



New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies

Anthony Giddens

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This is a new and revised edition of a book which has already established itself as a basic text in social theory.

The first section of the work provides a concise critical analysis of some leading schools of thought in social philosophy, giving particular attention to phenomenology, ethnomethodology and Wittgensteinian thought. Giddens concentrates primarily upon the implications of these various perspectives for an account of human action and its intelligibility. An 'action approach' on its own, however, will not do; in human social life, action and structure presuppose one another. The author therefore moves on to provide a series of concepts relevant to understanding the production and reproduction of society. The book concludes with a succinct statement of some 'new rules of sociological method'.

Representing the first, and most trenchant, exposition of the principles of structuration theory, this edition also contains a substantial new Introduction in which Giddens replies to some of the more persistent criticisms made of the original version and also addresses some important issues originally discussed only in a cursory way.

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Titus Hjelm says

Possibly the most interesting of Giddens' work I've read so far. While 'Capitalism and Social Theory', for example, is commentary of the classical tradition, here Giddens engages with metatheory. Fascinating.

Leo says

Giddens challenged the schools of understanding human beings' social actions then, particularly targeting the tradition of interpretative sociology. The main critique he posed, as I understand, lies in the way how such interpretative sociology tradition tackles the "society" and interprets the order and integration of it. The focus placed on the "internalized value" and "social convention/norm" by the structuralism and functionalism and the efforts of interpreting human being's social actions against such "things", ignored the problem of the production/formation of these "things", and therefore disproportionately downplayed the social members' intention and capability to "produce" the social world during the reproduction dynamics. Proposed new "methods" (certainly not in a mandatory sense) for interpreting and studying social actions, Giddens, though he was very cautious in portraying the human society as a product of the social members intended efforts, attacked harshly the tradition of studying the human society as if there exists any mechanical laws or predetermined result in the society. Introducing the term "structuration", Giddens certainly attempted to re-find "agency" in social reproduction--and his argument leads to the rising importance of studying power and struggle to understand the human society and social actions. The "structure" of human society, he argued, was both result of and medium for social actions of human beings.

For Giddens this work may need to be so lengthy and detailed as he needed to well lay a battlefield and identify the target of his critique. For readers knowing enough about traditions and main schools of sociology, however, this book could be hundreds pages shorter without blurring its main ideas or weakening its main arguments.
