

A-Level Sociology Teaching Notes

**Social Inequality:
Theories: Marxism**

Theories of Social Stratification.

In these Notes we are going to focus our attention on the various ways in which social stratification has been analysed and explained by a number of different writers working within a variety of theoretical perspectives.

In particular, we are going to examine in some detail theories of stratification that centre around three main categories or types:

- a. Social Class stratification.
- b. Gender stratification.
- c. Ethnic group stratification.

In this respect, it needs to be noted that we will consider each of the above as theoretically separate forms of stratification for the purpose of outlining and evaluating both their basic nature and the ways in which they can be theorized. In the "real world" of social interaction, of course, we frequently find that some or all of these basic forms coexist (an idea that we will develop in a bit more detail at a later point).

We can begin this examination of theories of social stratification by looking at the concept of social class and, in particular at the way in which Marxist, Weberian and Functionalist, perspectives have theorized this concept...

Marxist Perspectives on Social Class Stratification.

A. How Social Class Is Defined.

In order to understand how both Marx in particular and Marxist writers in general have attempted to define and theorize "social stratification" we must first look briefly at the historical background and context of Marx's view of social stratification.

In this respect, Marx argued that Western society (which includes our own society) had developed through four main epochs ("periods in time"):

1. Primitive communism.
2. Ancient society.
3. Feudal society.
4. Capitalist society.

As Marx argued ("The Communist Manifesto: Bourgeois and Proletarians"),

"In the earlier epochs of history we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome [an example of the second epoch listed above] we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages [an example of the third epoch listed above], feudal lords, vassals, guild masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society [that is, Capitalist society - the fourth epoch noted above] that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in places of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie [the ruling class] and proletariat [the working class]."

For Marx, only the first epoch (the "primitive communism" of various forms of hunter-gatherer society) was free from some form of social stratification on the basis of class. This was because, for Marx, class forms of social stratification only come into existence once people start producing more goods than they require to fulfil their everyday needs - and hunter-gatherer societies are basically subsistence societies; that is, people can only manage to hunt / gather enough food for their everyday needs.

Before we start to look in greater detail at Marx's conception of class it is important to note that each of the four epochs noted above are not hard-and-fast "stages" of human development (in the sense that one epoch "ends" and another "begins" - which, as an aside, was the way in which Auguste Comte ("The Positive Philosophy") theorized historical development). Rather, we need to see each epoch merging with the one that preceded it and the one that gradually replaced it, over a period of many hundreds of years.

You might also like to note that Marx delineated a fifth epoch, "advanced Communism" that he argued was destined to finally replace Capitalism.

In looking at Marx's conception of social class, therefore, we can initially note a number of points:

1. Firstly, all human societies (except, as has been noted above, the earliest forms of hunter-gather societies) have been "class based" in some way, shape or form.

By this, at the most basic level of interpretation, Marx meant that in every known human society there has been a fundamental division between two broad social groups, namely that:

a. One group has always owned and controlled the fundamental material resources that are necessary for the maintenance of social existence (such things as food production, the creation of shelter, clothing and so forth).

b. One group has not owned or controlled the production of such things.

In modern Britain we can express the above most clearly in terms of the basic class structure of society thus:

a. Those who own and control the means of production (which involves ownership of such things as land, factories, financial institutions and the like):

This is the Capitalist class (or "bourgeoisie").

b. Those who own nothing but their ability to sell their labour power (that is, their ability to work) in return for wages:

This is the Working class (or "proletariat").

2. From the above we can note two important points:

a. In any society the economic sphere (that is, the productive process involving the creation of goods and services for distribution and exchange) is always the most basic, fundamental and ultimately most significant sphere because it is only through economic activity that people can produce the things they need for their physical survival.

In short, economic production, since it is vital for the reproduction of human life, is always the most fundamental activity in which people engage.

b. At its most basic, there are always two major classes in any society according to Marx (the aforementioned bourgeoisie and proletariat).

We need to be clear that Marx was not claiming that there are only ever two classes in any society (as we will see in a moment, it is possible for numerous "classes" to exist in society); rather, he was saying that:

a. Only under communism could there be a single class (since communism involves the "dictatorship of the proletariat").

b. The "two class" model is simply the most basic and fundamental form of class society.

That is, he was arguing that, however many classes it may be possible to delineate empirically in a society, at the root of any society stands these two great classes defined in terms of their relationship to the means of production.

3. Marx was aware that there could be individual movement ("social mobility") between the two great classes he theorized. Capitalists could be driven out of business and into poverty / wage labour by competition, just as members of the working class could raise capital ("finance"), create their own successful business and grow rich.

However, thinking about these individual events in the grand scheme of things, they recede into insignificance, in social terms, for two main reasons according to Marx:

- a. This type of movement tends to be very limited.
- b. It doesn't alter the fundamental principle of Marx's concept of class - it doesn't really matter very much who is a member of the bourgeoisie and who is a member of the proletariat. All that really matters is that these two classes exist.

Having said this, it will become evident when we look at the question of class cultures and class consciousness that social mobility may be significant in terms of these, and related, concepts...

4. We can see from the above that, according to Marx's view of things, Capitalism as an economic system of production, distribution and exchange possesses a "logic of its own", regardless of who individual members of the bourgeoisie actually are. The "economic logic" to which Marx refers involves such things as:

- a. The need to make a profit.
- b. The need to exploit others in order to make profits.

In this respect, to be a "capitalist" involves, by definition, both the exploitation of others and the keeping of profits for "personal" use / disposal. In short, Marx was arguing that, logically, Capitalism as an economic system cannot exist / survive without this profit motive and exploitation.

5. In the above respect, we are presented with a picture of class stratification that is apparently contradictory:

- a. Within the overall parameters of the system there can, theoretically, be as much or as little social movement between classes as possible, yet:
- b. The fundamental relationship between social classes (as opposed to particular individuals within each class) will remain the same.

In simple terms, all Marx is saying in the above respect is that it doesn't really matter very much in terms of society as a whole who does the exploiting (whether they do it pleasantly or cruelly, for example). All that really matters is that exploitation of one class by another takes place.

To understand this point more clearly we have to understand that, for Marx, social classes are objective categories in any society other than a communist one. In this respect, the argument is that we can define social classes (on the basis of people's relationship to a production process) independently of the individuals who belong to it.

This doesn't mean that social classes can exist without people (an "error of reification"). Rather, it means that in order to be defined as belonging to a particular class individuals have to obey the economic logic to which I referred above. In simple terms:

A Capitalist who doesn't make profits will not be a capitalist for long...

As I have suggested at various points in the above, Marx made a clear distinction between two things:

- a. The objective definition of social class (in this instance, the individual's relationship to the process of production) and
- b. The subjective definition of social class (whether or not an individual believes themselves to belong to the class into which they can be objectively allocated).

Marx was not alone in making this distinction (although he is frequently accused of ignoring or overlooking the social significance of the latter). It is a distinction that appears through the literature of any discussion of class (from whatever perspective) and, for this reason, it will be more useful to discuss it in greater detail in the Study Pack that covers the question of "class consciousness".

Before we start to look at the implications of Marx's analysis of social stratification for both social change and social stability, we can recap and expand some of the main features and implications of Marx's basic arguments in the following terms:

1. All societies are characterized by the struggle between social classes; between, on the one hand, those who own and control the means of economic production and those who do not. Historically, for example, this basic relationship (or "dichotomy" - simply defined as a distinction between two things) has been expressed by Marx in terms of:

- a. Ancient societies - Master and slave.
- b. Feudal societies - Lord and serf.
- c. Capitalist societies - Bourgeoisie and proletariat (employer and employee).

2. This relationship (between owners and non-owners) is one that is both dependent and inherently conflictual.

It is a "mutually dependent" relationship because, for example:

Capitalists require people to work for them in order to create profits.
Workers need capitalists in order to earn money for their physical survival.

It is also a "conflictual" relationship because, according to Marx, each class has different basic interests:

It is in the interest of a capitalist class to keep its ownership of the means of production (to attempt, in short to make the most profit it can out of its relationship with the proletariat it exploits).

It is in the interests of a working class to seize ownership of the means of production - to replace a capitalist class with a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Question:

Briefly explain why it might be in the interests of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to own the means of production in society.

3. This "contradictory relationship" of dependency and conflict helps to explain both:

- a. The basis of social stability in society (how things remain the same) and
- b. The basis of social change.

Marx called this contradiction a "dialectical relationship" (a union of opposites), but it's perhaps easier to think of it, in these terms, as a kind of "love / hate" relationship perhaps...

The "Two-Class model" of Social Stratification: Closing Observations.

Marx was aware that whilst it was both theoretically and logically evident that two basic classes exist in any society, the "empirical reality" of class stratification in most societies was substantially different. In this respect Marx was aware that:

- a. Modes of economic production changed more rapidly than people's ability to adapt to such changes (for example, even the gradual transition between a feudal mode of production - based upon land ownership and agriculture - and a capitalist mode of production - based upon the ownership of capital and industry - meant that class groups would still exist for a time in the latter as a left over from the former.

For example, even as factory production started to become the norm in the early industrial period (leading to the emergence of an urban working class), a peasant class based around pre-capitalist, agricultural forms of production would still exist for a time.

Such classes were seen by Marx to be "transitional classes", in the sense that they would eventually disappear once the new mode of production had established its dominant position.

- b. Secondly, and more importantly, splits / divisions of greater or lesser importance were acknowledged to exist within the two broad classes.

For example, within the bourgeoisie the interests of:

1. Manufacturing capital (those who owned factories and produced commodities for sale) and
2. Finance capital (bankers, financiers and so forth),

were frequently at odds with one another since Manufacturing Capital was involved with the long-term creation and reproduction of profits whilst Finance capital did not produce anything but created profits through short-term lending to industry.

Additionally, we could also point to the vast difference between Trans-national companies (that is, companies which operate in more than one country) and small businesses.

Conversely, amongst the proletariat we can find clear differences between:

- a. Those employed in minor supervisory roles and
- b. Those whose work involves no supervision of others.

B. How Social Order is Created and Maintained.

Given that, according to Marx, class conflict is inevitable, we need to understand how social order is maintained in class stratified societies. In order to do this we need to look at how Marxists generally understand the basic structure of social systems.

1. As noted above, social systems can be classified in terms of two basic divisions:

a. Their economic base (the system of production that gives rise to two basic classes - those who own the means of production and those who sell their labour power).

b. Their political and ideological superstructure that surrounds and "rests upon" the economic infrastructure.

In simple terms, the economic base of a social system consists of the various forces of production which produce particular types of social relations to the production process. Thus:

In feudal society the forces of production relate to agricultural forms of economic production, ownership of land and so forth. The basic social relations of production that this produces is the distinction between Lord and Peasant.

In capitalist society the forces of production relate to industrial forms of economic production, the ownership of capital and so forth. This gives rise to social relations of production based around the distinction between Employer and Employee.

As this example illustrates:

A change in the forces of production (for example, from agriculture to industry) produces a change in the social relations to production (for example, from a Lord / Peasant relationship to an Employer / Employee relationship).

This change in social relationships as the forces of production change is important not just in class terms (since there is still, according to Marx, the basic division of society into two broad classes) but also in terms of the political and ideological relationship between the two classes.

In the first instance, for example, peasants had few political rights in feudal society and they had no legal right to organize politically to challenge the ruling ideas in society (how it was organized and the like).

In the second instance, because the relationship changes to a simple one of legal contract (the employer has no legal rights over his / her employee as a person - wage earners are not slaves, for example), it is possible for a system of political rights to develop, involving ideological challenges to the ruling ideas in society (a classic and obvious example in our society being the rise of Trade Unions to represent the interests of the working class and the emergence of the Labour Party as the political representative of organized labour).

2. The superstructure of a social system consists of two related spheres:

a. The State (which involves things like a system of government, judicial systems, a Civil Service and the like). This is the political sphere.

b. Ideological institutions (which involves things like religion, the mass media, education and so forth). This is the ideological sphere (the realm of ideas about the nature of the social world).

Marx argued that the economic infrastructure was the most important division in society because:

- a. It involved the production, distribution and exchange of the essential requirements for living (beginning with basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter and ending with all kinds of "necessary" consumer goods - televisions, cars, videos and so forth).
- b. Systems of government, communication and the like are dependent upon the way in which a society organizes itself to provide these essential requirements.

If this seems a little unclear, we can make the relationship easier to understand by using an analogy...

Base and Superstructure: An analogy.

Let's imagine that "society" is like a building.

Any building, if it is to remain standing, requires some kind of foundation and, for Marx, the "foundations" upon which "society" stands was its economic base.

In this respect, foundations influence the type of building that can be erected. A 50-storey office block, for example, requires deeper and stronger foundations than a single storey house and, whilst there is nothing to stop you building an office block on foundations designed to support a bungalow, such a building would rapidly collapse since its foundations would not be sufficient to support its weight...

Thinking in terms of foundations, therefore, such things are, by their very nature:

- a. Difficult to observe and
- b. Difficult to change

once they are established since they are, of course, buried in the ground.

Once you have established your foundations, you are able to build your offices, house or whatever and this is analogous to the superstructure of a society. As we have noted, the social superstructure has two main dimensions:

a. Politics:

We can compare this dimension to the look and overall shape of a building, insofar as within the basic limitations imposed by your foundations you can design and build a variety of different-looking buildings.

b. Ideology:

This dimension is comparable to the various ways in which it is possible for you to furnish your building once it has been built. People who live in the same type of building, for example, may have very different ideas about how it can be furnished, the use to which each room can be put and so forth.

Clearly, if you think about it, there are constraints upon what can be done to the building in the above respect, since such factors as room size and number, the way in which the building has been designed and so forth will all be important factors here.

Thinking about things in this way:

1. Politics, ideology and economics all combine to shape the overall look and feel of society (just as the foundations, house design and furnishings all combine to shape the look and feel of a building).
2. Some things are more permanent and difficult to change than others...

Think about the three dimensions I've just noted (politics, ideology and economics) and rank them in terms of how easy / difficult it might be to change them (starting with the easiest).

As you will have noted:

- a. Ideas are easier to change than
- b. Political systems, which are easier to change than
- c. Economic systems.

To continue the analogy, we can express and develop the above in the following ways:

1. Ideology or "rearranging the furniture"...

A building:

If you want to change the look of your house you can rearrange the furniture, add new pieces and get rid of old pieces. You can change the room usage (a bedroom could become a study, for example).

A society:

In social terms, you could do things like change the way in which children are educated (for example, in Britain we have gradually changed from an education system that segregates children on the basis of the idea that they have different "academic and vocational aptitudes" (Grammar / Secondary Modern schools) to one that involves the education of all children in the same basic type of school (a Comprehensive system)).

Similarly, in politics the equivalent of "rearranging the furniture" might be to replace our current "first past the post" system with one of proportional representation.

This "ideological rearrangement" will, of course, take time and it may involve a great deal of debate / argument between members of the household, but it is possible to do - mainly because by rearranging things you are not attempting to alter the basic structure of your building. Additionally, two points need to be noted:

- a. There are clear structural limits to what can be done "inside the building".
- b. Changing the appearance of the building does not alter its purpose.

2. Politics or "knocking it down and starting again":

A building:

If you don't like things like the overall look and size of your building you have the option of knocking it down and rebuilding it. This, of course, would be a fairly radical step since by demolishing your building you will destroy some or all of its contents (which will cost you time and money to replace).

If you do not change the foundations on which the building originally stood, there will, as we have noted, be restrictions upon the type of structure that you can build. In this respect, since the foundations will be unchanged you can only build something that is broadly the same as the previous building - although many things can, of course, be changed.

A society:

In social terms, political changes that might be analogous to the fairly drastic step of knocking your house down and rebuilding it might be something like the replacement of a democratic political system by one based upon dictatorship (or vice versa). Clearly, such a change would have important / significant social consequences.

As you can imagine, a change of political system (just like the decision to knock down your house and rebuild it differently) is not something that is likely to happen without a great deal of conflict. It will, in short, be more difficult to put into operation than the simple decision to change some feature of the established political system.

3. Economics or "digging up the foundations"...

A building:

If you decide that you want to replace your one-storey building with a 50 storey building then it is clear that you will have to dig-up and relay the foundations. This will, of course, involve demolishing both the original building and its contents. It is a long, arduous, task that is likely to take you a long time...

A society:

In social terms, the above is the equivalent of a change in the mode of economic production that is dominant in a society at any given time. For example, in Marxist terms, a change from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production. As with digging-up the foundations of a building, this replacement cannot happen "overnight" - it will take a long time to fully achieve.

As should be evident, the decision to rebuild from the foundations upwards is not one that is going to be taken without a great deal of conflict and resistance, primarily because it will affect the lives (both present and future) of the building's occupants in a substantial way.

Viewed in these terms, it is not very difficult to decide which of the three areas listed above are going to:

- a. Be most resistant to change.
- b. Create the greatest level of conflict concerning whether or not they should be changed.

If we now turn to think more specifically about how social order is maintained, we can continue the analogy by imagining yourself as a family living in the building we have created.

- a. Changing the layout of the rooms might easily be based upon a general consensus about the need to rearrange things.
- b. The decision to knock the building down and rebuild it is a fairly drastic step that cannot be taken lightly (and may involve overcoming a great deal of resistance to change).
- c. The decision to dig-up the foundations and build something completely different is likely to involve a great deal of conflict.

Now, translate the above into a "family" that involves millions of people (a society in which everyone has an interest) and you should start to appreciate why:

1. It is difficult to instigate and see through fundamental social changes that involve drastic changes in economic organization.
2. Changes in economic organization will produce political changes (the way in which people relate to one another), just as building and populating an office block on the ground where a small house once stood will involve changes in political relationships (there will be more people under the same roof, the new building will serve a different purpose to the old building and so forth).
3. Order and stability in a society can persist even though people are in perpetual conflict (just as long as radical changes are not made to the economic foundations of society). Thus, in social terms, people can argue and conflict over wage rates, the environment, political representation and so forth, just as people might argue and conflict over the best position for a new piece of furniture or the use to which a spare room might be put...

C. How Societies Change.

In terms of the analogies that I've used in the attempt to help you to understand the difference between "base and superstructure" in Marxist thinking you have to be careful not to be misled into stretching an analogy too far. For example, it is easy to be misled into seeing the social world as being rather static and unchanging (like a building). Unlike a building made from inert (that is, non-living) material, society is constantly changing, primarily because it consists of living, thinking, people who are constantly changing and adapting their personal relationships. If you want to persist with the analogy, it is as if "society" is constructed from living materials, each brick in the wall having its own store of experiences and ideas...

However, if we drop this analogy (since it has served its purpose and, in this new context is potentially confusing), we need to understand how Marxists theorize social change since, as you should be aware from your wider reading and experience, societies both evolve over time and, most importantly, undergo revolutionary social changes. Marxism attempts to account for the process of social change by using the idea of class conflict as the social dynamic that underpins such change.

In this respect, in basic (over-simplified) terms, each class in a society, as we have seen, has apparently different economic interests which they attempt to pursue. In this respect, basic "conflicts of interest" are always likely to occur since, if two classes want the same thing (control over the means of production) and only one can obtain it, then the basis for conflict is present...

Additionally, Marx used the notion of "contradictions" in the economic sphere to help explain both social change and social order. In this respect, again as we have seen previously, a fundamental contradiction between the bourgeoisie and proletariat is that although they will necessarily conflict in terms of their basic interests, they also need each other in capitalist society - the former in order to have people to exploit and make profits from, the latter in order to get money to buy various commodities.

In another respect Marx noted a contradiction between the economic and political spheres of capitalism:

Capitalist economics are based upon the idea of contracts which people necessarily enter into of their own "free will" (Marx did of course recognize that "free will" was actually the product of various social pressures, experiences and constraints), the most fundamental of which is the contract between an employer and employee. In return for work (the ability to make an employee productive in some way), the employer exchanges a wage.

Of necessity, in order for capitalism to remain a dynamic system of production, an employee has to be legally free to "choose" an employer (and vice versa). There are a number of reasons for this situation:

- a. It was necessary, in the early stages of capitalist development, because it provided a means of breaking the old feudal system of "tied relationships" between the nobility and the peasantry.
- b. It forces employers to "compete" for labour.
- c. It allows employers to "hire and fire" employees as and when necessary (during cyclical periods of economic expansion and contraction, for example). In this sense, the employer is hiring an individual's "ability to work" (their "labour power") rather than the individual themselves (an employer does not own the people they employ).
- d. The employer does not have to pay the "social costs" of maintaining a workforce (the employee, for example, pays their own "work-related" costs - food, clothing, shelter and the like - out of their wages). For a more-detailed discussion of this idea you need to refer to the "Family Life" Study Packs.

In the above respect, therefore, the "contradiction" we can note is between:

- a. The political status of individuals (in terms of, for example, their freedom to sell their labour power to anyone for as much money as possible) outside the workplace.
- b. The political status of individuals inside the workplace (since an employee has to be physically present in order to sell their labour power - the two cannot be empirically separated, even though we can separate them theoretically for our convenience).

In the former there is, for example, such things as legal and political equality, whilst in the latter there is no such equality. An employer buys the right to dominate labour within the workplace.

The contradiction here, of course, is that an employee is both the political equal of the employer whilst also being subservient to him / her...

Where contradictions exist, Marx argues that the potential for conflict also exists; where two or more things are opposed then conflict is always possible.

Where Marxism in particular differs from other forms of Conflict theory (for example, Weberian sociology or Feminism) is in terms of the primary importance it gives to economic conflicts.

Economic conflict, for Marxists, is seen to be the single most important form of conflict in society, whereas Weber, for example, stresses the importance of economic, political and ideological conflicts and feminism stresses the central importance of gender conflicts.

For Marxists, therefore, various forms of social change are brought into existence by the clash of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as each seeks to achieve the best it can within the capitalist system...

Modern Marxism.

Although we have, of necessity, concentrated on the work of Karl Marx in order to establish some of the basic theoretical principles and concepts employed by Marxist sociology, you need to be aware that "Marxism" is a fairly dynamic theoretical perspective insofar as it is constantly being amended and reinterpreted by writers as diverse as:

Eric Ohlin Wright (USA).
Antonio Gramsci (Italy)
Louis Althusser (France)
Nicos Poulantzas (Greece)
Ralph Milliband (UK).

In this respect, the basic two-class model proposed by Marx has been variously reinterpreted in the light of developments in the 20th century (some of which we will discuss in more detail at the appropriate points in further Study Packs). Modern Marxists have tended to refine Marx's model by subdividing the bourgeoisie and proletariat into various sub-classes or "class fractions" as the neo-Marxist Nicos Poulantzas has termed them ("Classes in Contemporary Capitalism", 1975).

Most people, for example, will be familiar with the classical division of the class structure into three classes:

Upper,
Middle and
Lower,

although we could add two further classes - one at the top (the Aristocracy) and one at the bottom (the "lumpenproletariat" or "underclass").

Although Marx tended to argue that such sub-classes would disappear in late-capitalism (immediately prior to a Communist revolution), any empirical analysis of class must take account of the existence of various sub-divisions within the class structure.

Rather than discuss modern Marxism in any further detail, however, it is probably more appropriate to consider modern developments as and when they are applicable in subsequent Notes.

Evaluation.

As you are no doubt aware, Marx's ideas have been the subject of intense debate both within sociology and, of course, wider society (mainly because of the important political aspect of Marx's theoretical perspective). There are a number of criticisms at which we can briefly look, some of which are more valid than others...

1. Marx was politically biased:

This is true but not a very telling criticism for at least two main reasons:

a. "Bias" is only significant if it involves the attempt to misinterpret / misinform - otherwise every statement about the world is "biased", in the sense that it involves holding one viewpoint to be superior to another.

b. All knowledge involves some form of interpretation and it seems difficult to conceive of any theory of social stratification that could not, on the above terms, be considered biased.

Furthermore, to argue that one view of stratification is more "politically biased" than another is to imply that there is a theory, somewhere, which is incontrovertibly true - and this is not the case...

2. Marx was an "economic determinist":

By this is meant the idea that relations in the economic sphere of human activity determine the shape and form of all other human relationships. As Marx was well aware (especially in relation to his discussion of class consciousness - something we will look at in some detail in a later Study Pack), the influences upon human behaviour are many and varied - and economic influences and pressures are but one (albeit very important) influence.

3. Not all societies are "class societies":

This is a more serious criticism in terms of Marx's theoretical analysis, since it is evident that Marxists have had problem explaining something like the Caste system operating in India (a system that seems to be built around religious status) in class terms.

In a slightly different way, some feminists (particularly radical feminists) have argued that Marxists have paid too little attention to stratification based upon gender (the concept of a "sex-class", for example, whereby males and females are seen to have different political, economic and ideological interests). In this respect, the criticism is not so much that societies are not "class stratified"; rather, it is that Marxists have tended to use a definition of class that encompasses purely economic relationships.

4. Is Communism "inevitable"?

Since this is a question that cannot be logically answered until communism comes to pass (if communism does occur then it will have been shown to be inevitable and if it doesn't occur then it might still be inevitable at some unspecified point in the future).

More importantly, perhaps, writers such as Sir Karl Popper have argued that the theories employed by Marxists are non-scientific because they do not admit to the possibility of ever being falsified. Like the religious leader who argues that belief in God will result in the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Marxists are accused by writers like Popper of failing to produce theories that can be tested, as opposed to theories that are little more than articles of faith...

5. Finally, there is debate - both within and outside Marxism - concerning the significance of both class fractions and the status of the "middle classes" generally. Writers such as Saunders ("Social Class and Social Stratification") from a right wing perspective argue that Marxists such as E.O.Wright and Poulantzas have failed to establish a theoretical basis for the existence and continuance of a middle class within Marxist theory (whilst, conversely, such writers from a left wing perspective argue that they have satisfactorily explained the continued existence of this class...).