



Weekly Question Discussion (Sociology)

(Discussion three terms for sociological vocabulary)

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Cultural Relativism

- The belief that the truth is not always the same but varies according to circumstances.
- Cultural relativism is a doctrine that holds that (at least some) such variations are exempt from legitimate criticism by outsiders, a doctrine that is strongly supported by notions of communal autonomy and self-determination.
- Cultural relativists assert that concepts are socially constructed and vary cross-culturally. These concepts may include such fundamental notions as what is considered true, morally correct, and what constitutes knowledge or even reality itself.
- Cultural relativism implies that on any moral question within a culture an opinion or a judgment is always necessarily wrong whenever it goes against traditional beliefs very widely held in the culture in question.
- This means that those individuals (or groups) who raise moral questions about entrenched and accepted practices are always in the wrong.
- Cultural Relativism says, in effect, that there is no such thing as universal truth in ethics; there are only the various cultural codes, and nothing more. Cultural Relativism challenges our belief in the objectivity and universality of moral truth.
- The following claims have all been made by cultural relativists:
 - Different societies have different moral codes.
 - The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society; that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society.
 - There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one society's code as better than another's. There are no moral truths that hold for all people at all times.
 - The moral code of our own society has no special status; it is but one among many.
 - It is arrogant for us to judge other cultures. We should always be tolerant of them.
- There is a general point here, namely, that there are some moral rules that all societies must embrace, because those rules are necessary for society to exist.
- Cultures may differ in what they regard as legitimate exceptions to the rules, but this disagreement exists against a broad background of agreement.
- Therefore, we shouldn't overestimate the extent to which cultures differ. Not every moral rule can vary from society to society.
- Before concluding we shall not that, Descriptive Cultural Relativism describes morality's relativity to the moral agents' culture.
 - It says that different cultures hold different moral views and ethical standards.
- Normative Cultural Relativism requires that moral judgments and standards must be considered valid or invalid only relative to the moral agent's own culture.
 - His or her moral views or actions ought to be considered right if they are judged right according to the standards in his or her own culture.

Ethnomethodology

- Ethnomethodology is the study of the everyday practices used by the ordinary members of society in order to deal with their day-to-day lives.
- People are seen as accomplishing their everyday lives through a variety of artful practices.
- Ethnomethodology is a major movement in sociological thought, part of a larger school often referred to as "phenomenological sociology".

Definition

- the study of "the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves" (Heritage, Linstead).
- This body of knowledge is "analytically primary to any theory of social action" and "consideration of these issues can be made an integral part of the theory of action" and constitutes significant research questions.

- Garfinkel's approach is "to detect some expectancies that lend commonplace scenes their familiar, life-as-usual character, and to relate these to the stable social structures of everyday activities"
- Ethnomethodology's fundamental phenomenon and its standing technical preoccupation in its studies is to find, collect, specify, and make instructably observable the local endogenous production and natural accountability of immortal familiar society's most ordinary organizational things in the world, and provide for them both and simultaneously as objects and procedurally, as alternate methodologies.
- Ethnomethodology seeks to understand the method by which individuals construct, negotiate, and agree upon reality.
- It questions the possibility of an objective science of the subjective human condition.
- Ethnomethodology is certainly not a macrosociology in the sense intended by Durkheim with his concept of a social fact, but its adherents do not see it as a microsociology either.
- Ethnomethodology's are interested in neither micro structures nor macro structures; they are concerned with the artful practices that produce both types of structures.
- Rather, Hilbert argues that ethnomethodology "transcends" the micro-macro issue because it is concerned "with social practices [membership practices] which are the methods of producing both: microstructure and macrostructure as well as any presumed 'linkage' between these two"

Zimmerman wrote

- Ethnomethodology, like sociology itself, encompasses a number of more or less distinct and sometimes incompatible lines of inquiry.
- Various Problems with Ethnomethodology
 - Its continued exclusion from mainstream sociology Sociologists view it as focusing on trivial matters and ignoring the crucially important issues confronting society today.
 - The accusation that it has lost sight of cognitive processes.
 - The inability to deal adequately with social structures.
 - The loss of its original radical quality.
 - The tension between ethnomethodology's and conversation analysts.

Phenomenology

- Phenomenology is a research approach aimed at the study of the variability of human experience of social phenomenon.
- A key concern of the phenomenologist is to capture a subject's immediate pre-reflexive experience of a phenomenon that is before it is conceptualized, theorized, categorized, or reflected upon.
- The aim of phenomenology is the return to the concrete, captured by the slogan 'Back to the things themselves'.
- Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician, founded the philosophical movement of phenomenology.
- Husserl believed that phenomenology suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual's experience.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the point of view that **one's own way of life is to be preferred to all others**. It has broadly been described as **an extreme affinity for the in-group, leading to out-group hate**.

Ethnocentrism often suggests that **the way something is done in other societies is inferior** to the way it's done in one's own society.

The term was introduced by **William Graham Sumner**.

His two explicit definitions of ethnocentrism suggest that he regarded **ethnocentrism as ethnic group self-centredness or selfimportance**:

- The **sentiment of cohesion, internal comradeship, and devotion to the in-group**, which carries with it a sense of **superiority to any out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group** against the out-group, is technically known as ethnocentrism.
- Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view of things in which **one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it**.

Eurocentricism refers to the belief that European way of life is the preferred way of life.

It led to ideas like **White Man's Burden** and justification of **colonialism** as a way of remedying the eastern societies of their ills.

- It involves the systematic investigation of consciousness.
- Three key concepts of Husserl's phenomenology included essences, intentionality, and phenomenological reduction (bracketing).
 - Essences: He stated that phenomenology should return "to the things themselves," to the essences that constitute the consciousness and perception of the human world, the very nature of a phenomenon that makes a some "thing" what it is—and without which it could not be what it is.
 - Intentionality: Husserl spoke of a division without any real separation "between two different sections of our inquiry, the one bearing on pure subjectivity, the other on that which belongs to the constitution of objectivity as referred to its subjective source. . . the intentional reference of experiences to objects".
 - In Husserl's transcendental approach, he believed that the mind is directed toward objects, consciousness was to be the "consciousness of something," and he called this directedness 'intentionality'.
 - Bracketing: It is assumed that our experience of the world, including everything from our perception of objects through to our knowledge of mathematical formulae, is constituted in and by consciousness.
 - To trace this process of constitution, we have to disregard what we know about the world, and address the question of how, or by what processes, that knowledge comes into being.
 - This strategy is known as bracketing or phenomenological reduction.
- Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable.
- He argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness.
- To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness.
- Realities are thus treated as pure 'phenomena' and the only absolute data from where to begin.
- Husserl named his philosophical method 'phenomenology', the science of pure 'phenomena'.
- Important Phenomenologists – Peter Berger, Schutz