

Social Theory: Understanding Society through Theoretical Lenses

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Introduction

Social theory is a broad field of study that seeks to understand and explain how societies function, how social structures shape human behaviour, and how individuals interact within these structures. Rooted in sociology, social theory also draws from anthropology, political science, philosophy, and economics to provide a comprehensive understanding of human society. The foundation of social theory was laid by classical theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim, each of whom provided distinct perspectives on social structure and change. Karl Marx, one of the most influential social theorists, introduced the concept of historical materialism, which argues that economic factors primarily shape society. According to Marx, class struggle is the engine of social change, as conflicts between the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat (working class) drive historical developments. His ideas laid the foundation for conflict theory, which focuses on power struggles and inequality within social structures. Max Weber introduced a different perspective by emphasizing the role of ideas, culture, and individual action in shaping society. He argued that economic factors alone cannot explain social change and stressed the importance of rationalization, bureaucracy, and authority [1,2]. His concept of "Verstehen" (understanding) encourages sociologists to analyse social behaviour from the perspectives of individuals rather than just from structural influences.

Description

Emile Durkheim focused on the role of social cohesion and collective conscience in maintaining social order. He introduced the idea of mechanical and organic solidarity to explain how traditional and modern society's function. His work on suicide demonstrated how social factors such as integration and regulation impact individual actions, leading to the development of structural functionalism, which views society as a complex system with interdependent parts. Modern social theories have expanded beyond classical frameworks to address new challenges, including globalization, technology, and identity politics. Some of the most influential contemporary theories include critical theory, feminist theory, postmodernism, and symbolic interactionism. The Frankfurt School, composed of scholars like Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, developed critical theory as a response to the limitations of traditional Marxism. Critical theorists argue that ideology, culture, and media play a crucial role in maintaining social inequalities [3,4]. They critique capitalist societies for promoting consumerism and suppressing critical thought, advocating for social emancipation and transformation. Feminist social theory emerged as a critique of traditional social theories that overlooked gender as a crucial factor in social structures.

Conclusion

Scholars like Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and bell hooks have explored how gender roles are socially constructed and how patriarchal systems reinforce gender inequalities. Feminist theory intersects with race, class, and sexuality to provide a broader analysis of power and oppression. Postmodern and poststructuralist theorists, such as Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard, challenge the notion of objective truth and grand narratives in social theory. Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge demonstrates how social institutions shape discourse and control behaviour. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality explores how media and simulations blur the line between reality and representation in contemporary society. Unlike macro-level theories, symbolic interactionism focuses on micro-level social interactions. George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman emphasized how individuals create meaning through symbols, language, and everyday interactions.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has nothing to disclose and also state no conflict of interest in the submission of this manuscript.



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