

Discuss marxism and functuionalism and compare

[Politics](#), [Marxism](#)



Compare Marxist and Functionalist Perspectives Compare and Contrast

Functionalist and Marxist Perspectives Sociology is a systematic way of studying the social world. It seeks to discover the causes and effects of intercommunication and interaction that arise in social relations. "

The science of society" was developed as a discipline in the 19th Century by Auguste Comte, a French philosopher. For him, common sense and the obvious would not suffice; he wanted to build scientific theories based on critical awareness of society.

The two main stems of sociological concepts are Positivism and Phenomenology. Both Functionalism and Marxism are Positivist theories. This means that philosophies are built by using scientific research methods to create structural perspectives. Positivism is called macro sociology because it looks at society holistically; it also emphasises the power of Society and how this effects man's behaviour. Positivism was a philosophy from the Modern Era when society was industrial, England's culture intolerant, the mass media conservative and pro-establishment.

Role in society was extremely important; it was traditional and gender specific. Functionalism provided a static view of society. It was rooted in the work of Emile Durkheim, a French Sociologist and during the later stages, Talcott Parsons. Although functionalism was not a dominant theoretical perspective in sociology until the 1940s and 1950s, it first emerged during the 19th Century. Marxism was founded by a German philosopher, economist and sociologist, Karl Marx. Friedrich Engels also contributed to development the works.

Marxism offered a radical alternative to the functionalism perspective and was developed in the 1970s. Both perspectives of Marx and Durkheim, aspired for a Utopian society. Functionalism views society like a biological organism. The parts or institutions of the organism or society function appropriately to ensure the whole structure works efficiently and effectively. The whole has greater power than the individual parts. The three main aims and objectives of functionalism are to maintain order, stability and equilibrium in society.

Marxism became increasingly influential due to; the decline in functionalism, its promise to provide answers (which functionalism did not) and its mood reflected that of the times. It originally consisted of three related ideas: a philosophical view of man, a theory of history and an economic and political program. The basic principle was that production equals social enterprise. Man needs to produce food, materials, etc... for survival, and in doing so; man enters into relations with other members of society.

From a functionalist perspective, the main parts of society (its institutions such as education, religion and the family) are the foundations for social structure. These institutions have interconnected roles and interrelated norms to form a complete system. All of the institutions have a role to meet the functional prerequisites (society's basic needs). Integration between the parts is necessary so therefore integration is a functional prerequisite in itself. Social relations are organised, in result of values providing general guidelines for behaviour.

Functionalist, Talcott Parsons set out four functional prerequisites essential for society: Goal Attainment- setting goals, e. g. Government/Education, Adaptation- development of material world, e. g. Mass Media/Industry, Integration- promoting harmony and social solidarity, e. g. Religion/Family, Latency- meeting individual needs to satisfy demand, e. g. Family/Mass Media. From a Marxist view, the force of production is the collective term for all things needed for production. The means of production are those parts of production which can be legally owned (land, machinery, and slaves... . Society's infrastructure was made up of the forces of production plus the social relations. The Superstructure includes the institutions of society and is shaped by the infrastructure. This therefore means that the institutions are primarily determined by economic factors. Marxism relates class not to income or family like functionalism does, instead it is measured on how much land, machinery... is owned and controlled- so it depends on the means of production. The person(s) who had the most means of production are the ruling class. The ruling class produces the dominant ideas in society. Their domination relies heavily on the exploitation and oppression of others. The employer to employee relationship of exploitation is concealed by ideology. Some accept the ruling class conflict as natural and so are lulled into false consciousness. Functionalism relies on social stratification. Kingsley Davis, an American Sociologist and Demographer said " As a functioning mechanism society must distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions". Without this casting of society's members, the institutions would be unbalanced and equilibrium could not be reached.

Functionalism sees this as a positive and inevitable aspect of society. In Marxism, the lower classes are exploited because they can be. Social change in Functionalism occurs when one of the institutions alters in some way. These changes only come about when society requests it. These changes in institutions cause society to behave, inevitably different. Marx believed all historical societies contain basic contradictions: the exploitation of one social group by another. Perhaps in a way, Marxism is perhaps a little more realistic than functionalism.

Therefore, they cannot survive in the existing form. The major frictions are between the forces and the relations of production. A great deal of the wealth, produced by the workforce is appropriated in the forms of profit by the Capitalists- the ruling class. The wages of the workers are not equivalent to the wealth they produce and so the ruling class was exploiting and oppressing the working class. Marx predicted a new and final epoch. A society that would have complete equality. There would be no new force of production but the relations of production will be transformed.

The ownership of production would be collective, as the members of society would share the wealth. The ruling class would no longer exploit or oppress the workers. It is interesting how Functionalists see people as unequal a positive thing and Marxists believe it a negative one. Functionalism fails to recognise social change, contrasting to Marxism which recognises and aspires to it. It is a conservative ideology which ignores the dysfunction's and assumes every institution is positive for society. Marxism, on the other hand, accepts conflict and the arising social problems.

The perspective tries to understand how to overcome societies problems by looking back over history and learning from past mistakes. Functionalists assume that everyone in society is in agreement and shares norms. It believes in the power of the institutions to socialise its members so well that deviance is rare. However, every society has deviants and so this statement is a little too confident. Functionalism shows us clearly the primacy of culture and socialisation via the social institution. Marxism underestimated the resilience of Capitalism, for example, Americas tragedy on the 11th September 2001.