

Sociological Perspectives

Positivism

Positivism is the term used to describe an approach to the study of society that relies specifically on scientific evidence, such as experiments and statistics, to reveal a true nature of how society operates. The term originated in the 19th century, when Auguste Comte described his ideas in his books.

First and foremost, Comte was interested in establishing theories that could be tested with the ultimate goal of improving our world once these theories were clearly laid out. He was eager to discover natural laws that applied to society. He viewed the natural sciences, such as biology and physics, as a necessary step in the development of social science. Just as gravity is a universal truth we all experience in the physical world, Comte believed sociologists could uncover similar laws operating on the social level of people's lives. Auguste Comte is credited with formulating the word "Sociology". He believed that sociology was to be the crowning glory of human studies – the 'Queen of the Sciences'.

He claimed the history of society could be divided into three different stages: theological, metaphysical, and positive, otherwise known as the Law of Three Stages.

- The theological stage reveals humankind's superstitious nature, one that ascribes supernatural causes to the workings of the world.
- The metaphysical stage is an interim stage in which humanity begins to shed its superstitious nature.
- The positive stage is reached when human beings finally realize that natural phenomena and world events can be explained through reason and science.

Functionalism

According to the functionalist perspective of sociology, each aspect of society is interdependent and contributes to society's stability and functioning as a whole. The central idea of Functionalism is, that society is a whole unit made up of interrelated parts that work together. It compares working of society with human body. Just as the heart, brain and lungs in the human body work together to maintain human life, social institutions like family, education and the law work together to maintain the society. This reference of comparing biology with society is called "**Organic analogy**".

Another key point in Functionalism is 'stability'. Stability in society is based on socialization into norms and values on which majority of the society agrees. These shared norms and values are known as **"Value Consensus"**

Functionalism draws its inspiration from the ideas of **Emile Durkheim**. Durkheim was concerned with the question of how societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. He sought to explain social stability through the concept of **solidarity**, and differentiated between the **mechanical solidarity** of primitive societies and the **organic solidarity** of complex modern societies. According to Durkheim, more primitive or traditional societies were held together by mechanical solidarity; members of society lived in relatively small and undifferentiated groups, where they shared strong family ties and performed similar daily tasks. Such societies were held together by shared values and common symbols. By contrast, he observed that, in modern societies, traditional family bonds are weaker; modern societies also exhibit a complex division of labor, where members perform very different daily tasks. Durkheim argued that modern industrial society would destroy the traditional mechanical solidarity that held primitive societies together. Modern societies however, do not fall apart. Instead, modern societies rely on organic solidarity; because of the extensive division of labor, members of society are forced to interact and exchange with one another to provide the things they need.

Marxism (Conflict theory)

Marxism as a sociological perspective has its origins in the work of Karl Marx. He was a 19th century German philosopher who began exploring the relationship between economy and the workers within that system. Over his lifetime, Marx developed a theory that human societies progress through a struggle between two distinct social classes. He focused on struggle between the bourgeoisie (small group of capitalists who own the means of production) and the proletariat (the masses of workers exploited by the capitalists). Marx believed that class conflict was the key to understand human history. He believed that the conflict and struggle would end only with a revolution by the working class.

To arrive at this conclusion, Marx studied and wrote on philosophy, economy, and politics. Marx formulated these into a scientific study of society. Thus, he is considered to be one of the founding figures of sociology as a discipline. Marx believed that with a mixture of historical research and scientific methods, society could be analyzed logically and rationally. This idea, of course, is still followed by sociologists today.

Feminism (Conflict theory)

Feminist sociology is a conflict theory and theoretical perspective which observes gender in its relation to power both at face to face interaction and within a broader social structure. At the core of feminist sociology is the idea of the systematic oppression of women and the historical dominance of men within the societies i.e. patriarchy. Feminist activists have campaigned for women rights such as contract law, property and voting. Therefore, over a period of time feminists particularly of West have achieved many rights such as women suffrage (voting), workplace rights and right to divorce.

Interactionism

Interactionism is a theoretical perspective in which society is thought to be a product of the everyday social interactions among millions of people. Instead of looking at social systems at a larger scale like country or a nation, Interactionism focuses on smaller scale interactions like between individuals or social groups, for example relationship within family, schools or workplaces between individuals. George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley have made several contributions to the interactionist school of thought.

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