

A2 Sociology: Value Freedom – Notes

‘Value free’: to dissociate personal beliefs from the study of sociology

Three stances: it’s possible; impossible; and values should be celebrated and fully incorporated into sociology

Whilst Weber contends values are key to sociology

Positivists advocate the methodology of natural sciences such as biology

Positivists argue that sociology studies external, observable phenomena

Which can thus be observed objectively through an unbiased scientific procedure

Additionally, they argue creed can be discarded if the research method is well-designed and findings unaltered

Consequently they typically favour methods producing quantitative data e.g. official statistics

Since they can provide correlations, conversely

The natural sciences study insentient phenomena, thus a researcher is practically

Incapable of generating an emotional attachment, whilst sociology

Is the study of human society, additionally

Researchers have been socialised or chosen freely

A theory which permeates all thought, hence detaching is virtually

Impossible

The mode of thought called ‘value laden sociology’ agrees

Citing examples e.g. researchers require funding bodies

Who must be convinced and attempting to appeal inevitably

Presents values, additionally

Career progression may be key, potentially permeating a sociologist’s actions whether it be

Consciously or subconsciously

Even the chosen subject matter may be a result of creed or personality

Alternatively, some sociologists believe the subject should not be value free:

Gouldner and Becker believe sociology should openly ‘take sides’

Though Gouldner states researchers should maintain their values

Lest run the risk of ‘selling out’ to the highest bidders, additionally

He enforces Marxist theory, arguing sociologists should focus on the powerful groups of society

Since they create ‘structures of oppression’,

Viewing Becker’s view that sociology should focus on the underdog e.g. criminals and the mentally ill as overly sentimental

Feminists agree with this, viewing gender inequality as foregrounding patriarchal society

Qualitative methodology is preferred when embracing values, e.g.

Practising ‘verstehen’; empathy
