
INEQUALITY – INEVITABLE: MYTH OR REALITY?

ABSTRACT

The concept of inequality is vast and complex. Sociologists share multiple perspectives – one principle linking with another; others standing on their own. Karl Marx saw inequality in terms of the ownership of wealth and the control of material possessions, which are also manifested in ideological perceptions. An assessment of Marx states the view as simple as it does not consider all of the other forms of inequality found in society. Max Weber debated Marx's views on social inequality. Inequality is more intricate than what Marx described, said Weber. He defined power as being the ability to persuade others to do their will and further claimed that it had numerous sources such as ownership of assets, social status, physical strength and education. On the other hand, sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore believed that an uneven allocation of society's rewards is essential to encourage people and reflect its importance, because that is how a society should be shaped.

INTRODUCTION

The term social inequality describes a condition in which members of a society have different amounts of wealth, prestige, or power. Some degree of social inequality is found in every society. When a system of social inequality is based on a hierarchy of groups, sociologists refer to it as stratification: a structured ranking of entire groups of people that perpetuates unequal economic rewards and power in a society. Ascribed status is a social position assigned to a person without regard for that person's characteristics, for example, being a Queen is an ascribed status, as is being a female. By contrast, achieved status is a social position attained by a person largely through his or her own effort. This can be positive or negative so a person can be an ex-prisoner or a judge. These are achieved statuses.

Individuals are affected more or less by social inequality because of numerous reasons, including their gender, economic position, religion, ethnicity, race, and even sexuality. People also live in areas which differ by culture, economic resources, and potentials. Together, an individual's self attributes and how they are deduced, along with family background, and the political, social and economic frameworks in which they inhabit shape their specific attitudes, course of life, and their chances for civilized and suitable lifestyles.

KARL MARX ON SOCIAL INEQUALITY: THE MARXIST IDEOLOGY

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Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) was motivated by concern for workers who were experiencing terrible poverty while all around was great wealth and power. He believed in working for a classless society. Marxism is often referred to as a conflict theory. Marxists see society as being divided by conflict between the social groups who make up society. Marx believed that social change is the natural order of societies. In each form of society there are those only two classes of people. These are the bourgeoisie who own and control all assets. Those who work for them are the proletariat and they own nothing but their own ability to work. The bourgeoisie are able to control the proletariat through two mechanisms. These are the direct control through the exercise of power and the indirect control of people's minds through the use of ideology or ideas. It is the second means of control that is the most dangerous, because people come to accept certain ideas as being true or self-evident without really questioning them. We accept that some people are rich and others poor as being part of daily life and so there are very few challenges to the idea that the greed and selfishness of the rich are acceptable and should be copied by the rest of us. Religion played an important role here too because it teaches people that they should seek reward in heaven and not equality on earth. Marx also recognized gender inequality, which he thought would follow eventually after all inequality ended. Feminists have taken Marxist ideas and have developed them into an analysis that places gender inequalities as being as significant as class inequality. Marx predicted that capitalism would be overthrown as the workers revolted against their masters and created a class free society. He thought this would happen in his own lifetime, or shortly after his death. This has clearly not happened.

MAX WEBER ON SOCIAL INEQUALITY: CLASS, STATUS & PARTY

According to Max Weber (1864 -1920), social inequality has three primary types of inequality. The first one is "CLASS" and is mainly based in the marketplace, while the second being the "STATUS" – also known as Stand in German. And the third type of stratification is "PARTY" where power is distributed. It was emphasized by Weber that the two stratification forms surface from two different parts of society. That is Status with its emphasis on honor came from the Gemeinschaft, whereas Class emerged out of Gesellschaft. And Party emerges out of both. Weber also drew the conclusion that Status and Class are fundamentally different, although they are related. While the former is rooted in rational calculation, the latter in abstract emotion, hence they cannot be mixed. In fact, when the two are separated, analysts get a much clearer view of the systems for how different types of inequality continue. Weber said that people create groups and organisations that tend to look after their own interests, thus sustaining and reproducing social inequality. Status is formed out of the tendency of people in judging one another. While Karl Marx believed society would become more polarised, Weber argued that there would be ever more social classes developing in capitalist society.

DAVIS AND MOORE ON SOCIAL INEQUALITY: THE

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FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Functionalists see society as consisting of shared values. They claim that inequality and stratification is practical for society and a source of social order. Davis and Moore proposed this theory in 1945. For them Stratification is a system of status positions and jobs. Davis and Moore went on to claim that society needs to fill the most important and difficult jobs with the most talented and hardworking people. If people were all paid the same regardless of their work, they would take the easiest jobs and do as little training as possible. There would be no incentive to work hard and do difficult educational courses. Society ensures that the most pay and the best working conditions go to those who are prepared to put the time and effort into working hard for them. The high rewards act as motivation for the years of work and preparation required for the difficult and responsible careers that some people choose. However, the functionalist approach generally ignores questions of structural inequality because it does not consider the social factors such as racial discrimination, lack of job opportunities, and the inadequate funding of many schools that may contribute to the persistence of inequality in society. Nevertheless, this theoretical perspective is very powerful. It emphasizes the view that the jobs of power and importance are given to those with the most talent.

CONCLUSION

Inequality is component of modern humanity, but the ways in which it is upheld and developed are not predetermined by our society or in our genes.

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