

# Teoretická sociologie

2021 Podzim





Knowledge



“Explanation, as a goal for the study of human beings, can only function as a subcategory of the larger category of understanding.”







# The debates about methodology

- „We have disagreements, that is, not only about how we establish the sheer existence of this or that social phenomenon, but also about how we can claim to correctly and effectively explain, criticize, or interpret it.“
- „[P]ost-positivism has a somewhat clear historical meaning — the term refers to the break with certain taken-for-granted assumptions about the unity of the natural and social sciences that, like so many other breaks, happened sometime in “the sixties.”







# Positivism, empiricism, postpositivism

- „Thus the tendency toward empiricism in social research extends far beyond quantitative methodologies taken from the natural sciences. Positivism, as an approach to method, and empiricism, as a resistance to theory, are by no means coextensive.“
- „[H]ow do, and how should, theory and evidence interact? For there is much objection, in postpositivism, to the positivist answer to these questions (in short, that theory generates hypotheses and evidences tests them), but little agreement as to how this intersection should happen outside the positivist mold.“







# Epistemic modes

- „Epistemic modes dictate the *conceptual* method by which theory is brought into contact with evidence, structure the expectations about what such contact can accomplish, and provide more or less well-formed criteria of validity that are used to evaluate the knowledge that is thereby produced.“
- „That register must resist the twin temptations of formal logic, permanently distant from the messiness of social investigation, and the reductive sociology of knowledge, insensitive to how internal and impersonal imperatives, combined with informal argumentation and scholarly communication, can make communities of inquiry more than just clubs or networks.“







# Establishing the phenomenon

- „[I]n the case of human affairs, many of the most essential facts of the matter — the social facts — are not immediately observable.“
- „It is not our spatial or temporal distance from social facts that makes them a difficult category. It is that reporting on the carryings on of human beings requires a reference to the meaning of their actions, in a very minimal yet fundamental way.“







# From reporting to understanding

- „[I]t is the responsibility of the social researcher not only to report the facts, but to propose a deeper or broader comprehension of them.“
- „We need theory to help us explain and evaluate social life.“
- „[But] the world of social theory is meaningful in the basic human sense of providing a coherent model for and model of the (social) world. The hope is that this meaningful world is also a useful one, so that our attempts to develop a deeper understanding of social phenomena are sometimes successful.“







# Referential and conceptual signs

- „[W]e do not expect theory to reference the social world in the same concrete manner that we expect evidence to reference the social world. Indeed, the whole point of theory is to be abstract and conceptual.“
- „The necessary result of this is that what theory “references,” first and foremost, is not really a referent at all in the concrete sense of meaningful social actions that actually happened. Rather, the immediate reference of theoretical expressions is, as far as I can tell, (1) other theoretical expressions and (2) imagined societies, social actions, and social relations whose primary existence is in researchers’ heads.“







# From minimal to maximal interpretation

- „Maximal interpretations, then, are always organizing, explaining, judging—in a word, interpreting—minimal interpretations, drawing themselves into relationship with the facts, but also going “beyond” the facts.“
- „We do not just want to know that the Hawaiians killed Cook, we also want to know why they killed him, and furthermore, what this violent action means to us today.“





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# Meaning-making

- „Hence a new set of debates concerning what people do with symbols, how symbols intersect social networks and group processes, and, generally, how the study of symbols and their meanings for actors can help sociologists explain action. And symbols require human subjectivity to give them meaning.“
- „[R]ather than seeing natural science as pure and true knowledge that emerges from the encounter of an unblemished subjectivity with unmediated Nature, we can see it as a specification of the interpretive process that, at a more general level, characterizes all human thought and communication.“







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