

Compare and contrast the Functionalist and Marxist views of society.

Sociology has been classified as the last in a long line of emerging scientific disciplines which people have developed and explored in order to make sense of their world. Early theories such as the positivist approach of Comte, the functionalist views of Emile Durkheim and the conflict perspectives of Karl Marx have offered a view of why human beings behave as they do and how they fit together in society.

Each theory has to some extent been shaped or influenced by the approach of others and many sociological explanations have comparisons or contrast that can be made. Browne once said "sociological perspectives centre on how much freedom or control the individual had to influence society" He goes on to comment on the two main approaches "structuralism is concerned with the overall structure of society and the way social institutions act as a constraint, or limit and control individual behaviour".

Structuralism offers a view of the individual being controlled by the society they live in, Marx and Durkheim are similar in that they can both be described as structuralists, however their individual ideas are somewhat different.

Functionalism was developed by Emile Durkheim, he believed like Comte that sociology should be viewed as a precise science and that society should be studied objectively. Durkheim placed an enormous amount of emphasis on social facts which he saw as ways of acting, thinking or feeling that are external to individuals and have their own reality outside the lives and perceptions of individual people. This is known as the macro approach, which places a great emphasis on the structure of society and how an individual operates with that society. Durkheim uses organic analogy of the human body, in order for the body to proper all parts like organs have to work together and work efficiently. He believed the end result would be a perfectly harmonious society which maintains order and stability.

The functionalist perspective has since been criticised for what not taking into account the dark side of society and the theme of social deviance and isolation. Parsons image of the cereal packet family has failed to take account of family diversity and abuse within the family. Feminist sociologists argue that family is far from being a harmonious unit, the family in fact oppresses women.

Like Functionalism, Marxism places great emphasis on society as an external structure and that the individual is contained by the structure, however the functional perspective, social structure can be seen as a cohesive benevolent influence. The Marxist perspective on the other hand is seen as a malevolent influence, both functionalism and Marxism start from the same point but branch out in different directions when ideas and views are expressed. For example the functionalist views the social institution of the family which offers primary socialisation and stabilisation as central to the maintenance of society. The Marxist perspective rejects this idea, seeing the family as a continuance of the imbalance of power by producing unequal relationships and perpetuating the dominant ideology of the ruling class.

Functionalists view education as maintaining social cohesion through secondary socialisation, teaching children a set of values, norms and customs. Durkheim views education as a miniature society and prepares children for the adult world, whereas Marxists would take the view that education creates conflict, children learn their obedience to capitalism.

Functionalism is based on consensus whereas Marxism is based on the notion of conflict. Marx believed what ultimately shaped society and in turn controlled the individual, was the economy and all the other social institutions that were influenced by

it. The industrial revolution has produced radical social change, Marx made the distinction between the small economically powerful class of the bourgeoisie and the large powerless class of the proletariat. Society viewed from a functionalist would offer more equal chances.

Marx identifies the imbalance of power between the two, the advancement in technology from a functionalist view is seen as an advantage, however Marx believed it led to a imbalance of power between those who owned the means of production and the urbanisation of the workers to sell their labour. Marx saw society not harmoniously but as a tool of oppression with the ideology of the bourgeoisie maintaining the false consciousness of the proletariat. Whereas the functionalist approach might view religion as a positive influence on society, Marx dismissed it as the "opium to the people".

Marx predicted that this state of affairs would be overthrown and that conflict would be removed and replaced by communism. Although Marx's view is based on theory it is remotely similar to the functionalist approach of harmony and resolution.

The apparent differences between the Marxist and Functionalist perspectives are not as conflicting as it would first appear. Both the functionalist and the Marxist perspectives place emphasis on society as something which influences an individual as opposed to the interpretivists or social action perspective put forward by Weber, It is a difference view from the post-modernist perspective which argues that society is fragmented and unstructured.

Comparisons and Contrast will naturally occur, sociological perspectives can make use of each other or react against each other, a lot of feminist sociology is linked to Marxism. Difference in opinion is linked to human capacity of social change and the need to explore and explain, what was relevant to society in Marx's view might not be relevant or as important to another type of society. Giddens wrote "societies can no longer be understood through the application of general theories". A subject like sociology has to be studied through a whole range of perspectives and should not be restricted by the margins of the structuralist approach