Sociological theory

- Sociological theories attempt to create a model of society. When creating these models, what is perceived as the important point is emphasised.

- What a Marxist perceives as an important point may not be seen as such by a Functionalist but both standpoints emphasise important areas to be considered.

- Every theory has its strengths and weaknesses. Remember that by emphasising a particular point another one is being distorted making it hard to decide on the truest reflection.

Evaluating Sociological theories

- Logical evaluation is concerned with the validity of the argument being examined. Do the pieces of the argument fit together logically or do they contradict one another?

All birds have wings, wings enable flight therefore all birds can fly

Although this statement appears logically correct there is evidence contradictory to this. Chickens for example cannot fly but they do have wings

Useless fact: - The longest (attempted) recorded flight of a chicken is 13 seconds

Evaluating Sociological theories continued

- Empirical evaluation is interested in the truth behind the propositions in the argument. To determine what the fundamental differences in society are the different claims must be compared with social reality.

- Initially this seems straightforward but it must be noted that the theorists have put their own interpretation into what they claim to be true.

- A piece of empirical evidence put forward and accepted as valid from one theoretical stance may well be disregarded by a theorist taking another standpoint.

- In simplest terms it is not always possible to test a Sociological theory using empirical evidence as those who support a contrasting theory may oppose it.
Marxism

“... The production of the means of subsistence forms the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art and even the ideas of religion, of the people concerned have been evolved.”

- For Marx, understanding social structure is dependent upon the understanding of how production is organised within that society. He called it the Infrastructure or economic base.

- All other elements of society (those that are not economic production) he terms the Superstructure such as political actions and ideology.

These terms convey how one set of activities is built upon to determine another.

More Marxism

Karl Marx (1818-1883) the founder of Marxist theory argues that there are 3 central elements to consider when studying society.

1. The material conditions of production – how the production of goods and services is organised

2. Class conflict – seen by Marx as the vehicle for social change that propels society forward from one system of production to another

   Feudalism \[\rightarrow\] Capitalism

3. Scientific identification of the conditions that will enable the working class to replace the modern oppressive production system with a classless system

Still Marxism

Marx believed that all non-communist societies are concerned with 2 main classes. Remember, in non-revolutionary times Marx highlighted the presence of the petit bourgeoisie (small shop owners etc).

1. The Bourgeoisie – do not take part in the means of production. They are Capitalists who own the factories.

2. The Proletariats – otherwise known as the masses. These are the people who work in the factories to benefit of the owners.

   Marxist theorists suggest that the bourgeoisie for their own gain exploit the proletariat. This is where the idea of class conflict has arisen.

Marxism again

Marx’s idea of the structure of society can be seen better using the following diagram.

- Marxist perspective is a macro or structural approach. This means that Marxist theorists analyse how society fits together

- Remember for Marx the structure of society was determined by the economic base or infrastructure