

Evolution of Sociological Thought

Positivists

(19th century)

- Saint Simon (1760 - 1825)
- Auguste Comte (1798 - 1857)
- Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903)
- Emile Durkheim (1858 - 1917)

Basic Assumptions

- influenced by natural sciences
- social reality is an objective reality independent of individual manifestations
- emphasized on the study of only those aspects of human social behavior which can be empirically observed or quantified
- ignored the study of the subjective dimension of human behavior

Neo-Kantians

(late 19th and early 20th century)

Methodenstreit

- Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 - 1911)
- Wilhelm Windelband (1848 - 1915)
- Heinrich Rickert (1863 - 1936)

- Neo-Kantians were influenced by the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804)

- he believed that reality is dualistic in nature:
 1. Natural Reality
 2. Social Reality (Geist)

Basic Assumptions

- social action is meaningful
- emphasized on the interpretative understanding of social action
- believed that social action is subjective in nature
- rejected any possibility of generalizations regarding human behavior

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Weber

(1864 - 1920)

- partly accepted and partly rejected the views of positivists as well as neo-Kantians

Basic Assumptions

- Social action is meaningful
- focused on empirical research as well as interpretative understanding of social action
- believed that complete objectivity is not possible in social sciences, at best value-neutrality may be achieved
- favoured limited generalizations
- believed in causal pluralism
- considered as the founder of
- Anti-Positivism or Non-Positivism

Gunnar Myrdal

(1898 - 1987)

Book: Objectivity in

Social Research (1969)

"Complete objectivity in social sciences is a myth."

- Like Weber, Myrdal too believes that sociology at best could aspire for the goal of value-neutrality on the part of the researcher

Post-Modernists

- Jean Francois Lyotard (1924 - 1998)
- Jean Baudrillard (1929 - 2007)

Critical Social Scientists

- C. Wright Mills (1916 - 1962)
 - The Sociological Imagination (published in 1959)
 - Mills complains that sociology has lost its 'reforming push'.
- Alvin W. Gouldner (1920 - 1980)
 - The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology (published in 1970)
 - Reflexive Sociology

Important: Critical social scientists questioned over emphasis on value-neutrality in sociology.

Prof. T. K. Oommen

(born 1937)

• emphasizes the importance of 'contextualization' in social research

• natural sciences - generalizing objectivity

• social sciences - particularizing objectivity
or
contextual objectivity

• Particularizing / Contextual objectivity can be determined by:
- intra-subjectivity
- inter-subjectivity

• Book: Knowledge and Society: Situating sociology and Social Anthropology (2007)