Interactionism

- Interactionism is the theoretical perspective in sociology which makes theories based upon human interaction.
- Interactionism is the study of how people behave in society.
- It makes social processes such as conflict, cooperation, identity formation based on human interaction.
- George Herbert Mead is the leader in the development of the perspective – an advocate of pragmatism and the subjectivity of social reality
- Herbert Blumer expanded the work and created the term “symbolic interactionism”
- There are several subdivisions of interactionism: phenomenology, verstehen, social action, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, social constructionism.
- Interactionism is micro—sociological
- It is based around the belief that meaning is produced through social interaction
- Important concepts of interactionism include “social role” and Erving Goffman’s “presentation of self”
- Their goal is to understand the individual and how they behave within society.
- In extreme issues, they tend to reject class, as they believe not every member of a social class behaves and thinks in the same way
- They believe that each individual has different values, culture and beliefs. They set out to obtain qualitative data.
- Interactionists prefer unstructured interviews, covert participant observation, overt participant observation and analysing historical, public and personal documents by content analysis as well as isolating variables so that relationships and trends can be noticed over time to provide explanation of policies.
- They are criticised for methods for having unreliable data as information cannot be compared or contrasted. The information is interpreted (‘interpretivist’) by a sociologist, making it biased.
- They are also linked to neo-marxists and pluralism through the idea that individuals have more awareness, skill and power to change their own situation.