

## A Level Sociology: Transition Work

Humans are social creatures. Throughout our evolution, from our days of foraging and hunting animals, we have tended to live and work in social groups, which have become progressively larger and more complex. These groups have ranged from simple family units, through clans and tribes, villages, and towns, to cities and nation states. Our natural inclination to live and work together has led to the formation of civil societies, which have been shaped by the increasing breadth of our knowledge and sophistication of our technology. In turn, the nature of the society we live in influences our social behaviour, affecting virtually every aspect of our lives. Sociology is the study of how individuals behave in groups and how their behaviour is shaped by these groups. This includes: how groups are formed; the dynamics that animate them; and how these dynamics maintain and alter the group or bring about social change. Today, sociology's scope ranges from the theoretical study of social processes, structures, and systems, to the application of these theories as part of social policy. And, because societies consist of a collection of individual people, there is an inevitable connection between the structures of society as a whole and the behaviour of its individual members. Sociologists may therefore focus on the institutions and organization of society, the various social groupings and stratifications within it, or the interactions and experiences of individuals.

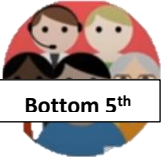

Throughout the A Level course, you will focus on five different sociological perspectives; functionalism, Marxism, feminism, Weberianism and postmodernism. You will understand how sociologists explain social order and stratification within the topics of the family, racism, poverty, sexism, ageism and crime.

### Poverty and Social Inequality:

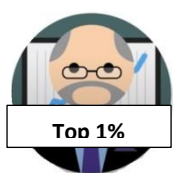


Watch the video about wealth distribution in the UK and complete the following activities on page 2.

After watching the video, see if you can complete the table by inserting the missing numbers from below.

Quintile (5 <sup>th</sup> ) of population	What people think is the <b>fair</b> distribution of wealth.	What people think is the <b>actual</b> distribution of wealth.	What <b>is</b> the actual distribution of wealth.
 <p>Bottom 5<sup>th</sup></p>			
 <p>Top 5<sup>th</sup></p>			

25% - 6% - 40% - 15% - 9% - 60%



The 'Top 1%' of the UK population owns the same amount of wealth as the entire bottom 60% of the population combined!

1) What are your initial thoughts about the distribution of wealth in the UK? Do these figures surprise you?

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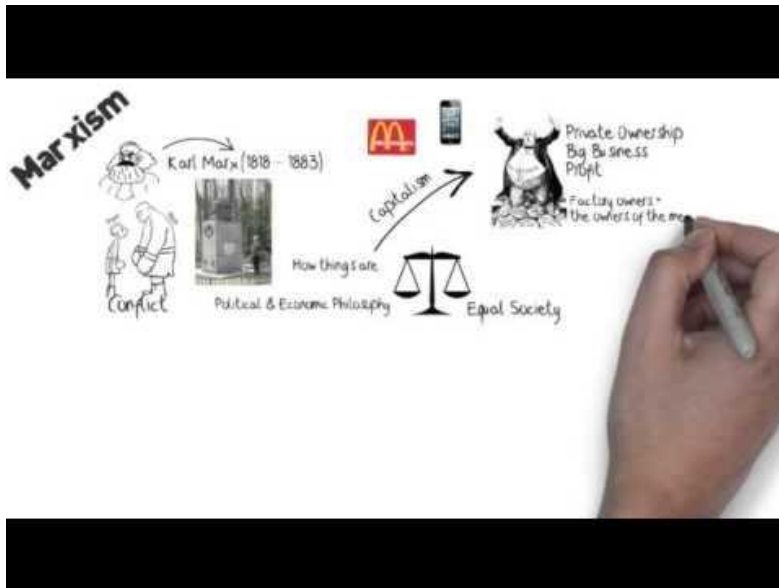
### Explaining the inequality.

As mentioned on page 1, there are several different sociological perspectives that offer explanations to how society is structured, including the distribution of wealth. We will focus on the most famous theory which is known as Marxism after the philosophy Karl Marx.

Watch the following video and read the following information from the 'Theories Booklet' you will be required to read during the A level course. Use both the video and the reading to answer the questions on pages 5 and 6.



## Marxist Theory:



The following is taken from the Sociological Theories booklet that you are expected to read during the first few weeks of Year 12.

**Karl Marx** (1818 – 1883) is probably the most famous and influential sociologist of all time. Marx was interested in the history of society and industrialisation, a concept he described as ‘historical materialism’. Marx believed that all ideas are products of a material struggle for existence within the economic base of society. In order to explain Marx’s theory we must start by looking at the historical developments in society throughout time; Marx described these periods as ‘epochs’.

Marx believed that each ‘epoch’ can be defined by considering the **relations of production**. In an Ancient Society the relations of production were between the slave-owner and slaves. Power would be derived from physical force. Any slaves unwilling to work for the slave-owners would be physically punished. This continued until Feudal Societies

<p><b>Ancient Society</b></p> <p>Based upon the exploitation of slaves, legally tied to their owners.</p>		<p>developed across Medieval Europe. The relation of production changed from slave and slave-owner to land-owner and serfs. A person’s birth would now dictate their position within society with Kings, Lords and Noblemen being granted land and serfs working for their Lords.</p>
<p><b>Feudal Society</b></p> <p>Based upon the exploitation of serfs, legally tied to the land.</p>		<p>Power now derives from legal and religious rulings. The third society (and most interesting to Marx) is a Capitalist Society. The relations of production has now changed with ‘serfs’ now freely hired by those who own the <b>means of production</b> (those who produce goods such as factories).</p>
<p><b>Capitalist Society</b></p> <p>Based upon the exploitation of free wage labourers.</p>		<p>Marx described the workers as the <b>Proletariat</b> and the rich ruling-class as the <b>Bourgeoisie</b>. He argues that the two</p>

classes are in a current state of conflict. The Bourgeoisie want to create as much financial profit as physically possible. One way to achieve this is to keep labour and production costs to a minimum. Marx called this ‘**surplus value**’. For

example, in 2016 Apple reported profits (surplus value) of \$9 billion. One reason for such large profits was the release of the iPhone 7, which costs \$220 in raw materials. The labour costs to build an iPhone is \$5 (the workers get paid \$1.85 per hour). To buy an iPhone 7 you must pay \$650, making someone very rich. It is currently estimated that around 0.5% of the world's population own 99% of the world's money and material possessions.

So why do the Proletariat accept this system? Well Marx had an explanation, what he called **False Class-Consciousness**. Marx believed that workers are brain-washed into believing that their relation to the means of production is fair and justified. Marx believed that the Bourgeoisie have developed a strong **Ideology** that allows them to remain rich and unchallenged. Many institutions within society promote the Bourgeoisie's ideology and help ensure that the Proletariat accept their place at the bottom of society. For example, Marx was very critical of religion. He focused on Christianity and how the church and religious teachings are manipulated to benefit the rich. He famously described religion as the 'opium of the masses'. For example, in Matthew 19:24 Jesus is quoted as saying 'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God'. Marx would suggest that this teaches the Proletariat that the only way to enter heaven is to be poor. In modern society institutions like the Mass Media would promote a False Class Consciousness through TV shows like the Apprentice or Dragons Den that promote hard work in order for the Proletariat to become the Bourgeoisie. Another feature of ideology is to **alienate** the proletariat. The process of alienation is to split the proletariat into smaller separate groups in order to prevent them from uniting together. For example, the media often use ethnic minorities as scapegoats which diverts attention away from the failures of capitalism and places the focus on small powerless groups.

However, in a similar vein to the Functionalists, Marx believed that society could be studied scientifically (he was also a positivist) and therefore predictions about society can be made. Marx believed that eventually the Proletariat will see through the Ideology of the Bourgeoisie and become **Class Conscious**. This is where the masses realise the unfair exploitation and inequality they have faced and over-throw the rich (**Revolution**). When this happens, Marx believes we will live in a 'classless communist society where exploitation is abolished, private ownership is replaced with social ownership and production for profit is replaced with production to satisfy human need. The workers would regain control of their labour and its products removing any 'labour surplus'. Marx said that the revolutions would happen all over the world, starting with the most advanced capitalist societies.

**See if you can now answer the questions and complete the activities on pages 5 and 6.**



**1) Why is Marxism described as a 'conflict theory'?**

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**2) Can you explain how a communist society would differ to a capitalist society according to Karl Marx?**

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**3) What key term did Karl Marx use to describe the factory owners or middle classes?**

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**4) What key term did Karl Marx use to describe the workers?**

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**5) According to Karl Marx, how would and when would a capitalist society evolve into a communist society?**

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See if you can match up the Marxist key terms. This activity will be useful when studying Marxism during the course.

Key Term		Definition
<b>Bourgeoisie</b>		The factories and material goods required to make products.
<b>Proletariat</b>		The process in which the proletariat overthrow the bourgeoisie and take control of the means of production
<b>Forces of Production</b>		The name for the individuals who make up the forces of production.
<b>Means of Production</b>		Now called the 'Repressive State Apparatus' – the physical barrier that prevents a revolution.
<b>False Class Consciousness</b>		When the proletariat realise the inequality in a capitalist society and see through the ideology.
<b>Class Consciousness</b>		How the number of proletariat is increasing and the bourgeoisie is decreasing.
<b>Revolution</b>		The ruling class who own the means of production and exploit the workers.
<b>Armed Bodies of Men</b>		The norms and values of rich, promoted through institutions such as the family, religion and education.
<b>Ideology</b>		The workforce who run the machines for the bourgeoisie.
<b>Class Polarisation</b>		A state in which the proletariat accept the ruling class ideology and believe that things like meritocracy exist.
<b>Capitalism</b>		A system that developed after the industrial revolution based upon the maximisation of profits and minimisation of costs.



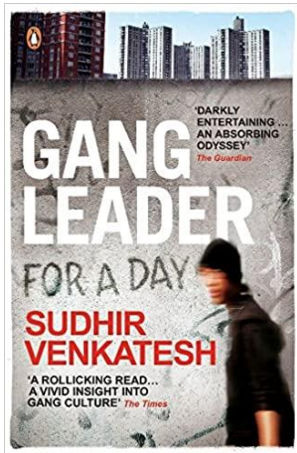


**Stretch and Challenge:** If you want to know a little more about the ideas of Karl Marx and how his theory relates to modern society, watch the following BBC documentary on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyrhoHtSkzg>

**Other topics to explore:**

Wider Reading:



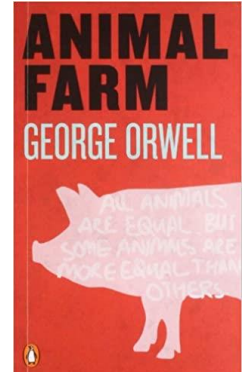
**Venkatesh, S. (2009). 'Gang Leader for a Day'**

During the A Level course we will read the book Gang Leader for a Day. This is the story about a Sociology student in Chicago who wants to study gangs and poverty. After being held at gun point by a gang called the Black Kings, the leader of the gang, J.T. allows the author to observe the gang and live amongst the gang members. J.T. even allows the author to be the gang leader for the day and challenges him to deal with gang conflicts, drug dealing operations and money laundering.

If you would like to start reading the book, see Mr Riley for a copy.

**Orwell, G. (1945). 'Animal Farm'**

George Orwell's famous fictional book that describes how animals overthrow their master farmer Jones and establish their own society based upon the belief that all animals are equal. Orwell uses the concept of animal farm to explore topics relating to communism and Russia following the Russian Revolution. An interesting and heart-warming story.



Films:

**This is England (2006)**



Twelve-year-old Shaun is a lonely boy growing up in a grim coastal town in northern England in 1983. Over the course of the summer holiday he befriends a group of local skinheads. With his pent-up rage and frustration, Shaun finds exactly what he needs in the gang-mischief, mayhem and brotherhood. This film explores topics of poverty, social class, racism, identity, subcultures and crime. An excellent introduction to topics covered during the course such as poverty, identity and deviance.