Sociological Theory

Exam One

Painter Joshua Reynolds: “Theory is the knowledge of what it takes what is truly nature.”

Ex: pumpkin example to grow a big pumpkin

Christopher Hitchens: “A theory is something evolved…to fit the facts.”
Ex: cigarette example

Ritzer and Stepinsky: “A set of interrelated ideas that allow for the systematization of knowledge of the social world, the explanation of that world, and predictions about the future of the social world.”

Ex: If you have a theory about delinquency you can try to figure out what makes kids bad. If you’re theory is that kid’s do better doing this or doing that, you can test it.

Simon Susen: “social theory is the attempt to provide a conceptually (ideas/terms) informed and, in many cases, empirically substantiated framework designed to

1. DESCRIBE: provide an account for things as they take place
2. ANALYZE: break things down
3. INTERPRET: figure out the meaning behind something
4. EXPLAIN: what caused something to happen
5. ASSESS: looking at the state of something

The constitution, the functioning, and the development of social reality, or of particular aspects of social reality in a more or less systematic fashion

Because we cannot know the future, all we have to rely upon is theory. If theory can explain the past...it might be able to say something useful about the future

John
→ **Capitalism**: workers and capitalists

→ **Socialism**: class struggle takes place between the workers and managers

→ **Communism**: no class distinctions, everyone would be treated equally

→ **Key to the transition from one society to another is a tension between…**

**Forces of production**: things in a society that help us make things
(Nature, science, technology, labor, oil, machines, etc.)

**Relations of production**: (workplace, hierarchies (boss/manager...etc.), control/pace of work, working hours, salaries, benefits)

For example, the tribal society would use the sun to dry their clothes

Ancient slave state- animals

→ Marx suggested that when you have this match between the forces of production and relations of productions, that is when you have the potential for revolutionary change

Revolutionary change happens in a society when the forces and relations of productions become out of joint

→ Marx and Engels think capitalism is a major improvement over previous societies (157-160)

→ But, they also say that eventually capitalism will die out because it would cease being able to provide for people’s needs (p. 160, 164)
Then when this happens, people might seek out other things which may look like socialism

→ Other interesting passages, p. 159, 161, 57

→ Where is the government?
In the primitive religions: normal activity and extraordinary events

Pg. 252 “Religion is something essentially social” He’s saying that religion expression is made up of social forces. People are socialized and learn to be religious in various ways

Durkheim says that it is society-human beings that provides the force and passion that is religious experience. In fact...(251)

According to Durkheim the religious forces are human social forces. Durkheim says that the religious person is stronger and more confident than the non-religious person. When we feel better or stronger or more peaceful after going to church it is because of the social experiences we encounter there.

Durkheim also argues that when we pray for something, although we think we are praying to a supernatural being, in reality we are actually praying to “society” (ex: someone getting well, or arriving safely, or being offered a job)

Pope Francis: “You pray for the hungry, and then you feed them. That is how prayer works.”

→ James 2:17 “Faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone”

→ Durkheim concludes by saying that all societies need religion or something like it. “There can be no society...” (p. 253)

→ Yet, he also says that existing religion is losing its power. “The great things in the past...” (253). People are finding new forms of religious expression in New Age Movements, Eastern philosophies, pagan religions, “Mega churches,” etc.

Durkheim’s Theory of Suicide

→ In his book, Suicide, Durkheim turned his attention to analyzing that most “personal” of topics---suicide---the taking of one’s own life. Had professional and private reasons for doing so

→ Durkheim spent much time reviewing mortality (death rates) data in European countries in the mid-19th century.

→ One of the startling facts to emerge was the Protestants killed themselves at a higher rate than Catholics. Why would this be?

Durkheim argued that Catholics had stronger social bonds to their fellow men than Protestants

→ Durkheim theorized that variations in social integration (ex: social bonds) and more regulation (i.e. rules) can explain suicides