SA 531: Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

Objectives
The objectives of the course are to help students to (a) learn major and diverse perspectives in sociology, (b) learn to comprehend society, social institutions, social processes and human social agents in alternative ways, and (c) learn to utilize such perspectives to carry out research on social institutions, social processes and human social agents.

I. Sociological Thinking (20)
   A. The sociological imagination and the promise of sociology
   B. Reductionism and non-reductionism: Sociological versus biological (and physiological, genetic, chemical, etc.), psychological, ‘natural’ and supernatural explanations of social institution and social change
   C. Significance of perspective and theory
   D. Sociology of knowledge: Basic principles and protocol
   E. History of early sociology: Political, economic, religious and intellectual contexts
   F. Classical sociology:
      a. Comte’s method of social inquiry and the idea of human progress
      b. Marx: Overall doctrine and dynamics of social change
      c. Spencer and growth, structure and differentiation
      d. Durkheim: General approach, individual and society, and religion
      e. Weber: Types of authority, and Protestantism and the rise of capitalism
      f. Cooley, the ‘looking-glass self’ and the nature and history of human groups

II. Structural-Functional Perspective (15)
   A. Historical context
   B. Key arguments
      • Whole, part and systemic interrelationships
      • Consensus, stability, order versus conflict, instability and change
      • Functional prerequisites or imperatives
      • Functional unity, universality and indispensability and Merton’s reformulation
      • Manifest and latent function and dysfunction
      • Protocol of functional analysis
   C. Variants: Societal (Durkheim), Individualistic (Malinowski), Structural (Radcliffe-Brown), Social systemic (Parsons)
   D. Critique
   E. Application to: (a) Stratification, (b) Deviance, (c) Religion
III. Marxist Perspective (20)
A. Context
B. Key arguments
- Historical specificity of social institutions and capitalism as a specific historical category
- Key features of economy, polity and society under capitalism
- Dialectics
- Idealism, materialism and dialectical historical materialism
- Mode of production and infrastructure and superstructure
- Commodification of social life and alienation
- Class and class struggle
- Nature of state
- Social change and revolution
C. Variants: (a) Structural Marxism, (b) Conflict functionalism, (c) Lenin, (d) Luxemburg, (e) Gramsci
D. Critique
E. Application: (a) Consciousness, (b) Religion, (c) Family and marriage

IV. World-System Perspective (20)
A. Context
B. Key arguments:
- Evolution of capitalism and the rise of the modern world-system
- Key features of the modern world system
- Priority of world-system over regional and local systems and simultaneous constitution of world and regional and local systems
- World division of labor and global movement of commodity, labor, finance and culture
- Globalization and liberalization
- Development and underdevelopment
- Economic cycles and political, economic and military crises within world system
- Crisis of world system, hegemonic shift and demise of capitalism
C. Variants: (a) Wallerstein-Frank debate on the origin of ‘modern world-system’, (b) World-system and dependency debate, (c) Wallerstein and Monthly Review debate
D. Application: (a) Growth of NGOs and INGOs, (b) International migration, (c) Global mass media
E. Critique

V. Critical Theory and Jurgen Habermas (15)
A. Context
B. Key arguments
- Emancipation
- Nature of society and human beings
• Social change
• Critique of science and sociology
• Critique of classical Marxist perspective
C. Early critical theory and Habermas
• The public sphere
• Critique of science
• Legitimation crisis
• Distorted and undistorted communication
• System and lifeworld
• Evolution

VI. Actor-Dominant Perspective (25)
• Context
• The idea of interpretation
• Symbolic interaction
  • George Herbert Mead’s early synthesis
  • Mead’s central theories and methods
  • Symbolic interaction and the Chicago School
  • Herbert Blumer and his perspective
  • Erving Goffman and the ‘presentation of self in everyday life
• Phenomenology
  • Alfred Schutz and phenomenological sociology
  • Theories of Alfred Schutz
  • Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s The Social Construction of Reality
• Ethnomethodology
  • Defining ethnomethodology
  • Diversification of ethnomethodology
  • Harold Garfinkel and ethnomethodology
  • Examples of ethnomethodology
  • Ethnomethodological criticism of ‘traditional sociology’
• Critique of actor-dominant perspective

VII. Structuration Perspective (20)
A. Historical context
B. Classical formulations
  • Marx: History, structure and the objective versus class consciousness, class struggle and political will and the subjective
  • Weber: iron cage of rationality and disenchantment of world versus types of human social action
  • Gramsci: Hegemony and political will
  • Durkheim: Externality of social facts, social constraints and the elevation of the collective and undermining of agency
  • Parsons: System versus action frame of reference
  • Bourdieu: Habitus versus field
C. Formulation of Anthony Giddens
- Agent and agency
- Agency and power
- Structure and structuration
- Duality of structure
- Forms of institution
- Time, body, encounters
- Structuration theory and forms of research

VIII. Micro-Macro Perspectives (15)
A. Historical context
B. Key problems
- The polar positions: Macro-micro extremism
- Relative priority of macro versus micro and macro-micro integration
- George Ritzer
- Jeffrey Alexander
- Norbert Wiley
- James Coleman
- Peter Blau
- Randall Collins
- Richard Munch and Neil Smelser

REQUIRED READINGS

Unit I. Thinking Sociologically
   [Short extracts from the preceding two chapters are available Pp. 5-10 and 11-20 in Ron Matson (ed.), *The Spirit of Sociology: A Reader*. Delhi: Pearson Education. 2005. First Indian Reprint.]
7. ‘Classical social theory, II: Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim’ by Antonino Palumbo and Alan Scott in *Austin Harrington* (ed.),


**Unit II. Functionalist Perspective**


**Unit III. Marxist Perspective**


Unit IV. World-Systems Perspective


Unit V. Critical Theory and Jurgen Habermas
1. Turner, 184-213.
2. Ritzer, 280-93.

Unit VI. Actor-Dominant Perspectives
5. Adams and Sydie, 502-17.

Unit VII. Structuration Perspective
2. Ritzer, 45-6, 49-54.
3. Coser, 45-6, 55-6.
20. Ritzer, 577-82.

Unit VIII. Micro-Macro Perspectives