Principles of Sociology

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Principles of Sociology

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Modern Sociological Perspectives:

Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interactionism

- **Theories and Theoretical Perspectives**

- Sociology is not restricted to collection of facts.

- In order to know why things happen, we are in need of developing explanatory theories.

- *Theories* involve constructing abstract interpretations that can be used to explain a wide variety of empirical or 'factual' situations.

- Theories focus on particular aspects of social life and experience.

- Theoretical approaches/perspectives refer to broad orientations to the social world.

- A *theoretical perspective* provides a set of assumptions, interrelated concepts, and statements about how various social phenomena are related to one another.

- Each perspective sets different questions about society, adopts specific methodology, deploys concepts and so provides different views of social life.

Functionalism

- According to Functionalism, society is a complex system whose various parts work together to produce stability and solidarity.

- The sociological study of the function of a social practice or institution means the analysis of the contribution which that practice, or institution, makes to the continuation of society.

- The structural-functional—or, more simply, functionalist—perspective draws substantially upon the ideas of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim, and takes a broad view of society, focusing on the macro aspects of social life.

- ***Comte's influence***

- Comte's influence refers to his suggestions about the existence of a "good society", inherent equilibrium of social system and the image of society as an organic system.

- Comte had adopted the theory of organism, as he recalled the analogy between social system and living organisms.

- Analogies between cell and family, tissues and social classes, organs and cities, all these are indicative of his perception of society as an organic system.

- ***Spencer's influence***

- Spencer developed the organismic theory of society.

- According to Spencer, the social systems present analogies with living organisms, that science of biology studies.

- Characteristic analogies are the following: **a)** development, **b)** differentiation of structures and functions, **c)** mutual dependence of parts, **d)** laws of evolution, **e)** vital functions of structures/parts of systems for the reproduction/survival of organic social system.

- ***Durkheim's influence***

- Durkheim had a crucial effect on structural functionalism.

- His contribution has to do with his suggestion about the relation between social cause and social function. Durkheim was searching about the cause of existence and form of social structure, social institution.

- At the same time, he was searching the usefulness of a social institution, the needs to which the existence and function of a social institution responds.

- One fundamental suggestion of structural functionalism arises from Durkheim's view: Each social institution serves a (positive) function of social system, as it responds to specific social needs.

- For functionalists, functions are the observed consequences of the existence of institutions, groups, and other system parts that permit the adaptation or adjustment of a system.

- Each institution (education, family, economy) is built around a standardized solution to a set of problems.

- The survival/reproduction of a social system requires the performance of certain tasks.

- Institutions are the principal structures whereby these critical tasks for social living —functions— are organized, directed, and executed.

- *Moral consensus:*

- Functionalism emphasizes the importance of moral consensus, in maintaining order and stability in society.

- Moral consensus exists when most people in a society share the same values.

- Until the 1960s, functionalist perspective was the leading theoretical tradition in sociology, particularly in the United States.

- **Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)**

- One main issue for structural functionalists is the requirements for survival and reproduction of social system.

- *Definition of social system:*

- "A social system consists in a plurality of individual actors *interacting with each* other in a situation which has at least a ***physical or environmental aspect***, ***actors*** who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the "optimization of gratification" and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a ***system of culturally structured and shared symbols***".

- Parsons did not take interaction as his fundamental unit in the study of the social system. Rather, he used the **status-role complex** *as the basic unit of the system.*

- *Status-role complex is a structural component* of the social system.

- *Status refers to a structural position within the social* system, and *role is what the actor does in such a position,* seen in the context of *its* functional significance for the larger system.

- The actor is viewed not in terms of thoughts and actions but instead as nothing more than a bundle of statuses and roles.

- Parsons refers to four functional requirements for social systems: 1) *Adaptation*, 2) *Goal attainment*, 3) integration, 4) *pattern maintenance*.

- **Adaptation***: A system must cope with external situational exigencies. It must* adapt to its environment and adapt the environment to its needs.

- **Goal attainment***: A system must define and achieve its primary goals.* It refers to the political function of social system, by which decisions on definition of goals and ways of its attainment are taken (organization, mobilization of resources).

- **Integration***: A system must regulate the interrelationship of its component* parts. It refers to the function of institutions of social control, which arrange and control social behaviour, and, also, to the types of social solidarity.

- **Latency (pattern maintenance)***: A system must furnish, maintain, and renew* both the motivation of individuals and the cultural patterns that create and sustain that motivation.

- **Functional theory of stratification**

Kingsley Davis & Wilbert Moore (1945)

- Stratification is, in their view, a *functional necessity. All societies need such* a system, and this need brings into existence a system of stratification.

- Division of roles and stratification of position enable the fulfillment of social needs.

- According to Davis and Moore, stratification comprise a system/structure of positions, that social individuals possess.

- The major functional issue is how a society motivates and places people in their "proper" positions in the stratification system.

- Proper social placement in society is a problem for three basic reasons:

- 1) some positions are more pleasant to occupy than others

- 2) some positions are more important to the survival of society than others

- 3) different social positions require different abilities and talents.

- The high-ranking positions within the stratification system are presumed to be those that are **a)** *less pleasant* to occupy , ***but*** **b)** *more important to the survival of society* and **c)** *that require the greatest ability and talent*.

- Society attaches sufficient rewards to these positions so that enough people will seek to occupy them and the individuals who do come to occupy them will work diligently.

- These positions are attached to a different degree of prestige, power and reward.

- **Points of Critique**

- **1)** The functional theory of stratification perpetuates the privileged position of those people who already have power, prestige, and money.

- **2)** The functional theory assumes that simply because a stratified social structure existed in the past, it must continue to exist in the future.

- **3)** The idea of functional positions varying in their importance to society is problematic.

- **4)** The high-ranking, prestigious positions tend to be exclusive for the members of a certain professional circle.

- **5)** The power, prestige and income are not the only motives that can mobilize people**.**

- **Robert K. Merton (1910-2003)**

- Merton criticized the three basic postulates of functional analysis:

- **a)** The postulate of the functional unity of society

- **b)** The postulate of universal functionalism

- **c)** The postulate of indispensability

- Merton also distinguished between *functions* and *disfunctions*.

- To look for the *dysfunctional aspects* of social behavior means focusing on features of social life that challenge the existing order of things.

- Merton (1968) pointed out that just as institutions and the other parts of society can contribute to the maintenance of the social system, they can also have negative consequences.

- **Nonfunctions:**

- The term of *nonfunctions refers to the consequences* that are simply irrelevant to the system under consideration.

- **Manifest functions** are those known to, and intended by, the participants in a specific type of social activity.

- **Latent functions** are consequences of that activity of which participants are unaware.

- A major part of sociological explanation, according to Merton, consists in uncovering the latent functions of social activities and institutions.

- **Unanticipated consequences:**

- *Actions have both* intended and unintended consequences. Although everyone is aware of the intended consequences, sociological analysis is required to uncover the unintended consequences; indeed, to some this is the very essence of sociology. Peter Berger (1963) has called this "debunking," or looking beyond stated intentions to real effects

- *Types of unanticipated consequences*: 1) latent function (positive), 2) latent dysfunctions, 3) non-functional consequences

Social structure and Anomie (1968)

- One of the best-known contributions to structural functionalism, indeed to all of sociology, is Merton's analysis of the relationship between culture, structure, and anomie.

- *Culture* *as* "that organized set of normative values governing behavior which is common to members of a designated society or group".

- *Social structure* *as* "that organized set of social relationships in which members of the society or group are variously implicated".

- *Anomie* occurs "when there is an acute **disjunction** between the **cultural norms and goals** and the **socially structured capacities** of members of the group to act in accord with them".

- Due to their position in the social structure of society, some people are unable to act in accord with normative values. The culture calls for some type of behavior that the social structure prevents from occurring.

- **Critique to Functionalism**

- **a)** The focus on stability and order means that divisions or inequalities in society - based on factors such as class, race and gender - are minimized.

- **b)** Less emphasis on the role of creative social action within society.

- **c)** The functionalist approach has difficulty dealing with history and processes of social change.

Conflict Theory

- Conflict theorists reject functionalism's emphasis on consensus. Instead, they highlight the importance of divisions in society. They concentrate on issues of **power**, **inequality** and **struggle**.

- Society is composed of distinct groups pursuing their own interests.

- The existence of separate interests means that the potential for conflict is always present.

- Conflict theorists examine the tensions between dominant and disadvantaged groups within society and seek to understand how relationships of control are established and perpetuated.

- The main *source of conflict* in human societies is sca*rcity of social and material resources*.

- Wealth, prestige, and power are always in limited supply, so that gains for one individual or group are usually associated with losses for others.

- When one group enjoys sufficient power, it makes and enforces rules and shapes institutional life so that its interests are served.

- An influential approach within conflict theory is Marxism, named after Karl Marx, whose work emphasized class conflict.

- Not all conflict theories take a Marxist approach. Conflict theory has various other roots, such as Marxian and Weberian theory and Simmel's work on social conflict.

Ralf Dahrendorf (1929-2009)

- Dahrendorf is the major exponent of the position that society has two faces (conflict and consensus) and that sociological theory therefore should be divided into two parts, **conflict theory** and **consensus theory**.

- Consensus theorists should examine value integration in society, and conflict theorists should examine conflicts of interest and the coercion that holds society together in the face of these stresses.

- Dahrendorf recognized that society could not exist without both conflict and consensus, which are prerequisites for each other.

- ***Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959)**

- Conflict comes mainly from different interests that individuals and groups have.

- Dahrendorf relates differences of interest more broadly to authority and power.

- In all societies there is a division between those who hold authority and those who are largely excluded from it -between ***rulers*** and ***ruled***.

- The differential distribution of authority "invariably becomes the determining factor of systematic social conflicts". Authority does not reside in individuals but in positions.

- Conflict theorists asked how it is that some groups acquire power, dominate other groups, and effect their will in human affairs. In so doing, they looked at who benefits and who loses from the way society is organized.

- Authority always implies both superordination and subordination.

- Those who occupy positions of authority are expected to control subordinates; that is, they dominate because of the expectations of those who surround them, not because of their own psychological characteristics.

- Like authority, these expectations are attached to positions, not people.

- Society is composed of a number of units that he called *imperatively coordinated associations* (associations of people controlled by a hierarchy of authority positions).

- *Interests:*

- Authority within each association is dichotomous; thus two, and only two, conflict groups can be formed within any association.

- Those in positions of authority and those in positions of subordination hold certain interests that are "contradictory in substance and direction."

- **Conflict of interest: Latent and manifest interests**

- Within every association, those in dominant positions seek to maintain the status quo while those in subordinate positions seek change. The interests of superordinates and subordinates are objective in the sense that they are reflected in the expectations (roles) attached to positions.

- A conflict of interest within any association is at least latent at all times, which means that the legitimacy of authority is *always precarious*.

- Individuals do not have to internalize these expectations or even be conscious of them in order to act in accord with them.

- If they occupy given positions, they will behave in the expected manner.

- Individuals are "adjusted" or "adapted" to their roles when they contribute to conflict between superordinates and subordinates.

- Dahrendorf called these unconscious role expectations **latent interests**.

- *Manifest interests* are latent interests that have become conscious.

- **Types of groups:**

- a) *quasi group*

- b) *interest group*

- c) *conflict group*

- **Conflict and change:**

- The ***conservative function of conflict*** refers to the maintaining of status quo. This function is only one part of social reality.

- Conflict also leads to ***change*** and development.

- Once conflict groups emerge, they engage in actions that lead to changes in social structure. When the conflict is intense, the changes that occur are radical. When it is accompanied by violence, structural change will be sudden.

- Whatever the nature of conflict, sociologists must be attuned to the relationship between conflict and change as well as that between conflict and the status quo

Critique to conflict theory

- **1)** The conflict approach has difficulty dealing with some aspects of consensus, integration, and stability.

- **2)** Like structural functionalism, conflict theory is almost wholly macroscopic and as a result has little to offer to our understanding of individual thought and action.

- **3)** Conflict seems to emerge mysteriously from legitimate systems (just as it does in structural functionalism).

- **4)** Conflict theory seems to suffer from many of the same conceptual and logical problems (vague concepts, tautologies) as structural functionalism.

- **Conclusion on differences between *Functionalism* and *Conflict Theory***

- **1)** Where functionalists depicted society in relatively static terms, conflict theorists emphasized the processes of change that continually transform social life.

- **2)** Where functionalists stressed the order and stability to be found in society, conflict theorists emphasized disorder and instability.

- **3)** Where functionalists saw the common interests shared by the members of a society, conflict theorists focused upon the interests that divide.

- **4)** Where functionalists viewed consensus as the basis of social unity, conflict theorists insisted that social unity is an illusion resting on coercion.

- **5)** While functionalists often viewed existing social arrangements as necessary and justified by the requirements of group life, conflict theorists saw many of the arrangements as neither necessary nor justified.

- **Notes on similarities and complementarity between *Functionalism* and *Conflict Theory***

- **1)** The functionalist and conflict perspectives focus on the macro or large-scale structures of society.

- **2)** Conflict may serve to solidify a loosely structured group. In a society that seems to be disintegrating, conflict with another society may restore the integrative core.

- **3)** Conflict with one group may serve to produce cohesion by leading to a series of alliances with other groups.

- **4)** Within a society, conflict can bring some ordinarily isolated individuals into an active role.

- **5)** Conflict also serves a communication function. Prior to conflict, groups may be unsure of their adversary's position, but as a result of conflict, positions and boundaries between groups often become clarified.

Symbolic Interactionism

- Symbolic interactionism offers a wide range of interesting and important ideas, and a number of major thinkers have been associated with the approach, including George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, W. I. Thomas, Herbert Blumer, and Erving Goffman.

- Max Weber was an important indirect influence on this theoretical approach because, although he acknowledged the existence of social structures - such as classes, parties, status groups and others - he held that these structures were created through the social actions of individuals.

- Focus on individuals' subjective experiences and understandings, and especially on how shared understandings of the world emerge from social interaction and form the basis for social life.

- Symbolic interactionism directs our attention to the detail of interpersonal interaction and how that detail is used to make sense of what others say and do.

- Social interaction, and therefore society itself, is possible because people share meanings. The combined emphasis on symbols and interaction gave this perspective its name: *symbolic interactionism.*

  - **The basic principles of symbolic interaction theory**

- **1)** Human beings, unlike lower animals, are endowed with the capacity for thought.

- **2)** The capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction.

- **3)** In social interaction people learn the meanings and the symbols that allow them to exercise their distinctively human capacity for thought.

- **4)** Meanings and symbols allow people to carry on distinctively human action and interaction.

- **5)** People are able to modify or alter the meanings and symbols that they use in action and interaction on the basis of their interpretation of the situation.

- **6)** People are able to make these modifications and alterations because, in part, of their ability to interact with themselves, which allows them to examine possible courses of action, assess their relative advantages and disadvantages, and then choose one.

- **7)** The intertwined patterns of action and interaction make up groups and societies.

G. H. Mead (1863- 1931)

- Language allows us to become selfconscious beings - aware of our own individuality and able to see ourselves from the outside as others see us.

- The key element in this process is the symbol. A symbol is something that stands for something else.

- Non-verbal gestures or forms of communication are also symbols.

- Mead argued that humans rely on shared symbols and understandings in their interactions with one another.

- Because human beings live in a richly symbolic universe, virtually all interactions between human individuals involve an exchange of symbols.

- **The looking-glass self**

- The self is a concept of enormous importance to symbolic interactionists.

- The self constitutes the core of the interactionists' intellectual scheme. All other sociological processes and events revolve around that core, taking from it their analytic meaning and organization.

- The idea of a *looking-glass self* can be broken down into three components:

- 1) we imagine how we appear to others.

- 2) we imagine what their judgment of that appearance must be.

- 3) we develop some self-feeling, such as pride or mortification, as a result of our imagining others' judgments.

- **Erving Goffman (1922-1982)**

- *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959).*

- ***Human and social self:***

- The tension "between our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves" results from the difference between what people expect us to do and what we may want to do spontaneously.

- In order to maintain a stable self-image, people perform for their social audiences.

- Goffman's analytical scheme: *dramaturgy, or a view of social life* as a series of dramatic performances akin to those performed on the stage.

- The self is not as a possession of the actor but rather the product of the dramatic interaction between actor and audience.

- Because the self is a product of dramatic interaction, it is vulnerable to disruption during the performance.

- Goffman's dramaturgy is concerned with the processes by which such disturbances are prevented or dealt with.

- Goffman assumed that when individuals interact, they want to present a certain sense of self that will be accepted by others. For that reason actors are attuned to the need to control the audience, especially those elements of it that might be disruptive.

- **Impression management**

- It involves *techniques* actors use to maintain certain impressions in the face of problems they are likely to encounter, and **methods** they use to cope with these problems.

- **Front stage:**

- The *front is* that part of the performance that generally functions in rather fixed and general ways to define the situation for those who observe the performance.

- The *setting* refers to the physical scene that ordinarily must be there if the actors are to perform.

- The *personal front* consists of those items of expressive equipment that the audience identifies with the performers and expects them to carry with them into the setting.

- **Personal front: Appearance and Manner**

- *Appearance* includes those items (clothing, tools) that inform audience about the performer's social status.

- *Manner* tells the audience what sort of role the performer expects to play in the situation (physical mannerisms, demeanor).

- In general, we expect appearance and manner to be consistent.

- **Techniques of concealment:**

- In order to present an idealized picture of themselves in their front-stage performances, people attempt to hide things in their performances.

- **1)** actors may want to conceal secret pleasures

- **2)** actors may want to conceal errors that have been made in the preparation of the performance as well as steps that have been taken to correct these errors.

- **3)** actors may find it necessary to show only end products and to conceal the process involved in producing them.

- **4)** it may be necessary for actors to conceal from the audience that "dirty work" was involved in the making of the end products.

- **5)** actors probably find it necessary to hide any insults, humiliations, or deals made so that the performance could go on.

- **Technique of the uniqueness:**

- Actors attempt to convey the idea that there is something unique about this performance as well as his or her relationship to the audience. The audience, too, wants to feel that it is the recipient of a unique performance.

- Actors may try to foster the impression that the performance in which they are engaged at the moment is their only performance or at least their most important one.

- **Technique of mystification**:

- *Actors often tend* to mystify their performances by restricting the contact between themselves and the audience. By generating "social distance" between themselves and the audience, they try to create a sense of awe in the audience.

- **Backstage:**
- The place where facts suppressed in the front or various kinds of informal actions may appear.
- A back stage is usually adjacent to the front stage, but it is also cut off from it.
- Performers can reliably expect no members of their front audience to appear in the back.

Outside:

- There is also a third, residual domain, the *outside,* which is neither front nor back.
- No area is always one of these three domains.
- A given area can occupy all three domains at different times.

Role distance

- *Role distance deals with the degree to* which individuals separate themselves from the roles they are in.
- Role distance is a function of one's social status. High-status people often manifest role distance for reasons other than those of people in low-status positions.

- **Critique to Symbolic Interactionism**

- 1) Ignoring the larger issues of power and structure within society and how they serve to constrain individual action.

- 2) Because social reality is constructed, there is the possibility to suggest that there is no reality independent of social constructions.

- 3) Research by symbolic interactionists has often focused on narrow aspects of social life.

- One classic example of symbolic interactionism that does take into account the issues of power and structure in our society is Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983).

- She observed training sessions and carried out interviews at Delta Airlines' Stewardess Training Center in Atlanta in the USA.

- Through her observations and interviews, Hochschild found that as Western economies have become increasingly based on the delivery of services, the emotional style of the work we do needs to be understood.

- Service workers felt a sense of distance from their own emotions.

- "**Emotional labour**": labour that requires that one manages one's feelings in order to create a publicly observable and acceptable facial and body display.

- According to Hochschild, the companies control not only laborers' physical movements, but also their emotions. They own their smile when they are working.

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