**Early Figures of Sociology and Defining What is Sociological Theory**

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SOCL-401-01: Sociological Theory
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February 10th, 2024

**Early Figures and Their Contributions**

Two of the biggest figures in the sociology field are August Comte and Karl Marx. Both of these individuals contributed to sociology being named a discipline. Comte gave sociology its name and foundation. Karl Marx had a significant influence on economic and political theories used still today. Both theorists have significant works within this discipline and have impacted and influenced society.

***August Comte***

August Comte is where the story of sociology begins (Allen & Daynes, 2017). In Comte’s early journey of life, he was studying to become an engineer. However, Henri de Saint-Simon, a social philosopher, later took him under his tutelage and started his journey in the sociology field. Saint-Simon and Comte believed that the scientific methods utilized in the natural sciences could be applied to social scientists studying society (Conerly et al., 2021). With this belief, Comte created the term *sociology*. He was the first to systematically organize the discipline of sociology and lay out the conceptual framework (Allen & Daynes, 2017).

One of his biggest contributions in this discipline is positivism, a philosophy of science. Comte created this philosophy claiming that there are three foundations to understanding the universe. The three foundations are the belief in the infinite potential of the human mind and knowledge, that everything within the universe is empirical and operates according to invariant, natural laws that govern behavior in predictable ways, as with the law of gravity, and that science is best way to improve human existence (Allen & Daynes, 2017). Putting all these foundations together, positivism is a viewpoint in which “the only way to obtain knowledge of the world is by means of sense of perception and introspection and the methods of empirical sciences” (Acton, 1951). With Comte’s contributions, he laid the foundation for the discipline of sociology and for the theorists that came after him.

***Karl Marx***

Karl Marx is another famous sociologist who contributed significantly to the sociology discipline. Marx was born to a German Jewish family in 1818. His upbringing and who he was surrounded by contributed to his works. He and his family lived next to Baron Johann Ludwing von Westphalen, who was a government official and Prussian aristocrat. Westphalen had a significant impact on Marx. Westphalen showed Marx to the ideas of the famous Henri de Saint-Simon (Allen & Daynes, 2017).

The ideas from Saint-Simon fueled Marx’s now significant contributions to the sociology discipline. Some of his most famous works include Marxism and defining capitalism. He saw the class tensions occurring in society between the capitalists and the workers (Guy-Evans, 2024). So, Marx articulated theories to explain economic and political phenomenons in society. These works drove critical political and economic structures and systems for society to flourish. He explained the impacts and continuous cycles of capitalism within society (Allen & Daynes, 2017). He laid out how to fix current systems and foresaw the complications to them. His theories are still used and applied in today's economic and political fields. It was revolutionary in sociology and society.

**Sociological Theory Defined**

Theory is the foundation for scientific investigation of the natural and social worlds. Sociologists use theory to explain occurrences in society because it provides a logical explanation for empirical phenomenons (Allen & Daynes, 2017). When studying these phenomenons in society, theory allows for social interactions and patterns to be explained. When sociologists make propositions or explanations about society, theory is used to create a hypothesis (Lumen, 2020). It explains as to why something is occurring using scientific investigation.

The scope of theories varies according to the size of the problems they are intended to explain. When discussing types of theories there are macro-level theories, micro-level theories, and grand theories. Macro-level theories are used to explain large scale issues and large groups of people. For example, conflict theory is a macro-level of analysis. This theory is used to explain how inequalities affect social differences and create differences in power within society. This is macro-level, because it is measuring a large group of people in society. Mirco-level theories are the opposite macro-level theories. Mirco-level theories are used to explain specific relationships between individuals or small groups. These theories explain social phenomenons on a smaller scale. Symbolic interactionism is a prime example of a micro-level of analysis because it is measuring one-to-one interactions. Lastly, grand theories are theories that explain why societies form and why they change. They attempt to answer fundamental questions on a large-scale (Lumen, 2020). By having different levels of sociological theories, it allows for that phenomenon to better be explained and understood in society.

Sociologists are constantly expanding on previous theories. It is crucial to understand the term theory to be able to understand sociological theories. By having this understanding, theories are better able to be understood and applied to daily life.

***Why Sociological Theory is Unique***

Another name for sociology is the “Queen of the Sciences”. This discipline is unique because it ties all the other disciplines/sciences together. To Comte, it is like a keystone (Allen & Daynes, 2017). In other words, it holds everything together. Sociological theory takes ideas and concepts from all disciplines. It connects and makes relationships with all the sciences to create explanations for society. Sociological theory is an attempt to explain why people do what they do when in groups. We can take many psychological theories and apply them to sociology. Where psychology is an attempt to explain the mind of the individual sociology and explains the various groups and how they interact in their individual fields. When we look at groups, the mentality changes because people play off against each other. Sociology is explaining how these ideas play against each other in a new perspective. It is taking sociology and applying it to mass group think.

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