. In particular, the relations of productions are reflected and reproduced in the various institutions, values and beliefs that make up the superstructure. Thus the relationships of domination and subordination found in the infrastructure will also be found in social institutions. In Marx's words, 'The existing relations of production between individuals must necessarily express themselves also as political and legal relations'. The dominant social group or ruling class, that is the group which owns and controls the forces of production,

will largely monopolize political power and its position will be supported by laws which are framed to protect and further its interests.

In the same way, beliefs and values will reflect and legitimate the relations of productions. Members of the ruling class 'rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas'. These ideas justify their power and privilege and conceal from all members of society the basis of exploitation and oppression on which their dominance rests. Thus under feudalism honour and loyalty were 'dominant concepts' of the age. Vassals owed loyalty to their lords and were bound by an oath of allegiance which encouraged the acceptance of their status. In terms of the dominant concept of the age, feudalism appeared as the natural order of things.

Under Capitalism, exploitation is disguised by the ideas of equality and freedom. The relationship between capitalist and wage laborer is defined as an equal exchange. The capitalist buy the labour power which the worker offers for hire. The worker is defined as a free agent since he has the freedom to choose his employer. In reality, equality and freedom are illusions. The employer-employee relationship is not equal. It is an exploitive relationship. The worker is not free since he is forced to work for the capitalist in order to survive. All he can do is exchange one form of 'wage slavery' for another. Marx refers to the dominant ideas of each epoch as '**ruling class ideology**'. Such ideology is a distortion of reality, a false picture of society. It blinds members of society to the contradictions and conflict of interest which are built into their relationships. As a result they tend to accept their situation as normal and natural, right and proper. In this way a 'false consciousness' of reality is produced which helps to maintain the system. However, Marx believed that ruling class ideology could only slow down the disintegration of the system. The contradictions embedded in the structure of society must eventually find expression.

In summary, the key to understanding society from a Marxian perspective involves an analysis of the infrastructure. In all historical societies there are basic contradictions between the forces and relations of production and there are fundamental conflicts of interest between the social groups involved in the production process. In particular, the relationship between the major social groups is one of exploitation and oppression. The superstructure derives largely from the infrastructure and therefore reproduces the social relationships of production. It will thus reflect the interests of the dominate group in the relations of production. Ruling class ideology distorts the true nature of society and serves to legitimate and justify the status quo. However the contradictions in the infrastructure will eventually lead to a disintegration of the system and the creation of a new society.

Although highly critical of capitalism, Marx did see it as a stepping stone on the way towards a communist society. Capitalism would help to develop technology that would free people from material need; there would be more than enough to feed and clothe the population. In these circumstances it would be possible to establish successful communist societies in which the needs of all their members were met. Despite its pessimistic tone, Marxism shares with functionalism the modern belief that human societies will improve, and that rational, scientific thinking can be used to ensure progress.

According to Karl Marx, in all stratified societies, there are two major social groups; a **ruling class** and a **subject class**. The power of the ruling class derives from its ownership and control of the forces of production. The ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class. As a result, there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes. The various institutions of society such as the legal and political systems are instruments of ruling class domination and serve to further its interests. Only when the forces of production are communally owned will classes disappear, thereby bringing an end to the exploitation and oppression of some by others.

From a Marxian perspective, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of social groups to the forces of production. Marx used the term **class** to refer to the main strata in all stratification systems, though most modern sociologists would reserve the term for strata in capitalist society. **From a Marxian view, a class is a social group whose members share the same relationship to the forces of production.** Thus during the feudal epoch, there are two main classes distinguished by their relationship to land, the major force of production. They are the feudal nobility who own the land and the landless serfs who work the land. Similarly, in the capitalist era, there are two main classes, the bourgeoisie or capitalist class which owns the forces of production and the proletariat or working class whose members own only their labour which they hire to the bourgeoisie in return for wages.

Marx believed that Western society had developed through four main epochs; **primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society** and **capitalist society**. Primitive communism is represented by the societies of prehistory and provides the only example of a classless society. From then on, all societies are divided into two major classes: masters and slaves in ancient society, lords and serfs in feudal society and capitalists and wage labourers in capitalist society. During each historical epoch, the labour power required for production was supplied by the subject class, that is by slaves, serfs and wage labourers respectively. The subject class is made up of the majority of the population

whereas the ruling or dominant class forms a minority. The relationship between the two major classes will be discussed shortly.

Classes did not exist during the era of primitive communism when societies were based on a socialist mode of production. In hunting and gathering band, the earliest form of human society, the land and its products were communally owned. The men hunted and the woman gathered plant food, and the produce was shared by members of the band. Classes did not exist since all members of society shared the same relationship to the forces of production. Every member was both producer and owner, all provided labour power and shared the products of their labour. Hunting and gathering is a subsistence economy which means that production only meets basic survival needs.

Classes emerge when the productive capacity of society expands beyond the level required for subsistence. This occurs when agriculture becomes the dominant mode of production. In an agricultural economy, only a section of society is needed to produce the food requirements of the whole society. Thus many individuals are freed from food production and are able to specialize in other tasks. The rudimentary **division of labour** of the hunting and gathering band was replaced by an increasingly more complex and specialized division. For example, in the early agricultural villages, some individuals became full-time producers of pottery, clothing and agricultural implements. As agriculture developed, surplus wealth, that is goods above the basic subsistence needs of the community, was produced. This led to an exchange of goods and trading developed rapidly both within and between communities. This was accompanied by the development of a system of **private property**. Goods were increasingly seen as commodities or articles of trade to which the individual rather than the community had right of ownership. **Private property and the accumulation of surplus wealth form the basis for the development of class societies. In particular, they provide the preconditions for the emergence of a class of producers and a class of non-producers.** Some are able to acquire the forces of production and others are therefore obliged to work for them. The result is a class of non-producers which owns the forces of production and a class of producers which owns only its labour power.

From a Marxian perspective, the relationship between the major social classes is one of mutual dependence and conflict. Thus in capitalist society, the bourgeoisie and proletariat are dependent upon each other. The wage labourer must sell his labour power in order to survive since he does not own a part of the forces of production and lacks the means to produce goods independently. He is therefore dependent for his livelihood on the capitalists and the wages they offer. The capitalists, as non-producers, are dependent on the labour power of the wage

labourers, since without it, there would be no production. However, the mutual dependency of the two classes is not a relationship of equal or symmetrical reciprocity. Instead, it is a relationship of exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. In particular, the ruling class gains at the expense of the subject class and there is therefore a conflict of interest between them. This may be illustrated by Marx's view of the nature of ownership and production in capitalist society.

The basic characteristics of a capitalist economy may be summarized as follows. **Capital** may be defined as money used to finance the production, of commodities for private gain. In a capitalist economy goods, and the labour power, raw materials and machinery used to produce them, are given a monetary value. The capitalist invests his capital in the production of goods. Capital is accumulated by selling those goods at a value greater than their cost of production. **Capitalism therefore involves the investment of capital in the production of commodities with the aim of maximizing profit.** Capital is privately owned by a minority, the capitalist class. However, in Marx's view, it is gained from the exploitation of the mass of the population, the working class. Marx argued that capital, as such, produces nothing. Only labour produces wealth. Yet the wages paid to the workers for their labour are well below the value of the goods they produce. The difference between the value of wages and commodities is known as 'surplus value'. This surplus value is appropriated in the form of profit by the capitalists. Since they are non-producers, the bourgeoisie are therefore exploiting the proletariat, the real producers of wealth. Marx maintained that in all class societies, the ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class.

In simpler words, Marx argues that class divisions result from the differing relationships of members of society to the forces of production. The structure of all societies may be represented in terms of a simplified two class model consisting of ruling and subject class. The ruling class owes its dominance and power to its ownership and control of the forces of production. The subjection and relative powerlessness of the subject class is due to its lack of ownership and therefore lack of control of the forces of production. The conflict of interest between the two classes stems from the fact that productive labour is performed by the subject class yet a large part of the wealth so produced is appropriated by the ruling class. Since one class gains at the expense of another, the interests of their members are incompatible. The classes stand opposed as exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed.

The labour of the subject class takes on the character of 'forced labour'. Since its members lack the necessary means to produce for themselves they are forced to work for others. Thus during the feudal era, landless serfs were forced to work for the landowning nobility in order to gain a livelihood. In the capitalist era,

the means necessary to produce goods – tools, machinery, raw materials and so on – are owned by the capitalist class. In order to exist, members of the proletariat are forced to sell their labour power in return for wages. Ownership of the forces of production therefore provides the basis for ruling class dominance and control of labour.

From a Marxian perspective political power derives from economic power. The power of the ruling class therefore stems from its ownership and control of the forces of production. Since the superstructure of society – the major institutions, values and belief systems – is seen to be largely shaped by the economic infrastructure, the relations of production will be reproduced in the superstructure. Thus the dominance of the ruling class in the relations of production will be reflected in the superstructure. In particular, the political and legal systems will reflect ruling class interests since, in Marx's words, 'The existing relations of production between individuals must necessarily express themselves also as political and legal relations'. For example, the various ownership rights of the capitalist class will be enshrined in and protected by the laws of the land. Thus the various parts of the superstructure can be seen as instruments of ruling class domination and as mechanisms for the oppression of the subject class.

In the same way, the position of the dominant class is supported by beliefs and values which are systematically generated by the infrastructure. Marx refers to the dominant concepts of class societies as **ruling class ideology** since they justify and legitimate ruling class domination and project a distorted picture of reality. For example, the emphasis on freedom in capitalist society, illustrated by phrases such as 'the free market', 'free democratic societies' and 'the free world', is an illusion which disguises the wage slavery of the proletariat. Ruling class ideology produces '**false class consciousness**', a false picture of the nature of the relationship between social classes. Members of both classes tend to accept the status quo as normal and natural and are largely unaware of the true nature of exploitation and oppression. In other words, members of both social classes are largely unaware of the true nature of their situation, of the reality of the relationship between ruling and subject classes. Members of the ruling class assume that their particular interests are those of society as a whole, members of the subject class accept this view of reality and regard their situation as a part of the natural order of things. This false consciousness is due to the fact that the relationships of dominance and subordination in the economic infrastructure are largely reproduced in the superstructure of society. In Marx's words, the relations of production constitute 'the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life’.

Ruling class dominance is confirmed and legitimated in legal statutes, religious proscriptions and political legislation. The consciousness of all members of society is infused with ruling class ideology which proclaims the essential rightness, normality and inevitability of the status quo. In this way the conflict of interest between the classes is disguised and a degree of social stability produced but the basic contradictions and conflicts of class societies remain unresolved.

Marx believed that the class struggle was the driving force of social change. He states that, ‘**The history of all societies up to the present is the history of the class struggle**’. A new historical epoch is created by the development of superior forces of production by new social group. These developments take place within the framework of the previous era. For example, the merchants and industrialists who spearheaded the rise of capitalism emerged during the feudal era. They accumulated capital, laid the foundations for industrial manufacturers, factory production and the system of wage labour, all of which were essential components of capitalism. The superiority of the capitalist mode of production led to a rapid transformation of the structure of society. The capitalist class became dominant, and although the feudal aristocracy maintained aspects of its power well into the nineteenth century, it was fighting a losing battle.

The class struggles of history have been between minorities. For example, capitalism developed from the struggle between the feudal aristocracy and the emerging capitalist class, both groups in numerical terms forming a minority of the population. Major changes in history have involved the replacement of one form of private property by another and of one type of production technique by another. For example, capitalism involved the replacement of privately owned land and an agricultural economy by privately owned capital and an industrial economy. Marx believed that the class struggle which would transform capitalist society would involve none of these processes. The protagonists would be the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, a minority versus a majority. Private property would be replaced by communally owned property. Industrial manufacture would remain as the basic technique of production in the society which would replace capitalism.

Marx believed that the basic contradictions contained in a capitalist economic system would lead to its eventual destruction. The proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize the forces of production, the source of power. Property would be communally owned and, since all members of society would now share the same relationship to the forces of production, a classless society would result. Since history is the history of the class struggle, history would now

end. The communist society which replaces capitalism will contain no contradictions, no conflicts of interest and therefore be unchanging. However, before the dawning of this utopia, certain changes must occur.

Marx distinguished between a **'class in itself'** and a **'class for itself'**. **A class in itself is simply a social group whose members share the same relationship to the forces of production.** Marx argues that a social group only fully becomes a class when it becomes a class for itself. At this stage its members have class consciousness and class solidarity. Class consciousness means that false class consciousness has been replaced by a full awareness of the true situation, by a realization of the nature of exploitation. Members of a class develop a common identity, recognize their shared interests and unite, so producing class solidarity. The final stage of class consciousness and class solidarity is reached when members realize that only by collective action can they overthrow the ruling class and when they take positive steps to do so.

Marx believed that the following aspects of capitalist society would eventually lead to the proletariat developing into a class for itself. Firstly capitalist society is by its very nature unstable. It is based on contradictions and antagonisms which can be resolved by its transformation. In particular, the conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and proletariat cannot be resolved within the framework of a capitalist economy. The basic conflict of interest involves the exploitation of workers by the capitalists. Marx believed that this contradiction would be highlighted by a second, the contradiction between social production and individual ownership. As capitalism developed, the workforce was increasingly concentrated in the large factories where production was a social enterprise. Social production juxtaposed with individual ownership illuminates the exploitation of the proletariat. Social production also makes it easier for workers to organize themselves against the capitalists. It facilitates communication and encourages recognition of common circumstances and interest.

Apart from the basic contradictions of capitalist society, Marx believed that certain factors in the natural development of a capitalist economy will hasten its downfall. These factors will result in the polarization of the two main classes. Firstly the increasing use of machinery will result in a **homogeneous working class**. Since 'machinery obliterates the differences in labour' members of the proletariat will become increasingly similar. The differences between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers will tend to disappear as machines remove the skill required in the production of commodities. Secondly, the difference in wealth between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat will increase as the accumulation of capital proceeds. Even though the real wages and living standards of the proletariat may rise, its members will become poorer in relation to the bourgeoisie.

This process is known as **pauperization**. Thirdly, the competitive nature of capitalism means that only the largest and most wealthy companies will survive and prosper. Competition will depress the immediate strata, those groups lying between the two main classes, into the proletariat. Thus the 'petty bourgeoisie', the owners of small businesses, will 'sink into the proletariat'. At the same time the surviving companies will grow larger and capital will be concentrated into fewer hands. These three processes - the obliteration of the differences in labour, the pauperization of the working class and the depression of the intermediate strata into the proletariat – will result in the **polarization** of the two major classes. Marx believed he could observe the process of polarization in nineteenth-century Britain when he wrote, 'Society as a whole is more and more splitting into two great hostile camps..... bourgeoisie and proletariat'. Now the battle lines were clearly drawn, Marx hoped that the proletarian revolution would shortly follow and the communist utopia of his dreams would finally become a reality.

Marx argued that while the superstructure may stabilize society and contain its contradictions over long periods of time, this situation cannot be permanent. The fundamental contradictions of class societies will eventually find expression and will finally be resolved by the dialectic of historical change. A radical change in the structure of society occurs when a class is transformed from a 'class in itself' to a 'class for itself'. A class in itself refers to members of society who share the same objective relationships to the forces of production. Thus, as wage labourers, members of the proletariat form a class in itself. However, a class only becomes a class for itself when its members are fully conscious of the true nature of their situation, when they are fully aware of their common interests and common enemy, when they realize that only by concerted action can they overthrow their oppressors, and when they unite and take positive, practical steps to do so. When a class becomes a class for itself, the contradiction between the consciousness of its members and the reality of their situation is ended.

A class becomes a class for itself when the forces of production have developed to the point where they cannot be contained within the existing relations of production. In Marx's words, 'For an oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself, it is essential that the existing forces of production and the existing social relations should be incapable of standing side by side'. Revolutionary change requires that the forces of production on which the new order will be based have developed in the old society. Therefore the 'new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society'. This process may be illustrated by the transition from feudal to capitalist society. Industrial capitalism gradually developed within the framework of feudal society. In order to develop fully, it required, 'the free wage labourer who sells his labour-power to capital'. This provides a mobile labour

force which can be hired and fired at will and so efficiently utilized as a commodity in the service of capital. However, the feudal relations of production, which involved 'landed property with serf labour chained to it', tended to prevent the development of wage labourers. Eventually the forces of production of capitalism gained sufficient strength and impetus to lead to the destruction of the feudal system. At this point the rising class, the bourgeoisie, became a class for itself and its members united to overthrow the feudal relations of production. When they succeeded the contradiction between the new forces of production and the old relations of production was resolved.

Marx further argued that once a new economic order is established, the superstructure of the previous era is rapidly transformed. The contradiction between the new infrastructure and the old superstructure is now ended. Thus the political dominance of the feudal aristocracy was replaced by the power to the newly enfranchised bourgeoisie. The dominant concepts of feudalism such as loyalty and honour were replaced by the new concepts of freedom and equality. In terms of the new ideology the wage labourer of capitalist society is free to sell his labour power to the highest bidder. The relationship between employer and employee is defined as a relationship between equals, the exchange of labour for wages as an exchange of equivalents. But the resolution of old contradictions does not necessarily mean an end to contradictions in society. As in previous eras, the transition from feudalism to capitalism merely results in the replacement of an old set of contradictions by a new.

The predicted rise of the proletariat is not strictly analogous with the rise of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie formed a privileged minority of industrialists, merchants and financiers who forged new forces of production within feudal society. The proletariat forms an unprivileged majority which does not create new forces of production within capitalist society. Marx believed, however, that the contradictions of capitalism were sufficient to transform the proletariat into a class for itself and bring about the downfall of the bourgeoisie. He saw the magnitude of these contradictions and the intensity of class conflict steadily increasing as capitalism developed. Thus there is a steady polarization of the two major classes as the intermediate strata are submerged into the proletariat. As capital accumulates, it is concentrated more and more into fewer hands, a process accompanied by the relative pauperization of the proletariat. Production assumes an increasingly social and cooperative character as larger and larger groups of workers are concentrated in factories. At the same time the wealth produced by labour is appropriated by fewer and fewer individuals as greater competition drives all but the larger companies out of business. Such processes magnify and illuminate the contradictions of capitalism and increase the intensity of conflict. It is only a matter of time before members of the proletariat recognize that the

reality of their situation is the alienation of labour. This awareness will lead the proletariat to 'a revolt to which it is forced by the contradiction between its *humanity* and its situation, which is an open, clear and absolute negation of its humanity'.

The **communist society** which Marx predicted would arise from the ruins of capitalism will begin with a transitional phase, '**the dictatorship of the proletariat**'. Once the communist system has been fully established, the reason for being of the dictatorship and therefore its existence will end. The communist society of the new era is without classes, without contradictions. The dialectical principle now ceases to operate. The contradictions of human history have now been negated in a final harmonious synthesis.

Judging from the constant reinterpretations, impassioned defences and vehement criticisms of Marx's work, his ideas are as alive and relevant today as they ever were. Many of his critics have argued that history has failed to substantiate Marx's views on the direction of social change. Thus they claim that class conflict, far from growing in intensity, has become institutionalized in advanced capitalist society. They see little indication of the proletariat becoming a class for itself. Rather than a polarization of classes, they argue that the class structure of capitalist society has become increasingly complex and differentiated. In particular, a steadily growing middle class has emerged between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Turning to communist society, critics have argued that history has not borne out the promise of communism contained in Marx's writings. Significant social inequalities are present in communist regimes and there are few, if any, signs of a movement towards equality. The dictatorship of the proletariat clings stubbornly to power and there is little indication of its eventual disappearance. Particular criticism has been directed towards the priority that Marx assigns to economic factors in his explanation of social structure and social change. Max Weber's study of ascetic Protestantism argued that religious beliefs provided the ethics, attitudes and motivations for the development of capitalism. Since ascetic Protestantism preceded the advent of capitalism, Weber maintained that at certain times and places aspects of the superstructure can play a primary role in directing change. The priority given to economic factors has also been criticized by elite theorists who have argued that control of the machinery of government rather than ownership of the forces of production provides the basis for power. They point to the example of communist societies where, despite the fact that the forces of production are communally owned, power is largely monopolized by a political and bureaucratic elite.

Important: The German sociologist **Ralf Dahrendorf** claims that the social structure of advanced societies has undergone some very significant changes since Marx's time. These changes have resulted in a "transformed" capitalism, and the modern industrial societies are organized in terms of "**imperatively coordinated associations**," i.e. associations of people controlled by a hierarchy of authority and power. According to Dahrendorf, some of the key features of advanced industrial societies are:

- **Decomposition of capital** (stock holders and managers): This implies the separation of ownership and control over large corporations such as joint stock companies where the ownership (in the form of equity) lies with the public at large while the control is exercised by the management, professionals, technocrats and other experts.
- **Decomposition of labour** (from homogeneous group of equally unskilled and impoverished people, to differentiated occupational groups, with differentiated attributes and status (prestige, responsibility, authority)): Dahrendorf believes that during the twentieth century there has been a 'decomposition of labour', a disintegrating of the manual working class. Contrary to Marx's prediction, the manual working class has become increasingly heterogeneous or dissimilar by the emergence of new differentiations of skill. He sees this resulting from changes in technology arguing that 'increasingly complex machines require increasingly qualified designers, builders, maintenance and repair men and even minders'. Dahrendorf claims that the working class is now divided into three distinct levels: unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual workers. Differences in economic and prestige rewards are linked to this hierarchy of skill. In view of the differences in skill, economic and status rewards and interests within the ranks of manual workers, Dahrendorf claims that 'it has become doubtful whether speaking of the working class still makes much sense'. He believes that during the twentieth century there has been a 'decomposition of labour', a disintegration of the manual working class.
- **Institutionalisation of class conflict** (industrial bargaining): According to Dahrendorf, the tension between labour and capital is recognized as a principle of the structure of the labour market and has become a legal institution of society. As workers have become increasingly skilled, educated and better paid, they have become more integrated into the middle layers of society. The traditional sources of discontent and labour militancy have been dissolved. The basis for class struggle is gone. Conflicts now develop within imperatively coordinated associations (institutional structures such as business organizations, unions and so forth) and are resolved rationally and fairly through mediation, arbitration or adjudication.

However, despite criticisms, Marx's work on class has been examined in detail for the following reasons. Firstly, many sociologists claim that his theory still provides the best explanation of the nature of class in capitalist society. Secondly, much of the research on class has been inspired by ideas and questions raised by Marx. Thirdly, many of the concepts of class analysis introduced by Marx have proved useful to Marxists and non-Marxists alike. And, as T.B. Bottomore writing in 1965 notes, 'For the past eighty years Marx's theory has been the object of unrelenting criticism and tenacious defence'. This observation remains true today.

Dear Candidate, until now we have discussed some of the key ideas of Marx. We have discussed historical materialism as a perspective as well as a method. We have also seen that how Marx applied the historical materialism methodology in explaining class conflict and social change in society. We have also discussed the concept of mode of production and its centrality in Marxian theory. However, when we come to the discussion of Paper II, you will also learn that how an Indian Marxist sociologist A.R. Desai has applied this methodology to explain the rise of Indian nationalism in his book '*Social Background of Indian Nationalism.*'

Let us now briefly discuss the various stages of human society which Marx talked about, each being characterized by a particular mode of production. Marx believed that Western society had developed through four main epochs: *primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society and capitalist society.*

Primitive communism is represented by the societies of pre-history and provides the only example of a classless society according to Marx. Primitive communism represents the earliest stage where forces of production were extremely simple and were commonly owned. For example, in a hunting and gathering band, the earliest form of human society, the land and its products were communally owned. The men hunted and the woman gathered plant food, and the produce was shared by members of the band. Classes did not exist since all members of society shared the same relationship to the forces of production. Every member was both producer and owner, all provided labour power and shared the products of their labour. Hunting and gathering is a subsistence economy which means that production only meets basic survival needs. Classes emerge when the productive capacity of society expands beyond the level required for subsistence. This occurs when agriculture becomes the dominant mode of production.

Next stage was represented by ancient Greece and Rome where the society was divided into masters, those who owned the forces of production, and slaves, who were themselves owned by the masters. In other words, slavery is the very essence of the ancient mode of production. In this system of production the master

has the right of ownership over the slave and appropriates the products of the slave's labour. So much so, that the slave is not even allowed to reproduce. The slave is deprived of his own means of reproduction. The ruling classes in these societies acquired their wealth from slave labour. In Roman Italy, slavery on the land (agricultural slavery) assumed an importance beyond anything experienced before. In the western half of the Roman Empire, the ancient mode of production gradually transformed into the feudal mode of production.

As discussed earlier, society of medieval Europe (before fourteenth century) was largely feudal in character. Feudalism was the dominant system of social-economic and political organization in Western Europe from tenth to fifteenth century. It had emerged on account of downfall and decentralization of Roman Empire and absence of any central authority. The word 'feudal' comes from *feud* which originally meant a *fief* or land held on condition or service. In a feudal society, land was the source of the power. Thus, feudal system was based on allocation of land in return for service. Feudal society was essentially an agrarian society consisting of land owning nobility and the landless serfs who enjoyed the right to work in the lord's land.

Finally, capitalist society emerged fully with the growth of industrial mode of production and consisted of bourgeoisie who owned the forces of production and the proletariat who contributed their labour. According to Marx, capitalist society was inherently unstable and would eventually transform into a communist society.

Please note that when Marx worked on Asian countries, he used the term *Asiatic mode of production* for the primitive communism stage. The theory of the Asiatic mode of production was devised by Karl Marx around the early 1850s. It is concluded that Marx at first regarded Asian society as a special society which was stagnant and devoid of history, but that at length he overcame this view, considered that the Asiatic mode of production was begotten out of the dissolution of primitive society and was the earliest form of class society and the specific mode of production preceding the ancient mode of production, and placed this mode of production in the series of historical stages of development.

The essence of the theory has been described as “[the] suggestion ... that *Asiatic societies were held in thrall by a despotic ruling clique, residing in central cities and directly expropriating surplus from largely autarkic and generally undifferentiated village communities*”. The Asiatic mode of production is characteristic of primitive communities in which ownership of land is communal. These communities are still partly organized on the basis of kinship relations.

State controls the use of essential economic resources, and directly appropriates part of the labour and production of the community.

Sometimes, Marx and Engels stressed the dominant role the state played in Asiatic societies because of either its monopoly of land ownership, its control over irrigation systems, or its sheer political and military power. At other times, they suggested that it was the communal nature of landholding that isolated the inhabitants of different villages from one another and so made them prey to state domination.

The Asiatic mode of production does not seem to be distinguished by the subordination of slaves or serfs, but by the subordination of all workers to the State. The Asiatic mode of production constitutes one of the possible forms of transition from classless to class societies; it is also perhaps the most ancient form of this transition. It contains the contradiction of this transition, i.e., the combination of communal relations of production with emerging forms of the exploiting classes and of the State. Marx did not leave behind any systematic presentation of the history of India. He set down his observations on certain current Indian questions which attracted public attention, or drew materials from India's past and contemporary conditions of his times to illustrate parts of his more general arguments. The concept of Asiatic mode of production is therefore inadequate for an understanding of Indian history and society.

The Asiatic mode of production is a notion that has been the subject of much deliberation on the part of Marxist and non-Marxist commentators alike. The Asiatic mode of production has endured much controversy and contest from many scholars and is the most disputed mode of production outlined in the works of Marx and Engels. Questions regarding the validity of the concept of the Asiatic mode of production were raised in terms of whether or not it corresponds to the reality of certain given societies. Some have rejected the whole concept on the grounds that the socio-economic formations of pre-capitalist Asia did not differ enough from those of feudal Europe to warrant special designation. Some argue that the Asiatic mode of production is not compatible with archaeological evidence.

Let us now discuss another important concept of Marx, **alienation**.

The term alienation has had long and varied use in many fields besides sociology, including philosophy, theology, law, and psychiatry. Alienation is a socio-psychological condition which denotes a state of 'estrangement' of individuals from themselves or from others, or from a specific situation or process. This concept gained currency in the writings of Hegel and was later developed by Feuerbach before Marx adopted it in his early writings.

According to Hegel, the noted German idealist philosopher, the ultimate purpose of human existence was to express the highest form of what he called the human Geist or 'Spirit'. This Spirit was not a physical or material entity but an abstract expression of the moral and ethical qualities and capacities, the highest cultural ideals, which, he argued, were the ultimate expression of what it is to be a human being. For Hegel, material life was the practical means through which this quest for the ultimate realisation of human consciousness, the search for a really truthful awareness of reality, could be expressed. Material life, and this included such things as the economy, the political institutions of the state and other social organisations in civil society, are a means to this higher end and not an end in themselves.

As discussed earlier, Hegel uses the concepts of sublation and estrangement to describe the sense of insecurity or unease that people might experience at moments when they recognize the shortcomings of their mental understanding of reality. For Hegel, estrangement was a cognitive or psychological state of being whose resolution depends on acquiring a more thorough understanding of what reality is and how individual consciousness comes to terms with its place within it. Hegel links the term alienation to the terms estrangement and objectification in his theory of development of the human mind. In labour, man is alienated from his humanity and becomes an object for himself. Thus, he becomes estranged from the social world he has created. At the same time, however, this estrangement and objectification are necessary element for the mind to learn to know itself by becoming something else, and man can abolish this alienation if he sees himself in his own objectification. Thus for Hegel, as Marx puts it, 'all estrangement of human nature is therefore nothing but estrangement of self-consciousness.'

Several years before Marx wrote about alienated labour, Ludwig Feuerbach published *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). In this book Feuerbach not only criticized religion (as did most of the young Hegelians, including Marx and Engels), but he went a step further and tried to explain why it exists. Feuerbach bases religion in man's worldly existence and believes that, in religion, man expresses his dream of a different and better world. It is not God who has created

man, as religion teaches, but it is man who has created (the concepts of) God. Man has objectified his own being in God and then provided his creation with a creative force of his own. In this way the object, the concept of God which is created by man, has become the subject and the true subject, man, has made himself an object. In this way, man has become estranged – alienated – from himself and, according to Feuerbach, religion expresses this alienation of man from himself.

For Hegel, alienation was a meta-physical concept. Marx transformed it in to a sociological one in his *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844). Here, in his analysis of alienation, Marx takes up Hegel's theory of the importance of human labour, but he rejects the idea of the existence of a superhuman spirit and the process of its development.

According to Marx, the course of human history involves a progressive development of the forces of production, a steady increase in man's control over nature. This is paralleled by a corresponding increase in man's alienation, an increase which reaches its height in capitalist society. Alienation is a situation in which the creations of man appear to him as alien objects. They are seen as independent from their creator and invested with the power to control him. Man creates his own society but will remain alienated until he recognizes himself within his creation. Until that time he will assign an independent existence to objects, ideas and institutions and be controlled by them. In the process he loses himself, he becomes a stranger in the world he has created, he becomes alienated. Religion provides an example of men's alienation. In Marx's view, 'Man makes religion, religion does not make man'. However, members of society fail to recognize that religion is of their own making. They assign to the gods an independent power, a power to direct their actions and shape their destiny. The more man invests in religion, the more he loses himself. In Marx's words, 'The more man puts into God, the less he retains of himself'. In assigning his own powers to supernatural beings, man becomes alienated from himself. Religion appears as an external force controlling man's destiny whereas, in reality, it is man-made. Religion, though, is a reflection of a more fundamental source of alienation. It is essentially a projection of the social relationships involved in the process of production. If man is to find himself and abolish the illusions of religion, he must 'abandon a condition which requires illusions'. He must therefore eradicate the source of alienation in the economic infrastructure.

In Marx's view, productive labour is the primary, most vital human activity. History begins when men actually produce their means of subsistence, when they begin to control nature. At a minimum this involves the production of food and shelter. Marx argues that, 'The first historical act is, therefore, the production of

material life'. Production is a social enterprise since it requires cooperation. Men must work together to produce the goods and services necessary for life. From the social relationships involved in production develops a 'mode of life' which can be seen as an expression of these relationships. This mode of life shapes man's nature. In Marx's words, 'As individuals express their life so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, with what they produce and how they produce it'. Thus the nature of man and the nature of society as a whole derive primarily from the production of material life.

In Marx's view, productive labour is the primary, most vital human activity. According to Marx, man is essentially a creative being who realizes his essence and affirms himself in labour or production, a creative activity carried out in cooperation with others and by which the external world is transformed. The process of production involves transformation of human power into material objects or 'objectification' of human creative power. In other words, in the production of objects man 'objectifies' himself, he expresses and externalizes his being. However, if the objects of man's creation come to control his being, then man loses himself in the object. The act of production then results in man's alienation. This occurs when man regards the products of his labour as commodities, as articles for sale in the market place. The objects of his creation are then seen to control his existence. They are seen to be subject to impersonal forces, such as the law of supply and demand, over which man has little or no control. In Marx's words, 'the object that labour produces, its product, confronts it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer'. In this way man is estranged from the object he produces, he becomes alienated from the most vital human activity, productive labour.

Marx saw into important characteristics of industrial society – the mechanization of production and a further specialization of the division of labour – as contributing to the alienation of the work-force. However, he stressed that the capitalist economic system, rather than industrialization as such, is the primary source of alienation. In the capitalist society, division of labour and the institution of private property develop to their highest level and relations become contractual, consequently alienation also reaches the highest level. According to Marx, alienation reaches its height in capitalist society where labour is dominated by the requirements of capital, the most important of which is the demand for profit. These requirements determine levels of employment and wages, the nature and quantity of goods produced and their method of manufacture. The worker sees himself as a prisoner of market forces over which he has no control. He is subject to the impersonal mechanisms of the law of supply and demand. He is at the mercy of the periodic booms and slumps which characterize capitalist economies. The worker therefore loses control over the objects he produces and becomes

alienated from his product and the act of production. His work becomes a means to an end, a means of obtaining money to buy the goods and services necessary for his existence. Unable to fulfill his being in the products of his labour, the worker becomes alienated from himself in the act of production. Therefore the more the worker produces, the more he loses himself. In Marx's words, 'the greater this product the less he is himself'.

According to Marx, alienation manifests itself in four ways:

Firstly, the worker is alienated from the product of his labour, since what he produces is appropriated by the capitalist and the worker has no control over it.

Secondly, the worker is alienated from the act of production itself because all decisions as to how production is to be organized are taken by the capitalist. For the worker, labour ceases to offer an intrinsic satisfaction and instead becomes only a means for survival. It becomes a compulsion forced from without and is no more an end in itself. In fact, work becomes a commodity to be sold and its only value to the worker is its saleability. The labour therefore is not voluntary but forced, it is *forced* labour.

Thirdly, in addition to the fact that wage labour alienates man from his product and his productive activity, which distinguishes him from animals, he also becomes alienated from his species. After all, according to Marx (and Hegel) his "species-being" is determined by his conscious productive activity, which is also a goal in itself. Under conditions of wage labour, however, labour is not a goal in itself, but only a means of maintaining life. This too means that what distinguishes man from animals, the free, conscious activity of life, disappears. In other words, according to Marx, man is distinguished from the animal by his creative ability to do labour but due to above mentioned aspects of alienation, man loses his distinctly human quality and gets alienated from his real human nature or his "species-being." The capitalist system stratifies man, destroys the human qualities and renders man to a state worse than animal. No animal has to work for its survival at other's bidding while man has to do that in a capitalist system.

Fourthly, the form of wage labour prevalent in the capitalist society also leads to social alienation. Consequently, man ultimately becomes alienated from that which is a product of his actions: society, as in the case of Feuerbach's concept of God, society becomes estranged from the individual and directed against him. "Society" then becomes a force that lives its own life over which no one has control. In other words, the worker in a capitalist system is also socially alienated, because social relations became market relations, in which each man is judged by his position in the market, rather than his human qualities.

Capital accumulation generates its own norms which reduces people to the level of commodities. Workers become merely factors in the operation of capital and their activities are dominated by the requirements of profitability rather than by their human needs.

In Marx's view, the market forces which are seen to control production are not impersonal mechanisms beyond the control of man, they are man-made. Alienation is therefore the result of human activity rather than external forces with an existence independent of man. If the products of labour are alien to the worker, they must therefore belong to somebody. Thus Marx argues that, 'The alien being to whom the labour and the product of the labour belongs, whom the labour serves and who enjoys its product, can only be man himself. If the product of labour does not belong to the worker but stands over against him as an alien power, this is only possible in that it belongs to another man apart from the worker'. This man is the capitalist who owns and controls the forces of production and the products of labour, who appropriates for himself the wealth that labour produces. Alienation therefore springs not from impersonal market forces but from relationships between men. An end to alienation thus involves a radical change in the pattern of these relationships. This will come when the contradiction between man's consciousness and objective reality is resolved. Then man will realize that the situation in which he finds himself is man-made and therefore subject to change by human action.

Given the priority Marx assigns to economic factors, an end to alienation involves a radical change in the economic infrastructure. In particular, it requires the abolition of private property and its replacement by communal ownership of the forces of production, that is the replacement of capitalism by communism. In communist society conflicts of interest will disappear and antagonistic groups such as capitalists and workers will be a thing of the past. The products of labour will no longer be appropriated by some at the expense of others. With divisions in society eradicated, man will be at one with his fellows, a truly social being. As such he will not lose himself in the products of his labour. He will produce both for himself and others at one and the same time. In this situation 'each of us would have doubly affirmed himself and his fellow man'. Since he is at one with his fellows, the products of man's labour in which he objectifies himself will not result in the loss of self. In productive labour each member of society contributes to the well-being of all and so expresses both his individual and social being. The objects which he produces are owned and controlled at once by himself and his fellow man.

The critique of capitalism developed by the American economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis is strongly influenced by Marx's views. Like Marx they see capitalism as a repressive and exploitive system concerned with the maximization of profit rather than the satisfaction of human need. Following Marx, they argue that an understanding of the nature of work in capitalist society is only possible by seeing it in relation to the economic and social system in which it is set. Thus, what goes on in the workplace, the social organization of work, can only be explained by reference to the structure of class and power relationships in society as a whole. Bowles and Gintis's major contribution is their rejection of the view that the nature of work in capitalist society is shaped by the demands of efficiency and the requirements of technology. They claim that 'the alienated character of work as a social activity cannot be ascribed to the nature of "modern technology", but is, rather, a product of the class and power relations of economic life'.

Please note that the theory of alienation was unknown until the 1930s but, particularly since the 1960s, it has become extremely important and much discussed and used in so-called humanistic Marxism. It was used to criticize the "affluent society" of the Western world, but it was also used by many opposition figures in Western Europe who analyzed and criticized "actually existing socialism." Since Marx, 'alienation' has undergone a lot of change of meaning. It has become one of the important concepts in mainstream sociology, especially in the writings of the American sociologists of 50's and 60's. Let us now discuss the view of other scholars on alienation.

Max Weber disagreed with Marx regarding the factors leading to alienation and believed that alienation was an inevitable feature of modern industrial society irrespective of whether the means of production are owned privately or collectively. For Weber the cause of alienation lies in the rationalization of social life and predominance of bureaucratic organizations in modern industrial societies. The compulsive conformity to impersonal rules in bureaucratic organizations renders people into mere cogs in giant machines and destroys their human qualities.

The American sociologist C. Wright Mills, in a study of the American middle classes entitled *White Collar*, applies Marx's concept of alienation to non-manual (white-collar) workers. Mills states that the expansion of the tertiary sector of the economy in advanced capitalist societies has led to a 'shift from skills with things to skills with persons'. Just as manual workers become like commodities by selling their 'skills with things', a similar process occurs when non-manual workers sell their 'skills with persons' on the open market. Mills refers to this sector of the economy as the 'personality market'. A market value is attached to

personality characteristics and as a result people sell pieces of their personality. Therefore managers and executives are employed not simply because of their academic qualifications and experience but for their ability to get on with people. The salesman is given a job for his apparent warmth, friendliness and sincerity. However, because aspects of personality are bought and sold like any other commodity, individuals are alienated from their true selves. Their expression of personality at work is false and insincere. Mills gives the example of a girl working in a department store, smiling, concerned and attentive to the whims of the customer. He states, 'in the course of her work, because her personality becomes, the instrument of an alien purpose, the salesgirl becomes self-alienated'. At work she is not herself. In the salesroom, in the boardroom, in the staffroom, in the conference room, men and women are prostituting their personalities in pursuit of personal gain. Mills regards American society as a 'great salesroom' filled with hypocrisy, deceit insincerity. Rather than expressing their true personalities and feelings, people assume masks of friendliness, concern and interest in order to manipulate others to earn a living.

Similarly, the French sociologist and journalist Andre Gorz argues that alienation at work leads the worker to seek fulfillment in leisure. However, just as the capitalist system shapes his working day, it also shapes his leisure activities. It creates the passive consumer who finds satisfaction in the consumption of the product of the manufacturing and entertainment industries. Leisure simply provides a 'means of escape and oblivion', a means of living with the problem rather than an active solution to it. Thus in capitalist society, man is alienated from both work and leisure. The two spheres of life reinforce each other.

A similar picture is painted by Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man*, though his remarks apply to both capitalist and East European communist societies. Marcuse sees the potential for personal development crushed in advanced industrial society. Work is 'exhausting, stupefying, inhuman slavery'. Leisure simply involves 'modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong this stupefaction'. It is based on and directed by 'false needs' which are largely imposed by a mass media controlled by the establishment. Needs are false if they do not result in true self-fulfillment and real satisfaction. Marcuse claims that, 'Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate belong to this category of false needs'. Members of society no longer seek fulfillment in themselves and in their relationships with others. Instead, 'The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment'. The circle is now complete: industrial man is alienated from every sphere of his life.

Marxian perspectives on the nature of work and leisure are open to a number of criticisms. Firstly, they are based partly on a rather vague picture of what man could and ought to be. It can be argued that this view says more about the values of particular sociologists than it does about man's essential being. Secondly, they tend to ignore the meanings held by members of society. If people claim fulfillment in work and/or leisure, there is a tendency to dismiss their views as a product of false class consciousness. Thirdly, Marxian perspectives are very general. As Alasdair Clayre notes, they tend to lump together diverse occupations and leisure activities and create a simple model of 'man in industrial society'.

Where Marx was pessimistic about the division of labour in society, Emile Durkheim (a functionalist) was cautiously optimistic. Marx saw the specialized division of labour trapping the worker in his occupational role and dividing society into antagonistic social classes. Durkheim saw a number of problems arising from specialization of industrial society but believed the promise of the division of labour outweighed the problems. Whereas Marx's solution to the problem of alienation was radical – the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by socialism – Durkheim believed that the solution to anomie can be provided within the existing framework of industrial society. He outlined his views in *The Division of Labour in Society*, first published in 1893. Durkheim saw alienation as a consequence of the condition of *anomie*, which refers to the breakdown of norms in society leading to experienced normlessness. You will learn about it more when we'll discuss the ideas of Emile Durkheim.

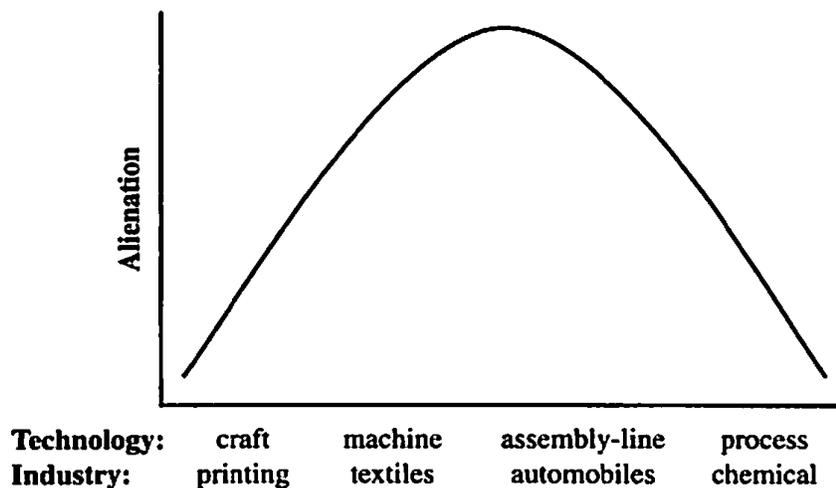
Another sociologist Melvin Seeman used the insights of Marx, Emile Durkheim and others to construct what is often considered a model to recognize the five prominent features of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. However, Seeman simply treats them as subjective dispositions which can be measured with the help of attitude scales. Seeman later added a sixth element (cultural estrangement), although this element does not feature prominently in later discussions of his work. Seeman was part of a surge in alienation research during the mid-20th century when he published his paper, "*On the Meaning of Alienation*", in 1959.

An American sociologist, Robert Blauner, in his famous study entitled *Alienation and Freedom*, examines the behaviour and attitudes of manual workers in the printing, textile, automobile and chemical industries. He sees production technology as the major factor influencing the degree of alienation that workers experience. Blauner defines alienation as 'a general syndrome made up of different objective conditions and subjective feelings and states which emerge from certain relationships between workers and socio-technical settings of employment'. 'Objective conditions' refer mainly to the technology employed in particular

industries. Blauner argues that technology largely determines the amount of judgement and initiative required from workers and the degree of control they have over their work. From an analysis of various forms of technology, he assesses the degree of alienation they produce. 'Subjective feelings and states' refer to the attitudes and feeling that workers have towards their work. This information is obtained from questionnaires.

Blauner considers workers' attitudes as a valid measure of their level of alienation. Thus if workers express satisfaction with their work, they are not alienated. He thus rejects Marxian views which argue that workers in capitalist society are automatically alienated because of their objective position in the relations of production. From a Marxian perspective, if workers express satisfaction with their jobs, this is an indication of false consciousness. Blauner divides the concept of alienation into four dimensions: the degree of control workers have over their work; the degree of meaning and sense of purpose they find in work; the degree to which they are socially integrated into their work; and the degree to which they are involved in their work. In terms of these four dimensions, the alienated worker has a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self estrangement.

Robert Blauner, on the basis of his findings, presented the relationship between technology and alienation in the form of an **inverted U-curve**. According to him, level of alienation is low in craft industries like printing but it increases in the machine-based textile industry. Blauner saw alienation reaching its height with mass production industry based on mechanized assembly line technology like automobile industry but in process industries with high degree of automation, alienation tends to decline because workers feel more involved and responsible.



Blauner's Model of Alienation

Please note that Blauner believes that automation reverses the 'historic trend' towards increasing alienation in manufacturing industry. It restores control, meaning, integration and involvement to the worker. Blauner examines work in the chemical industry which involves the most recent development in production technology. The oil and chemical industries employ automated continuous process technology whereby the raw materials enter the production process, the various stages of manufacture are automatically controlled and conducted by machinery, and the finished product emerges 'untouched by human hand'. Although the product is manufactured automatically, the worker has considerable control over and responsibility for production. Work in chemical plants involves monitoring and checking control dials which measure factors such as temperature and pressure. Readings indicate whether or not adjustments must be made to the process. Blauner states that these decisions require 'considerable discretion and initiative'. Work also involves the maintenance and repair of expensive and complicated machinery. Skilled technicians range freely over the factory floor; there is considerable variety in their work compared to the routine machine minding and assembly line production. In direct contrast to assembly line workers, none of the process workers felt they were controlled or dominated by their technology.

Compared to craft work, Blauner argues that in continuous process technology, 'the dominant job requirement is no longer manual skill but responsibility'. This emphasis on responsibility restores meaning and purpose to work; it is an 'important source of satisfaction and accomplishment'. Process technology halts the increasingly specialized division of labour. It integrates the entire production process and since workers are responsible for the overall process, they can see and appreciate their contribution to the finished product. Their sense of purpose is increased by the fact that process workers operate in teams with collective responsibility for the smooth running of the machinery. Again, this encourages the individual worker to feel a part of the overall production process.

However, as can be seen from the discussion above the latter-day meaning of alienation has undergone change. It is no longer based upon objective conditions alone rather it has come to be identified with subjective dispositions.

Marx: An Assessment

We conclude our discussion by making some observations about the impact of Marx's ideas on social theory and on the social theorists who came after him. As we know that Karl Marx never saw himself in the role of a sociologist, his prime concern being to bring about a revolutionary transformation in the then contemporary European society. Nevertheless, ideas of Karl Marx have greatly contributed to the development of modern sociology. In fact, he is the founder of the 'conflict tradition' in modern sociology and his ideas have stimulated a lively debate which has further enriched the discipline.

Firstly, Marx contributed a new perspective and a new methodology to study the social phenomena. He highlighted the role of economic factors in shaping various institutions of society. This has been accepted as an academic methodology in social sciences. The long-lasting significance of Marx's theory of historical materialism is that he goes far beyond the point of just adopting a materialist orientation in philosophical terms, but puts this approach to work in developing a detailed theory about the emergence of modern capitalist society. To the extent that Marx's theory accounts successfully for the emergence of capitalist society during the 19th century, this reinforces the general reliability, not only of his own theory of historical change, but of the materialist and realist approaches in social theory as a whole.

However, particular criticism has been directed towards the priority that Marx assigns to economic factors in his explanation of social structure and social change. Max Weber's study of ascetic Protestantism argued that religious beliefs provided the ethics, attitudes and motivations for the development of capitalism. Since ascetic Protestantism preceded the advent of capitalism, Weber maintained that at certain times and places aspects of the superstructure can play a primary role in directing change. The priority given to economic factors has also been criticized by elite theorists who have argued that control of the machinery of government rather than ownership of the forces of production provides the basis for power. They point to the example of communist societies where, despite the fact that the forces of production are communally owned, power is largely monopolized by a political and bureaucratic elite.

Secondly, having produced a painstaking account of how societies move on under pressure from developments in the means of production combined with changes in the nature of property relations, the simple message that Marx and Engels want to get across in *The Communist Manifesto* is that, as surely as night follows day, the capitalist mode of production is about to be replaced by a socialist or communist mode of production. The only remaining question was exactly *when*

this might happen and whether some kind of intervention might be required to make sure it did. Marx and Engels certainly felt that by forming the Communist Party, and by spelling out the principles of historical change according to their own theory in the *Manifesto*, they could, as it were, give history a bit of a push in the right direction. The working class, it seemed, could not be relied upon to make history happen as it should, but would need the help of 'fresh elements of enlightenment and progress' supplied even by the bourgeoisie to show them the way. There are strong hints, at least in sections of the *Manifesto* drafted by Engels, that the overthrow of capitalism was unlikely to be a peaceful affair: the Communists 'openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win'.

Equally certain, however, is the fact that the validity of Marx and Engel's theory would have been considerably strengthened if a revolution *had* occurred in modern society during the latter part of the 19th century. The fact that this has not yet happened rather suggests either that the theory was not complete or that they had a poor sense of timing. Critics argue that Marx's predictions about the downfall of capitalism have not come true. Contrary to his belief, socialism has triumphed in predominantly peasant societies whereas capitalist societies show no signs of destructive class war. And Marx's classless and stateless society is an utopia; there can be no society without an authority structure or a regulatory mechanism which inevitably leads to a crystallization of social relations between the rulers and the ruled, with inherent possibilities of internal contradiction and conflict. His theory of class conflict, even though no longer relevant to a present day society, has been an immensely valuable contribution. It has stimulated further debate and research which enriched sociology as a discipline.

Turning to his idea of '**communist society**', critics have argued that history has not borne out the promise of communism contained in Marx's writings. Socialist or communist societies are societies in which the forces of production are communally owned. Marx believed that public ownership of the forces of production is the first and fundamental step towards the creation of an egalitarian society. This would abolish at a stroke the antagonistic classes of capitalist society. Classes, defined in terms of the relationship of social groups to the forces of production, would now share the same relationship-that of ownership-to the forces of production. Social inequality would not, however, disappear overnight. There would be a period of transition during which the structures of inequality produced by capitalism would be dismantled. Marx was rather vague about the exact nature of the communist utopia which should eventually emerge from the abolition of private property. He believed that the state would eventually

‘wither away’ and that the consumption of goods and services would be based on the principle of ‘to each according to his needs’. Whether he envisaged a disappearance of all forms of social inequality, such as prestige and power differentials, is not entirely clear. One thing that is clear, though, is that the reality of contemporary communism is a long way from Marx’s dreams. Significant social inequalities are present in communist regimes and there are few, if any, signs of a movement towards equality. The dictatorship of the proletariat clings stubbornly to power and there is little indication of its eventual disappearance.

Eastern European communism has not resulted in the abolition of social stratification. Identifiable strata, which can be distinguished in terms of differential economic rewards, occupational prestige and power, are present in all socialist states. Frank Parkin identifies the following strata in East European communist societies: White-collar intelligentsia (professional, managerial and administrative positions), Skilled manual positions, Lower or unqualified white-collar positions, and Unskilled manual positions. Although income inequalities are not as great as in capitalist societies, they are still significant.

Milovan Djilas, a Yugoslavian writer, argues that those in positions of authority in communist societies use power to further their own interests. He claims that the bourgeoisie of the West have been replaced by a new ruling class in the East. This ‘new class’ is made up of ‘political bureaucrats’, many of whom are high ranking officials of the Communist Party. Although in legal terms, the forces of production are communally owned, Djilas argues that in practice they are controlled by the new class for its own benefit. Political bureaucrats direct and control the economy and monopolize decisions about the distribution of income and wealth. If anything, Djilas sees the new class as more exploitive than the bourgeoisie. Its power is even greater because it is unchecked by political parties. Djilas claims that in a single party state political bureaucrats monopolize power. In explaining the source of their power, Djilas maintains the Marxian emphasis on the forces of production. He argues that the new class owes its power to the fact it controls the forces of production. Others have reversed this argument claiming that in communist societies economic power derives from political power. Thus T.B. Bottomore argues that the new class ‘controls the means of production because it has political power’.

The German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf has modified the Marxian theory of class and class struggle to make it applicable to contemporary industrial societies. He examined the nature of conflict in industry with particular reference to the role of trade unions. He argues that by the latter half of 20th century trade unions were generally accepted as legitimate by employers and the state.

Dahrendorf regards this as the major step towards industrial democracy and the institutionalization of industrial conflict.

Trade unions form the major groups representing the interests of employees in general and the manual working class in particular. A number of sociologists have argued that largely through trade unionism, the working class has been integrated into capitalist society. Conflict between employers and employees has been institutionalized in terms of an agreed upon set of rules and procedures. The net result is increasing stability in industrial society. No longer is the working class seen as a threat to social order a Marx believed; there is less and less chance of the kind of class conflict which Marx predicted.

Dahrendorf argues that the voice of the working class is growing louder through its formal associations. He sees a trend towards a more equal balance of power between employers and employees and the development of what he terms, 'industrial democracy'. He argues that with the formation of workers' interest groups a number of processes occurred which furthered the integration of the working class into the structure of capitalist society. Firstly, negotiating bodies were set up for formal negotiation between representatives of employer and workers. Such negotiation take place within a framework of agreed upon rules and procedures. Conflict is largely contained and resolved within this framework. Secondly, should negotiations break down, a machinery of arbitration has been institutionalized in terms of which outside bodies mediate between the parties in dispute. Thirdly, within each company workers are formally represented, for example by shop stewards, who represent their interest on a day-to-day basis. Finally, there is a tendency 'towards an institutionalization of workers participation in industrial management'.

The American sociologist Seymour M. Lipset has also argued that trade unions 'serve to integrate their members in the larger body politic and give them a basis for loyalty to the system'. Via trade unions, the interests of the working class are represented at the highest level and in this way the working class as a whole is integrated into 'the larger body politic'. The picture which emerges from this discussion is one of fully-fledged interest groups – trade unions – effectively representing workers' interests. Industrial conflict has been institutionalized and the working class has been integrated into both the capitalist enterprise and society as a whole.

However, although Marx's predictions regarding the future of capitalist societies have been largely disproved by the developments of history in 20th century, yet Marx's concepts of historical materialism, class and class conflict and his theory of social change (if shorn of the prophetic elements) remains a valuable

contribution to social sciences in understanding the social structure and change in the society.

Thirdly, Marx's concept of alienation is another important contribution to sociology. The concept of alienation was further developed by other sociologists like C.Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, Seeman, Robert Blauner, etc., to adapt it to contemporary societies. However, critics argue that Marx misjudged the extent of alienation in the average worker. The great depth of alienation and frustration which Marx "witnessed" among the workers of his day is not "typical" of today's capitalism or its worker who tends to identify increasingly with a number of "meaningful" groups—religious, ethnic, occupational and local. This is not to deny the existence of alienation but to point out that alienation results more from the structure of bureaucracy and of mass society than from economic exploitation. Further, Robert Blauner believes that automation reverses the 'historic trend' towards increasing alienation in manufacturing industry and produced non-alienated worker.

Herbert Marcuse's *Re-examination of the Concept of Revolution* is a significant contribution to Marxist sociology. According to him, "the *Marxian concept of a revolution* carried by the majority of the exploited masses, culminating in the 'seizure of power' and in the setting up of a proletarian dictatorship which initiates socialization, is 'over-taken' by the *historical development*: it pertains to a stage of capitalist productivity and organization which has been overtaken. He argues that although the Marxian prophecy of the downfall of capitalism has not come true, Marx's concept of revolution which is at once a historical concept and a dialectical concept is relevant in two different contexts. Firstly, in the capitalist countries, there is a standing opposition whose members are drawn from the ghetto population and the middle-class intelligentsia, especially among students. These groups are vocal; they reject the system, form counter-cultures and profess adherence to radical political beliefs and new lifestyles. Yet, they cannot become agents of revolutionary change unless actively supported by a politically articulate working class freed from the shackles of bureaucratic trade unions and establishment-oriented party machinery. Secondly, in the predominantly agrarian countries of the Third World, there are peasant revolutions and national liberation movements.

Marcuse also perceives a "fateful link" between the two revolutionary movements. In the first place, the national liberation movements in the developing countries "are expressive of the internal contradictions of the global capitalist system"—the colonialism and economic exploitation perpetrated by the corporate capitalism. This position is actively endorsed by Andre Gunder Frank whose extensive research in Latin America has led him to conclude that the

underdevelopment of the Third World countries is initiated and aggravated by the capitalist system of the developed countries which have satellized and exploited developing countries. Thus the radical protest in capitalist countries and the revolutionary tendencies in the developing nations are closely related—in their opposition to multinational corporate capitalism and their orientation to the imperatives of a global revolution.

In addition

Marxism – an evaluation

Strengths

1. Marx drew attention to the plight of the disadvantaged in capitalist society and demonstrated how various aspects of the social structure function to perpetuate large-scale social inequality.
2. In providing a critique of capitalism, Marx demonstrated that it is neither inevitable nor indestructible. In doing so he challenged the widely held assumption that capitalism has an independent existence and therefore he demystified the power of the capitalist.
3. Marx reaffirmed that it is the labour of the worker that sustains capitalism and without it capitalism cannot survive. He suggested that worker unity and a common desire to overthrow the bourgeoisie and halt oppression can be a powerful force for social change. This gives workers the knowledge and means by which to liberate themselves.
4. Marx's concern with human emancipation is worthy of credit. Prior to his work, sociologists had been largely interested in developing an understanding of the *status quo* rather than engaging in critical analysis motivated by a desire to improve the lot of individual members of society. Little attention had been given to issues such as human potential and creativity.
5. In adopting a dialectical approach, Marx provided an alternative to previous theories that had failed to recognize the subtle relationships between aspects of the social world and the way in which interconnections influence that world. He demonstrated how social relationships can be as powerful as social structures.
6. Marx generated a number of concepts (for example, the free market economy, commodity fetishism, reification, ideology, alienation) that captured the imagination of later sociologists, providing them with new ways to interpret and explore the world. Many of these concepts are still of interest and in use today.

Limitations

1. Perhaps the most common criticism levelled at Marx is that he predicted a revolution, but this has yet to occur. Some regard this as sufficient grounds for entirely dismissing his contribution to sociology. Societies that did adopt and implement broadly Marxist principles to run their economies and infrastructures such as the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, East Germany were regarded as authoritarian and repressive. These countries eventually adopted a pro-capitalist stance and became subdivided along quasi-ethnic/religious lines, often after military conflict which still continues today. China, Cuba and North Korea are three remaining overtly Marxist-based societies.
2. Linked to the above, some have argued that Marx underestimated the flexibility of capitalism – that is, that the bourgeoisie can make concessions to the proletariat – for example, offering higher wages and voting rights, allowing the private ownership of commodities/property and so on – without relinquishing their power.
3. Marx is also criticized for being too radical. His revolutionary leanings have led conservative and liberal thinkers to depict him as ‘a blood-crazed fanatic’. Much of the ‘revolutionary’ fervour was written in political pamphlets of his day for propaganda purposes. A full and scholarly account of the development of the revolution was never contained in his academic work such as *Das Kapital*.
4. Another common criticism of Marx is that he was ideologically biased. In particular, critics suggest that Marx placed too much emphasis on the economy at the expense of other influential aspects of the social structure. Further criticism is directed at Marx’s political stance. It has been argued that his enthusiasm for political decentralization led him to dismiss the value of political pluralism in protecting individual rights.
5. Marxist theory has also been criticized in the light of the collapse of socialist and communist societies, which have been replaced by capitalist-orientated economies. Communism was Marx’s utopia, providing the ultimate conditions for the fulfilment of human potential and creativity. It would emerge from the contradictions of capitalism and provide a stable social structure based on mutual cooperation and consent. Marxist theory cannot explain the collapse of communism and return to capitalism because it is something that Marx never envisaged.

Neo-Marxism

A number of writers have sought to build upon Marx's theory. Those who have worked within the guidelines set down by his original works are termed neo-Marxists. Those who have gone beyond the traditional boundaries of Marxian theory are termed Post-Marxists. The work of neo-Marxists will be discussed in this section. Neo-Marxists have sought to develop Marxist theory in the light of increasing criticism of economic determinism. The discussion here will focus on the work of one neo-Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, to demonstrate the scope of neo-Marxist analysis.

Gramsci (1891-1937), perhaps the most influential writer in the neo-Marxist tradition, rejected the overarching role of the economy in bringing about a communist revolution. For Gramsci, while the effect of the economy cannot be denied, the economic inequalities of capitalism alone are not sufficient to generate class consciousness among the proletariat. The proletariat do not have the capacity to generate revolutionary ideas from within; instead revolutionary ideology will be generated by revolutionary intellectuals and put into practice by the proletariat.

Gramsci saw collective ideas rather than social structures such as the economy as the key to understanding social life and social change. He sought to analyse the source of ideas in society, giving particular attention to the source of dominant ideas and how such ideas are transmitted to the masses. For Gramsci, the key to bourgeois domination is the control of ideas. Thus for a revolution to be successful, the proletariat will not only need to seize control of the means of production but also provide moral and cultural leadership.

Central to Gramsci's analysis is the concept of 'hegemony', which he defined as 'moral and philosophical leadership which manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules – leadership designed to create a popular, collective will'. The consent of the governed is achieved simply by leading them to believe that the ruling class are the most suitable group to wield power in society.

For Gramsci, the mass media are an important tool for achieving ideological control of the masses. They can be used to present a particular world view that is assimilated into the collective consciousness of the masses and becomes their view. This is how the media can be used to shape people's ideas about social events and this may be used to the advantage of powerful groups in society at the expense of the powerless.

Neo-Marxism – an evaluation

Strengths

1. Gramsci's focus on hegemony provides an alternative to the economic determinism of traditional Marxism. Economic Marxists tend to emphasize the economic and coercive aspects of state determinism. In contrast Gramsci suggests that domination stems from acceptance of the ideology that perpetuates ruling-class power.
2. Gramsci provides an alternative route to revolution – implying that seizing control of the means of production is not enough. Revolutionaries will only achieve total domination if they gain cultural leadership over the rest of society.
3. Gramsci pinpoints the significant role of education in revolution. In his view, class consciousness will not simply emerge as workers become aware of their common experience of oppression. Instead, intellectual enlightenment is vital to provide momentum to revolutionary action. Gramsci highlights that the communist party has a vital role to play here – drawing public attention to those who can provide the inspiration for revolutionary change.
4. Perhaps Gramsci more aptly demonstrates the value of dialectical analysis than Marx. His meshing of cultural awareness, moral and philosophical leadership and political and economic control provide a more sophisticated and probable analysis of state and societal control than Marx's more one-dimensional material analysis.
5. Gramsci's acknowledgement that complete ideological dominance is rare and that society is characterized by interest groups with conflicting philosophies seeking ideological dominance can be more easily aligned with Western democracy than the totalitarian picture painted by Marx. In Gramsci's work there is acknowledgement not just of the sources of power of the dominant group, but also the existence and scope of potential successors.

Limitations

1. Gramsci's more humane, open and gradualistic analysis of socialist strategy has been subject to severe criticism by more orthodox Marxists for being too liberal and for denying the historical importance of the laws of historical materialism – the process whereby social change happened through the clash between material interests in society.

2. Communist parties have been critical of Gramsci's assertion that the proletariat are dependent upon education to become revolutionary. This denies their power to bring about change in their own right.
3. The limited impact of the communist parties in the West could be seen as eroding the power of Gramsci's analysis. He speculated that radical intellectuals would become increasingly involved with the working classes to spread revolutionary fervour. If anything the working class have become more conservative and accepting of the status quo, and more resistant to communist politics. Far from appealing to the masses in society, the communist parties and their direct successors today appear to attract only minority groups (for example, students, women, blacks) who are marginalized from the working class and thus could be construed as non-proletarian.

Critical theory

Critical theory is associated with the work of the Frankfurt School, a group of German neo-Marxists who sought to address what they perceived to be the weakness of Marxism: its tendency towards economic determinism. Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse argued for a more sophisticated interpretation of the social structure, with emphasis on aspects of society that could contribute to 'domination' – that is, the way the system dominates, forces and blinkers people so as to ensure the reproduction of the prevailing social and economic situation. Critical theorists provide a critique of modern society. Central to this is the analysis of culture and its role in perpetuating the masses.

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), a German-American philosopher, sociologist, and political theorist, associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, devotes much of his writing to what he terms 'one-dimensional culture', which he sees as pervasive in contemporary society. He identifies a powerful role for the culture industry in creating and disseminating a false culture to stupefy (to make somebody unable to think clearly) the masses and create false needs. This serves to prevent thoughts of revolutionary acts against dominant groups. By spreading a pre-packaged set of ideas, the culture industry is able to subjugate the masses. People become obsessed with trivia and gossip, fashion and fad (short lived trend), and wish to keep abreast of popular culture rather than develop revolutionary insight into their social circumstances and routes to liberation.

Critical theorists consider that modern society is irrational, oppressive and takes away the basic features of human life, particularly the ability to transform the environment and make collective rational choices about life. However, modern

society is also characterized by rationalization – a process whereby knowledge and objects become means to ends rather than ends in themselves. This is associated with the emergence of technocratic thinking, which emphasizes domination at the expense of emancipation. The proponents of the Frankfurt School call the rationalized, bureaucratized structures that control modern culture the ‘culture industry’. The culture industry is seen as responsible for producing a phoney culture that dupes and pacifies the masses. If those in the Frankfurt School are right, it should be possible to find evidence that the media draw attention to trivia, presenting it as important and diverting attention away from ‘real’ issues that might lead the masses to be critical of the current social system and structures.

Critical theory – an evaluation

Strengths

1. Critical theory gives further credence to the argument that social structure cannot be understood in economic terms alone.
2. By focusing attention on the role of culture in perpetuating ruling-class power, critical theorists alert the masses to the potential threat posed by cultural influences.
3. Critical theorists provide much food for thought in their critiques. They demonstrate that everything is open to criticism. This could be a source of new knowledge that leads to social change, in contrast with unquestioning acceptance of the *status quo*.
4. By linking the economic, social and cultural worlds, critical theorists provide a useful working example of the potential of dialectical analysis.

Limitations

1. Critics argue that critical theorists contribute little to sociology, except a range of empty criticisms.
2. Critical theory has been condemned for paying insufficient attention to the historical and comparative context in which events occur.
3. Critical theory has been seen as overemphasizing the influence of culture at the expense of economic factors.

4. Critical theory implies that cultural forces have eroded the revolutionary potential of the working classes. Traditional Marxists would disagree.

Jurgen Habermas

Jürgen Habermas (1929 -) is a German sociologist and philosopher in the tradition of critical theory. Habermas's theory is an interesting development of critical theory. Habermas suggests that 'communication' holds the key to understanding relationships and structures in the modern world. He sees communication as the key to emancipation and argues that contemporary society is oppressive because communication is distorted. Communication is not an expression of truth but the spreading of ideology designed to promote the interests of the powerful. For the masses to be liberated, the two main causes of distorted communication – that is, 'legitimations' and 'ideology', need to be eliminated. In contrast to earlier critical theorists, who were pessimistic about the future of society, Habermas presents an optimistic view based upon his idea of utopia. For Habermas (1970), utopia is a 'rational' society where barriers that distort communication are removed and ideas can be openly presented and defended against criticism. He does, however, see a place for critical thinking in his ideal society. For Habermas, when distorted communication has been overcome, knowledge will emerge from society itself. Critical appraisal of competing arguments will ensure that what emerges as truth will stem from a consensus of opinion. Habermas calls this state the 'ideal speech situation', ideal because it is not force or power that determines which arguments win out, but the quality of the arguments themselves.

Habermas provides an innovative interpretation of oppression to those who condemn critical theory as offering more criticisms than positive contributions. In outlining his utopia, he also provides the masses with something to aspire to and some indication of the barriers that stand in the way. However, he fails to address the question of how these barriers could and should be removed. This pitfall was identified much earlier by Marx, who refused to provide an example of his utopia for fear of diverting attention away from the need to use criticisms of current society as a basis for promoting the necessary conditions for social change.

Conflict theory

Conflict theory has developed Marx's ideas on the dominance of social groups. The theory first emerged in response to the work of the structural functionalists, who proposed that social life can best be understood through consensus theories. Consensus theories see shared norms and values as fundamental to society, focus on social order based on tacit agreements, and suggest that social change occurs in a slow and orderly way. In contrast, conflict theory emphasizes the dominance of some social groups by others, sees social groups as based on manipulation and control by dominant groups, and suggests that social change occurs rapidly and in a disorderly fashion as subordinate groups overthrow dominant groups.

Perhaps the most famous work in the tradition of conflict theory is that by Ralph Dahrendorf, who produced an innovative theory of social conflict and change. Ralph Dahrendorf (1929-2009) was a German-British sociologist, philosopher, political scientist and liberal politician. Dahrendorf's theory is more sophisticated than those that preceded it. Simple conflict theories picture society as a confused battleground, with a variety of groups fighting each other, constantly forming and reforming, making and breaking alliances. Dahrendorf, however, sees conflict in terms of a kaleidoscope of overlapping interest groups competing for power and authority. His interpretation of power and authority is informed by Weber's idea that power involves reliance on force or coercion whereas authority involves legitimized control.

Dahrendorf sees authority as crucial, for the mere existence of authority is enough to create conflict. He looks at sources of authority and the impact that such authorities have upon individuals and the social structure, and finds that power and authority are divisive as those in power seek to maintain their position and those without power seek to gain it. Dahrendorf regards authority as arising from the occupation of certain social positions, rather than stemming from individuals themselves. Thus authority is transient and is defined in each social situation by the positions that are occupied. Potentially, an individual could wield authority in one social situation but not in another. However, the position and the individual cannot be separated and it is quite possible for an individual to experience conflict between the interests inherent in their role and their personal interests. In Dahrendorf's view, interests unite groups at the top and at the bottom of the social structure. Interests are construed as 'structurally generated orientations' because they emerge from the actions of people in defined social positions. There is conflict between the interests of those in power and those without power. This is because those in power seek to maintain the status quo and

those without power seek to change it. Thus the legitimation of authority is always precarious.

Dahrendorf (1959) proposed an analysis of three groups in society whose presence can be used to explain conflict: (1) quasi-groups – that is, groups of people who share similar social positions and thus similar role interests; (2) interest groups – that is, groups within quasi-groups with common modes of behaviour, structure, form of organization and goals; and (3) conflict groups – that is, interest groups that engage in group conflict. Such an analysis explores why small pockets of conflict occur within larger expanses of social cohesion. Dahrendorf provides a link between conflict groups and social change. He argues that intense conflict leads to radical change. If violence is involved, this change will be sudden. The potential for social change is omnipresent because the legitimacy of authority is precarious.

Globalization

Marx referred to globalization in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and described a process whereby industrial capitalism would be transported to every corner of the world in the push for developing world markets and employing cheap labour. We must suppose that Marx thought the ‘transportation’ would involve conflict of some description. Globalization in its early form of imperialism and colonialism is characterized as Western countries literally plundering the resources and labour of other countries. More recent examples include what Ritzer (2008) has called the ‘McDonaldization’ of the world – developed and undeveloped – whereby the US in particular has transported and transplanted its brand of culture from Mickey Mouse to Coca-Cola to Intel Pentium processors. Global Americanization has both an economic and military force. The use of military means to overthrow governments seen as a threat to America has been a feature of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century and had earlier legacies in Latin America. Undercover American activities conducted by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) are now known to have brought about the overthrow of democratically elected governments in Guatemala, Chile and Nicaragua in the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s. In more recent examples such as Afghanistan and Iraq the use of military force has been overt and largely accepted by other powerful industrial nations in the West. The Marxist writer David Harvey (2005) has argued that the continuing superiority of America – militarily and economically – is mainly about making sure of a long-term and secure supply of oil, sources of which lie in the Middle East. Thus the linking of Iraq (described by George Bush as part of the axis of evil) with the 9/11 attack on America by al-Qaeda and the global treat of terrorism has had a two-fold effect – justifying the

war in the Middle East and diverting attention away from problems at home such as economic recession, social inequality and poverty.

Hence the 'new imperialism' can be viewed from a conflict perspective as a more sophisticated version of the period of colonialist expansion which can integrate economic, military-political and ideological control into activities beyond national borders. Other examples of globalization take the form of companies relocating their operations to areas of world where labour is cheaper and more compliant and legal protection of working practices and conditions less strict than in the West. The expansion of call centres to third-world locations has been a feature of the banking, insurance and ICT sectors of many Western economies. Companies like Dyson vacuum cleaners have relocated their entire business operation abroad to take advantage of cheaper production processes and labour.

However, writers such as Fukuyama (1992) and Giddens (2003) have characterized globalization as a two-way process. Globalization, they say, can have a positive impact upon local cultures and identities; for example, some call centre jobs in India are viewed as high-status, sought-after posts, paying above the local wage and with excellent working conditions. Also, some large Indian companies such as Tata Motors have a significant foothold in the British economy and can compete with the traditional Western industries in the development and production of cars. Hence Spiby (1998) has argued that although globalization had its origins in the West, non-Western societies are an integral part of the process now and multiple centres have emerged, particularly in India, which have challenged leading businesses in the West.

Conflict theory – an evaluation

Strengths

1. Conflict theory provides a radical contrast to consensus theory and draws attention to the sources of conflict in society.
2. In seeking to build upon existing theories, conflict theory demonstrates the value of an eclectic approach to understanding social life.
3. Conflict theory can account for social stability and social change, and recognizes that change is an inevitable feature of social life.
4. Conflict theory attempts to integrate macro-level and micro-level analysis to provide a more rounded analysis of social conflict and change.

Limitations

1. Critics of conflict theory argue that too little attention is given to order and stability.
2. Conflict theory has been attacked as ideologically radical.
3. It is argued that conflict theory is not a theory in its own right – it is simply a polar opposite of structural functionalism. Ironically, although it claims to be informed by Marxism, some critics believed that conflict theory is closer to structural functionalism than to Marxism.
4. Dahrendorf's work has been criticized on a number of counts. For example, it has been described as macroscopic: focusing on social structures at the expense of the way people interpret the world. Also, he provides little explanation of how conflict escalates into social change.

Post-Marxism

Since the collapse of the former USSR and the Eastern Bloc communist regimes and the introduction of free-market policies in these countries Marxist theories could be seen as somewhat redundant. The move to introduce Western-style democratic governments in these countries and some in the Middle East has added weight to this general demise of Marxist thought. Furthermore there seems to have been a decline in the working class, especially manual workers, as the class system generally has become more fragmented and class positions have become increasingly difficult to locate within a Marxist class structure.

Socialism as a political force also seems to have been abandoned by leftwing parties in European countries in an attempt to address the modern social and political changes taking place in relation to the position of the individual and their place in society. Commentators have pointed to the policies of Labour governments in the 1990s and 2000s in the UK largely continuing in the same mould as the former Conservative policies, as a case in point.

A Note on Convergence Theory

Some scholars argue that in certain respects, the overall picture of stratification in communist societies is similar to that of the West. A number of American sociologists have argued that stratification systems in all industrial societies, whether capitalist or communist, are becoming increasingly similar. This view, sometimes known as '**convergence theory**', argues that modern industrial economies will necessarily produce similar systems of social stratification. In particular, modern industry requires particular types of workers. In the words of Clark Kerr, one of the main proponents of convergence theory, 'The same technology calls for the same occupational structure around the world - in steel, in textiles, in air transport'. Kerr assumes that technical skills and educational qualifications will be rewarded in proportion to their value to industry. Since the demands of industry are essentially the same in both East and West, the range of occupations and occupational rewards will become increasingly similar. As a result the stratification systems of capitalist and communist societies will converge.

Convergence theory has been the subject of strong criticism. Firstly, it has been argued that there are important differences between the stratification systems of East and West. Secondly, the factors which shape the two systems have been seen as basically different. Thirdly, it has been argued that the view that economic forces shape the rest of society ignores other important sources of change. Thus John. H. Goldthorpe claims that convergence theory fails to consider the influence of political and ideological forces. In the West market forces are the main factors generating social stratification. By comparison, in the East, social inequality is far more subject to political regulation. Frank Parkin makes similar points, seeking the bases of stratification in capitalist and communist societies as qualitatively different. He argues that in the East, 'the rewards system is much more responsive to manipulation by the central authority than it is in a market based economy'. Parkin also notes a number of specific differences between the stratification systems of East and West. Firstly, income inequalities are considerably smaller in the East. Secondly the manual/non-manual distinction seems less marked in communist societies. In particular skilled manual workers are relatively highly placed and routine white-collar workers of now share the prestige and fringe benefits of their Western counterparts. Thirdly, the rate of upward mobility is higher in the East. In particular, there is far more recruitment from below to elite positions. However, convergence theory does not argue that the stratification systems of East and West are the same, only that they will be increasingly similar. On this particular point, only time will provide the final answer.

So far communism has failed to live up to the expectations of many of its supporters. It may be that Eastern European societies are still in the process of transition and are indeed moving towards an egalitarian goal. There is some evidence of a decline in income inequality within the mass of the population during the 1960s and early 1970s. However, there is little indication of a reduction in the privileges of the elite. From his study of elite life styles in the USSR, Mervyn Mathews concludes that not only is privilege accepted at the top, but it is 'actively promoted'. It is built into administrative practices and so institutionalized. While communal ownership of the forces of production may be essential for the creation of an egalitarian society, other changes are clearly necessary.

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UPSC: Previous Years' Questions
Paper I

4. Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

- Q. What is the Marxist concept of 'fetishism of commodities'? (2019/10)
- Q. What is 'reserve army of labour'? Present the position of feminist scholars on this. (2019/10)
- Q. Compare and Contrast the contributions of Marx and Weber on social stratification in capitalist society. (2019/20)
- Q. Does collapse of functionalism and bankruptcy of Marxism coincide with the rupture of modernity? Discuss. (2018/20)
- Q. According to Marx, how are human beings alienated from their human potential and what does he suggest to change this? (2018/20)
- Q. Analyse Marxian conception of historical materialism as a critique of Hegelian dialectics. (2017/20)
- Q. Evaluate Marx's ideas on mode of production. (2016/10)
- Q. Distinguish between the social organization of work in feudal society and in capitalist society. (2015/10)
- Q. Differentiate between Marxian and Weberian theories of Social Stratification. (2015/20)
- Q. For Marx, class divisions are outcomes of 'exploitation'. Discuss. (2014/10)
- Q. What are the distinctive features of social organization of work in slave society? How is it different from feudal society? (2014/10)
- Q. Identify the similarities and differences between Marx's theory of 'alienation' and Durkheim's theory of 'anomie'. (2014/20)
- Q. Compare Karl Marx with Emile Durkheim with reference to the framework of 'division of labour'. (2013/20)
- Q. Analyse the salient features of historical materialism. (2013/10)

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- Q. Some workers do not feel attachment for their work. Marx formed a theory for this situation, discuss that theory. (2012/20)
- Q. In Marxian classification of society, feudal and slave societies are very important. How are they different from each other? (2012/20)
- Q. Examine Karl Marx's views on 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself' with reference to proletarians. (2010/30)
- Q. Comment on the responses of the functionalist-school to Karl Marx's views on social change. (2009/30)
- Q. Explain Karl Marx's analysis of capitalistic mode of production and class-struggle. What are the intellectual reactions to his views? (2007/60)
- Q. Explain Karl Marx's 'theory of social change'. What are the reactions of functionalists to his views? (2006/60)
- Q. Write short note: Class struggle as conceived by Karl Marx (2005/20)
- Q. Write short note: Class-in-itself and Class-for-itself (2003/20)
- Q. Explain Karl Marx's conception of class-antagonism. How have the functionalists reacted to his views? (2001/60)
- Q. Write short note: Alienation (2000/20)
- Q. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness." Examine Karl Marx's notion of mode of production in the light of this statement. (1998/60)
- Q. Explain the concept of social change. Critically examine the contribution of Karl Marx's theory of social change. (1997/60)
- Q. Write short note: Mode of production (1996/20)
- Q. "Subjective perception of the objective reality prepares the context for the articulation of class antagonism." Evaluate this statement with reference of Karl Marx's contribution.(1995/60)
- Q. Critically examine Karl Marx's theory of alienation. (1994/60)
- Q. Explain Karl Marx's theory of social stratification. On what grounds functionalists refute it? (1993/60)
- Q. Critically bring out the differences in the approaches of Karl Marx and Max Weber to the study of class structure in industrial capitalist society. (1992/60)
- Q. 'The history of the hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle.' Critically comment on this Marxian thesis. (1991/60)
- Q. How does Marx's treatment of alienation differ from that of other sociologists? (1990/60)
- Q. Write short note: Alienation (1989/20)

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Q. Attempt a comparative analysis of the Weberian and Marxian theories of social change. Which do you think is more relevant to the Indian society at present? Give reasons for your answer. (1988/60)

Q. Do you accept that Marxism offers a prefabricated theory of social change? Discuss critically. (1987/60)

Q. Write short note: Alienation (1987/20)

Q. Write short note: Historical materialism (1986/20)

Q. How is Marxism relevant to developing nations? Will it be able to establish classless societies? (1985/60)

Q. Write short note: Alienation in developing societies (1984/20)

Q. Discuss Marx's concept of class. Is class struggle inevitable for the elimination of inequalities and exploitation in the third world societies? (1984/60)

Q. Write short note: Alienation in modern society (1981/20)

Q. Analyse Marxian theory of social change. Is it useful to comprehend the changes in the developing societies? (1982/60)