

Greetings All,

Today is the 31st so I am only just making it. My pacemaker operation went smoothly, so that is not my excuse. What is not going smoothly is my desktop computer which even though it has been to the technician who claimed it was fixed, it still does not work and will go back again on Monday. My lap-top is only marginally better, keys are sticking and programmes may or may not start. Even in these few lines I keep having to go back to fix missing letters.

I was going to raise with you some interesting topic that are being debated on line by the American Sociological Association, but all the details are on my desktop and I cannot get to them.

So in lieu of all that I thought I would raise the issue of the boundaries of sociology.

Comte's definition of Sociology was the positivistic and scientific study of society. We have moved away from this approach to a range of approaches that may or may not use any reference to the physical sciences. Sociology today faces the idea that it is not a distinct science and can be incorporated with a range of approaches under the wider title of social science. I support the approach that sociology should not be judged against the physical sciences. If for no other reason than societies and individuals are not made up of fixed entities. In chemistry an oxygen or an iron atom is always an oxygen or an iron atom no matter what combination it may be in and will always have the same characteristics. Whereas the subject matter of sociology is never fixed. i.e. what someone believes today they may not believe tomorrow or as Thucydides (c. 460 – 395 BCE) has noted: "*Most people, in fact, will not take the trouble to find out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first version of any story they hear.*" and I don't think things have changed much. Therefore although they may be constant in believing something to be true, it may not be true, so that the people who provide sociological data are never fixed in the way physical science's data is fixed.

If sociology is to hold its own it has got to demonstrate that what it has to offer are methods and solutions that come from the use of tried and tested theories that can be replicated, but at the same time show that what can be shown to be the case in one place does not mean that a repeat in another would provide the same answer. But this would not negate the study. Not because sociology is not an exact science, rather because it understands that the nature of its data sources that will never be the same.

At the same time, the idea that the physical sciences are value free has been shown to be wrong by Karl Popper and others. Popper also argued that 'scientific theory, and human knowledge generally, is irreducibly conjectural or hypothetical, and is generated by the creative imagination in order to solve problems that have arisen in specific historico-cultural settings.'

I would like to see more, from those engaged in applied sociology, provide to wider audiences, arguments and examples as to why sociology is every bit as valuable to society as the physical sciences and just as reliable.

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