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What is sociology?

- HM51 — all sociology books code
- From the Latin socius(social, being with others) and the Greek logos(word, reason, science); the scientific study of society.

What do sociologists do?

- They notice social patterns
- They investigate the challenge community held assumptions.

The sociology imagination

- The ability to see the relationship between personal experiences and the larger society
- The capacity to shift from one perspective to another - from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self - and to see the relationship between the two.(The sociological imagination, 1959;4)

Coffee: a purely private matter?

- Implies a cultural setting
- Socially significant
- Socially acceptable
- Socially available
- Implies an extensive social division of labour and a complex social organization
- Implies the world history, economizes, and politics of coffee.

A word of caution

- Peter Berger's introduction to his invitation to Sociology

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When, where, and why was sociology invented?

Some Classical Philosophers and Social thinkers:

Confucius (1551-1479 BC)

Plato(427-347 BC)

Aristotle (384-322 BC)

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406)

Shakespeare (1564-1755)

Montesquies (1689-1755)

Social change and Sociology

Industrialization:

- From agriculture and handmade products to manufacturing and related industries

Urbanization:

- Population moving from rural areas to cities

Emergence of many new social problems

- Anonymity, isolation, inadequate housing, crowded cities, unsanitary and unhealthy work and living conditions, homelessness, high rates of poverty, pollution, criminal behaviour, etc.
- Popular discontent among the working class:
 - strikes, protest, social uprising, angry mobs clashing with the police or the army, etc.

Famous novels from the 19th century

- Victor Hugo's Les misérables
- Emile Zola's Germinal
- Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist
- Herman Melville's novels

Political/ Democratic Revolutions

Changes in political thought

- society as the product of individual self-interest
- New political climate; individual freedom and rights

Early Sociologists...

How and why do societies change?

What are the social forces holding societies together to create order and stability over time?

How do modern societies differ from the preceding ones?

Auguste Comte (1798-1857)

Coined the word Sociology... but preferred the term Social Physics

Sought to do a science of society

Social statics (order and stability) and dynamics (conflict and change)

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

- Created the first rules of methods in sociology
- Brought sociology to the university, created the first chair in sociology at la Sorbonne in Paris
- Trained the first students in the discipline
- Created the first academic sociological journal, L'Année sociologique (1898)

Durkheim:

Society is more than the sum of its parts:

- has a unique character of its own; not reducible to the behaviour of any one individual

Social Facts:

- patterned ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside any one individual but that exert social control over each person
- Ex. Roles as a sister or brother, a student or worker, it exist long since you were born.

Suicide as a social fact

- Social distribution of suicide and its rate among different groups and countries
 - for any given country, the suicide rate is stable over time
 - It also differs wildly among them...
- Britain > 2 x Italy
- Denmark > 4 x Britain
- Social integration:
 - Categories of people with strong social ties had low suicide rates; more socially isolated or individualistic people had higher suicide rates

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Karl Marx (1818- 1883)

Marx:

Stressed the importance of social conflict, and the need for further change and revolution

Concerned about oppression, exploitation, and alienation

Economic determinism:

— every aspect of social life is based on economic relationships

The key to human history:

— the conflict between those who own the means of production and those who do not: class conflict

In the case of industrial societies:

— the conflict between the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and the proletariat (working class)

- Socialism

* the dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie

- **Communism:**

* a classless system in which the means of production are collectively owned and wealth and power are evenly distributed

Max Weber (1864-1920)

- Meaningful social action:

* the motives that underlie human behaviour

* the ways in which people interpret and explain their own behaviour and that of others

* the way in which these actions and meanings affect the social order

- Verstehen (understanding, insight)

- Importance of ideas, values, and beliefs

Major theoretical perspectives in sociology

Theory...

From the Greek theorein, “to see” A conceptual overview of the way something works

- A set of logically interrelated statements that attempts to describe, explain, and (occasionally) predict social events.

- Social theorizing: the task of weaving isolated observations

- An overall approach or viewpoint toward some subject; a basic image of society that guides thinking and research (“road map”, paradigm)

- Each perspective directs our attention to:

* what to study

* what question(s) to ask

* and how we should ask them...

- Each perspective interprets reality and explains data in a different way

Theoretical perspective:

An overall approach or viewpoint toward some subject; a basic image of society that guides thinking and research (“road map”, paradigm)

Functionalist perspective (also known as structural-functionalism)

- Society as a system made up of interrelated parts, each of which performs one or several important social functions or meets vital social needs

- Parts/ subsystems: social institutions; economy, family, education, religion, government, medicine, science, etc.

- Institutions provide the rules governing behaviours, and a set of common values that bind people together.

Merton on social function:

- Manifest functions: recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern

- Latent functions: consequences that are largely unrecognized and unintended

— example: the education system

- Dysfunctions: undesirable consequences of any social pattern for the operation of society

Functionalist perspective: Brief critical evaluation

- How can we assume that society has a “natural” order when social patterns differ from place to place and change over time?
- By emphasizing social integration, tends to gloss over inequality based on social class, race, ethnicity, and gender — divisions that may generate considerable tension and conflict.

Conflict perspective

- Based on the four C's: conflict, class, contestation, and change
- Society is an arena of inequality generating conflict and change, and of continuous power struggle among competing groups
- Social class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. are linked to unequal distribution of money, power, education, and social prestige; the social system typically benefits some people while depriving others.
- Assumes that society either will or should be changed; commitment to fight against social inequalities.
- Inscription on Marx's monument in London's Highgate Cemetery:
 - “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it’

Brief critical evaluation

- By highlighting inequality and division, glosses over how shared values or interdependence generates unity among members of a society
- By pursuing political goals, relinquishes any claim to scientific objectivity
- Functionalist and conflict perspectives envision society in very broad and abstract terms: large- scale social structures and social systems.

Symbolic- Interactionist Perspective

- Micro- level focus: social interactions in specific situations (face to face, reciprocal exchanges)
- Symbolic because looks at the meaning of the interaction:
 - Plans, intentions, motivations, and self- reflexivity of actors; through speech, written language, intonations, signs, gestures, body language, gift giving, etc.
 - Envisions society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals, as a shared reality created by the interactions of its members.

Brief critical evaluation

- By focusing on day- to- day and face to face interactions, ignores the larger social institutions in which behaviour takes place
- Downplays the global and historical aspects of culture, and the effects of socially imposed definitions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and age on people's lives

The Feminist Perspective

- Focuses on the significance of gender in understanding and explaining inequalities between men and women in all areas of social life.
- Encompasses both the micro and the macro levels of analysis:
 - Daily construction and re- production of gender
 - Series of constraints and forms of resistance in women's lives in social institutions
 - Dorothy Smith(1926-)

Brief critical evaluation

- Women- centered
- Explicitly ideological

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Common Sense

- Women are more likely to be assaulted than men
- Rates of murder and other violent crimes have steadily increased over the past twenty years
- Most sexual assaults and rapes are committed by strangers
- Living together before marriage increases the likelihood of having a stable marriage
- The fact that a belief is widespread among the population doesn't make it true
- Hard to refute
- Based on rudimentary reasoning
- Not universally accepted

False Obviousness

- Paul Lazarsfeld and R.K Merton's "The American Soldier" (1949)
- Lazarsfeld: Austrian born American sociologist (1901- 1976). Created the Bureau for Applied Social Research

"The American Soldier"

- (1) Soldiers from the southern US handled the hot climate of the Pacific islands better than the soldiers from the northern US
- (2) The morale of soldiers from the countryside was better than that of soldiers from the cities.
- (3) The desire of soldiers to be brought back home was stronger during combat and hostilities than it was after the German surrender and the end of the war.

ALL FALSE

Prejudice and Stereotypes

- Prejudice, from the Latin *prae* (before, pre-) and *judicium* (judgement): a pre-judgement
- Stereotypes, from *stereos* (solid): overgeneralizations about the appearance, behaviour, mindset, or other characteristics of members of particular groups:
 - Guys with long hair...
 - Natives...
 - Men... Women...
 - Canadians... Americans...

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The principles of Sociological Research

The Scientific Method

1. Select and formulate a research question
2. Review relevant literature
3. Select an appropriate research design
4. Collect data
5. Analyze the data, draw conclusions, and report findings

Stimulating Curiosity...

- Cultivating oneself
- Travelling
- Social Marginality

Critical Outlook

- To criticize, from the Greek *krino* (to separate, to distinguish): to sort things out
- To cultivate doubt, to put things into question
 - Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)