

# Compare and contrast karl marx's and walt rostow's theories

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This essay attempts to compare and contrast Karl Marx's and Walt Rostow's theories of stages of social and economic development. A theory is an interconnected, logical system of concepts that provides a framework for organising and understanding observations. The function of a theory is to allow us to understand and predict the behaviour of some aspect of the world (Miller, 1993). However, each theory of development presents a different view of how and why of society growth and change. Each theory is useful though no single theory explains everything.

While Karl Marx had a different notion in regard to the stages of social and economic development it can also be noted that Rostow had a different perception on the theory. The Marxian stage theory tradition is intimately linked to turning points in the historical process of capital accumulation. These turning points mark the inauguration of a period of relatively unproblematic reproduction of capitalist social relations or, symmetrically, the beginning of a period of stagnation and crisis.

Traditional/Primitive Communism: This stage was characterized by societies without a class.

Most people in these societies were subsistence farmers and concentrated on their own individual survival. Marx and Friedrich (1983), explain that, the productive forces were hardly developed at all and property was held in common in this stage. During this period, land was vast and population was small. People lived as individuals and tried to fend for themselves regardless of whom or what was around them. A traditional tribal structure was the order of the day while the Means of Production was in a pre or early stage.

The replacement of this stage of production came about by the gradual increase in population, growth of wants and extension of external relations such as war and trade (Marx & Friedrich, 1983). According to Marx (1993), the growing independence of the individual within the community meant that it was not possible for the traditional stage to survive. Ancient Stage: in the ancient mode of production classes were prevalent. The ruling class controlled the surplus and, therefore, controlled the lower class (Marx, 1993).

In this stage, slavery was the most predominant materialisation of class struggle as the coercion and restraint of the lower class was very direct (Laibman, 2006). The ruling class physically owned the lower class and slaves had little to no motivation to advance the productive forces by increasing their labour productivity. The ancient stage was economically supported by agriculture and the discovery of trade. During this stage there were the introduction of a new technology which mainly involved the use of animals (horses, cows and ox) and the development of two ways farming. This mode of production can be identified within Ancient Greek and Roman Empires.

In Africa, this act could be identified with the Great Ghanaian Empire and the Great Egyptian Kingdom (time of the pharaohs). Feudalism: Feudalism brought about the collapse of most cultures and the rise of Capitalism, Barbarism and other socio-economic characteristics which emerged as a result of wealth amassing. This wealth amassing was in the form of property. The feudalism age was characterised by the possession of land. Furthermore, there was the possession of human beings as peasants who worked on these lands (Marx & Friedrich, 1983).

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Feudalism is the age that has shaped Economic Development to this day. Therefore, it can be clearly seen that over generations these classes maintain their status and serve as leaders of the land, thereby, controlling the land which is owned by the peasants. Bourgeois: The development of governments and education were the driving force of the economy and resulted in an emergence of Capitalism which took its pedigree from the division of labour created in a means to meet rising demands and improve production.

Capitalism is the current stage of production. According to Shimp (2009), bourgeois stage is dominated by private property and markets. Businesses own machines, buildings and tools which are used to produce different items that can be sold in markets to make a profit. According to Marx (1993), capitalism increasingly divides people into two groups. In a capitalist economic system, the means of production (anything used to produce goods, like factories, machines, and land) are privately owned by the bourgeoisie, or capitalist class.

The capitalist lower class is coerced into working for the capitalist ruling class. Even though members of the lower class have their choice of which employers to sell their labour to, the fact remains that they sell their labour to survive (Marx & Friedrich, 1983). The Rostovian take-off model (also called "Rostow's Stages of Growth") is one of the major historical models of economic growth. The model postulates that economic modernization occurs in five basic stages, of varying length.

Traditional society, Preconditions for take-off, Take-off, Drive to maturity, Age of High mass consumption. Rostow asserts that countries go through <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-karl-marxs-and-walt-rostows-theories/>

each of these stages fairly linearly, and set out a number of conditions that were likely to occur in investment, consumption and social trends at each state. Traditional society is one whose structure is developed within limited production functions, based on Pre-Newtonian science and technology, and on Pre-Newtonian attitudes towards the physical world (Chang, 2003).

This stage is characterized by subsistence agriculture or hunting & gathering; almost wholly a "primary" sector economy limited technology; a static or 'rigid' society: lack of class or individual economic mobility, with stability prioritized and change seen negatively.

Pre-conditions to "take-off" External demand for raw materials initiates economic change; development of more productive, commercial agriculture & cash crops not consumed by producers and/or largely exported widespread and enhanced investment in changes to the physical environment to expand production (i. e. irrigation, canals, ports) increasing spread of technology & advances in existing technologies changing social structure, with previous social equilibrium now in flux individual social mobility begins development of national identity and shared economic interests Take off - The take-off is the interval when the old blocks and resistances to steady growth are finally overcome.

The forces making for economic progress, which yielded limited bursts and enclaves of modern activity, expand and come to dominate the society. Growth becomes its normal condition. Compound interest becomes built, as it were, into its habits and institutional structure (Chang, 2003, p. 7).

Manufacturing begins to rationalize and scale increases in a few leading industries, as goods are made both for export and domestic consumption the <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-karl-marxs-and-walt-rostows-theories/>

"secondary" (goods-producing) sector expands and ratio of secondary vs. primary sectors in the economy shifts quickly towards secondary textiles & apparel are usually the first "take-off" industry, as happened in Great Britain's classic "Industrial Revolution" Drive to maturity is that stage when a society has effectively applied the range of (then) modern technology to the bulk of its resources (Chang, 2003, p. 59).

Diversification of the industrial base; multiple industries expand & new ones take root quickly manufacturing shifts from investment-driven (capital goods) towards consumer durables & domestic consumption rapid development of transportation infrastructure large-scale investment in social infrastructure (schools, universities, hospitals, etc. ) Age of mass consumption the industrial base dominates the economy; the primary sector is of greatly diminished weight in economy & society widespread and normative consumption of high-value consumer goods (e. g. automobiles) consumers typically (if not universally), have disposable income, beyond all basic needs, for additional goods Rostow's theory is limited in many ways it is considered too generalised and only applicable to western countries.

It works on the assumption that funds are effectively put into investment projects. If financial institutions are not effective this will not take place. From this failure the next assumption will not occur. The government should develop an infrastructure, to develop roads, ports, hospital and schools, if this does not occur take-off will not take place. (Rostow, 1960).

The model de-emphasizes differences between sectors in capitalistic vs. communistic societies, but seems to innately recognize that modernization can be achieved in different ways in different types of economies. There are <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-karl-marxs-and-walt-rostows-theories/>

certain similarities between Rostow's stages of growth analysis and the Marxian analysis of the historical evolution of an economy. They are both audacious attempts to interpret how whole societies evolve from primarily an economic perspective.

Both accept the reality of group and class interests in the political and social process, linked to interests of economic advantage and both accept the fact that economic change has social, political and cultural consequences. In terms of economic technique, both are based on sectoral analysis of growth process, although Marx confined himself to consumption goods and capital goods sectors, while the stages of growth are rooted in a more disaggregated analysis of leading sectors which flows from a dynamic theory of production. Both the theories would pose, in the end, the goal of true affluence for human society.

From other view points, however, there are fundamental differences. The most fundamental difference between the two analyses relates to the view taken regarding human motivation. Marx interpreted human behaviour only in economic terms. According to Marx profit-maximisation is the only dominant motive of man in his economic activities. Rostow's stages of growth analysis are no doubt an economic way of looking at whole societies, yet they do not ignore the non-economic influences. Man is viewed as a complex unit and therefore subject to a number of social, political, cultural and emotional influences (Rostow, 1960).

Marx considers the behaviour of societies as determined by economic considerations. Rostow's analysis does not accept that view. In Rostow's (1960) view, cultural, social and political forces also influence the <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-karl-marxs-and-walt-rostows-theories/>

performance of societies. Even economic performance is conditioned by the above forces. A contrast between Rostow's analysis of post-traditional and Marx's post-feudal phase—capitalism—is also worth noting. Marx held that the decisions of capitalist societies are made simply in terms of the free-market mechanism and private advantage. Marxian analysis fails to explain the emergence of a welfare state.

However, Rostow's analysis of the breakdown of traditional societies is based on convergence of motives of private profit in the modern sectors with a new sense of affronted nationhood (Rostow, 1960). According to Marxian analysis, history moves forward by the clash of conflicting interests and outlooks. According to Rostow, however, " the outcome of conflict in a regularly growing society is likely to be governed by ultimate consideration of communal continuity. " Marx's analysis of history was based only on the experience of British take-off and drive to maturity.

At that time, no other country had reached the take-off stage. By generalizing the British case Marx missed the variety of experience in the evolution of different societies. This makes the Marxian historical sequence unduly rigid and artificial. According to G. M. Meier, Rostow's analysis can claim to be a superior alternative to the Marxian sequence. Rostow's stage theory helps us " to isolate the strategic factors that constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for determining the transition of an economy from a preceding, stage to a succeeding stage."

Cairncross holds that, " Rostow, like, Marx, adopts a stage approach to history. But he has failed to show how the major variables in social and economic developments operate in different situations. Cairncross says, <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-karl-marxs-and-walt-rostows-theories/>



Rostow is perhaps too anxious like Marx to dramatize history not merely to make it dramatic and give it meaning but to reduce it to a set pattern, to compare the texture of events into too narrow a framework of logic,"

An approach to history in these terms may make good drama or supply the element of myth required for a popular manifesto; but it does not make good theory or, for that matter, good history. " Again in the opinion of Cairncross, one of the greatest weaknesses of stage approach to history is that it provokes but it cannot answer the question what comes next. The engine of growth in the Marxist system is assumed to break down completely when capitalism fulfils its destiny; Marx has nothing to say about the laws of motion of a post-capitalist society. In Rostow's exposition, the last but presumably no' the final stage is an era of high mass consumption.

Although he brood on what lies beyond affluence he cannot tells us what stages have yet to come? Vaclav Holesovsky holds that Marx's classification of history is-only an approximation to the reality and the measuring rod is a single variable—the varying form in which the surplus is appropriated from the producers. This is not the case with Rostow. He has adopted a symptomatic approach and describes features of a society at various stages of development.