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Q2(c)

Elaborate the main tenets of interpretative perspective in sociology

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Elaborate the main tenets of the interpretative perspective in sociology
- Keep the elaboration within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Interpretative sociology studies meaningful social action.

- **Weber:** *Verstehen*, ideal types, adequacy of meaning.
- **Mead and Blumer:** self and interaction.
- **Schutz:** life-world; **Geertz:** thick public symbols.

It complements, rather than deletes, structural explanation.

Introduction

The interpretative perspective studies social action as meaningful conduct oriented to others. It does not deny structure. It refuses to treat meaning as leftover noise after a count.

Body

Core tenets

- **Max Weber** defined sociology as interpretative understanding of social action, using *Verstehen* and ideal types.
- Action is distinguished from mere behaviour by the subjective meaning the actor attaches.
- Causal explanation in culture still requires adequacy at the level of meaning, then comparison.

Lines of development

- Symbolic interactionism, after George Herbert **Mead** and Herbert Blumer, locates meaning in interaction and the self.
- Phenomenology, after Alfred Schutz, describes the life-world of typifications.
- Clifford **Geertz**'s thick description ties meaning to public symbols that other readers can contest.

Method

- Documents, talk, and participant observation reconstruct motives.
- Objectivity is checking the reconstruction, not deleting the actor.

Limit

- Structural Marxists said interpretation can miss silent domination. The tenet still stands as a necessary moment, not as the whole science.

Flow diagram

Social action meaning -> Verstehen

Verstehen -> Ideal type

Mead self -> Interaction

Interaction -> Checked account

Conclusion

Interpretative sociology's tenets are meaning, **Verstehen**, ideal types, and interactional selves. **Weber**, **Mead**, Schutz, and **Geertz** supply the kit. Counts remain usable once meaning is not skipped.

Facts & figures

Weber

Sociology as interpretative understanding of action oriented to others.

Verstehen

Controlled reconstruction of motives, not unstructured empathy.

Mead

The self arises in taking the role of the other.

Geertz

Thick description of public symbols as an interpretative method.