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Q1(b)

Examine ethnomethodological and phenomenological perspective as critique of positivism

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

Sociology as Science: Science, scientific method and critique; Major theoretical strands of research methodology; Positivism and its critique; Fact value and objectivity; Non-positivist methodologies.

Core demand of the question

- Examine ethnomethodological and phenomenological perspectives as a critique of positivism
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Positivism measures external facts; these perspectives study meaning and members' methods.

Schutz described the everyday life-world of typifications.

Garfinkel showed order as accomplished, indexical work.

Berger and Luckmann treated institutions as objectivated meanings.

The critique qualifies rates; it does not delete official files.

Introduction

Positivism treats social life as measurable external facts. Phenomenology and ethnomethodology answer that order is accomplished in meaning and in everyday methods. The critique is of a science that skips the actor's world.

Body

Phenomenology against a thing-like society

- Alfred **Schutz** asked how the everyday life-world is constituted in typifications, not only in variables.
- Edmund Husserl's bracketing, used sociologically, suspends the taken-for-granted so that meaning can be described.
- Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann showed that institutions are objectivated meanings, not natural objects waiting for a census cell.

Ethnomethodology

- Harold **Garfinkel** studied the methods members use to produce a sense of fact. Breaching experiments showed how fragile "obvious" order is.
- **Indexicality** and reflexivity mean that talk and rule are completed in the situation. A positivist codebook cannot fully freeze that work.
- Conversation analysis later showed turn-taking as organised practice, not residual noise.

What the critique does not do

- It does not abolish rates. **Durkheim's** suicide files still exist. It refuses to treat those files as innocent of office meaning.

Flow diagram

Positivism external facts -> Skips meaning
Schutz phenomenology -> Life-world
Garfinkel ethnomethodology -> Members methods
Life-world -> Critique
Members methods -> Critique

Conclusion

Phenomenology relocates the object in the life-world. Ethnomethodology studies how members make that world accountable. Together they criticise positivism's skip from behaviour to variable without the actor's methods.

Facts & figures

Schutz

Brought phenomenological attention to the everyday life-world into sociology.

Garfinkel

Founded ethnomethodology: studies of how members produce a sense of social fact.

Indexicality

Meaning of an utterance depends on context that members fill in as they go.

Berger and Luckmann

The Social Construction of Reality: institutions as sedimented meanings.