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WORLD IN TRANSFORMATION

Sociological view

Fall Semester 2015/2016
Faculty of Humanities, AHG University of Krakow, Poland

SYLLABUS

A. Description of the course

It is a widely spread *epistema* among contemporary sociologists, social scientists, philosophers etc. that we live today in a world the main features of which are ambiguity, uncertainty, risk and contingency. For it is awash with change, tensions, deep social, cultural, political, economic... divisions and conflicts. This ultimately implies unpredictability in both *universal/global* and *individual* (and, of course – as a middle stage – in *particular*) conditions and processes of the so called life-world. The *differentia specifica* of scientific approach to (and appropriation of) reality – and that distinguishes it from common opinion – is searching for the truth; which means searching for a knowledge that enables reliable predictions of things, conditions, processes etc. Can sociology and other social sciences (and the humanities) offer the predictions? If not, do they deserve to be regarded as sciences?

In the first few parts of the course, the focus will be on some basic epistemological and/or logical and methodological issues, e.g.: how do we acquire knowledge in general, what are the main kinds of knowledge (from

doxa to *phronesis*, *episteme* and *sophia*) and what are the main obstacles to reach reliable knowledge and/or the truth? Also, some relevant theoretical and methodological problems in sociology will be discussed: positivism vs. hermeneutics, and/or structure vs. action, and/or explanation vs. understanding etc., and the theory of structuration – as an epistemological compromise. Then in the rest, larger part of the course – mostly on the basis of the latter theoretical/methodological conception – the issues of the ***world in transformation***, (i.e., on the main subject of the course) will be examined and discussed. The focus will be on some of the following problems: *the world over the past several decades – the main characteristics; on globalization; socio-historical “tectonic shift” – the end of communism; what is modernity?; what is post-modernity?; the consequences of the new (neo-liberal) “world order” on global (universal), social (particular) and specific (individual) levels; what happened in former Yugoslavia? (wars, devastation, sociocide). Serbia in the aftermath. The consequences of transformation: are we happier today? Etc.*

B. Schedule

Session 1

Monday, 12 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *Introducing dialogue: who are you and who am I?*
- *Discussion on how to carry out the course*
- *About evaluations*

Session 2

Wednesday, 14 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *The main terms and notions of the course (do we understand each other?)*
- *On communication – in brief*

– *About knowledge in general and on some obstacles to reach the truth (e.g. the four idols of Francis Bacon; also on: structure of our attitudes and, especially, of our prejudices)*

Session 3

Thursday, 15 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *Kinds of knowledge – from Plato and Aristotle to modern nomenclature*
- *What is science? Natural and social sciences (distinctive features)*
- *Is sociology a science? Various sociological approaches to reality (positivism vs. hermeneutics, or structure vs. action, or explanation vs. understanding...)*
- *Theory of structuration – an epistemological compromise*

Session 4

Monday, 19 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *Some main sociological notions: world, society, culture, group, individual...*
- *Systems of human interdependence: community (Gemeinschaft) and society (Gesellschaft) – the differences, a brief historical overview; contemporary systems of human interdependence; is there a society any more?*

Session 5

Wednesday, 21 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *The main characteristics of contemporary world (some relevant demographic, economic, cultural etc. data)*
- *Globalization – its nature and impact on our lives*
- *Are globalization and modernity the synonyms? What is modernity (and anti-modernity)? What is post-modernity?*

Session 6

Thursday, 22 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *Decades of transformation (transition) – from communism to capitalism (socio-historical "tectonic shift")*
- *What has been going on ever since 1989, really?*
- *The case of Yugoslavia – instead of transformation: sociocide in vivo (what is sociocide?)*

Session 7

Monday, 26 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *The previous (primitive) and new accumulations of capital*
- *Tycoons and the rest – then and now (the richest and the poorest, again)*
- *Global, regional and particular (within societies) inequalities; capitalism: a permanent crisis?*
- *On "detraditionalization" (what is tradition?)*

Session 8

Wednesday, 28 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *What does the neo-liberal concept of life really offers?*
- *On risk, on unpredictability, and/or on living in a reflexive everyday life, i.e. on: what are we supposed to do every morning – and later on – to cope with the day to day social, political, economic, family, emotional, health etc. challenges, problems, difficulties...*
- *Are we happier than our ancestors? What is happiness – then and now?*

Session 9

Thursday, 29 10 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *Film: "SiCKO" by Michael Moore; an example of the neo-liberal (risky) conception and practical treatment of health and sickness and – life as such*
- *Discussion*

Session 10

Monday, 02 11 2015 – 18.50 (135 minutes)

- *Students’ evaluation of the course - discussion*
- *Professor’s evaluation of essays (no discussion!)*
- *Farewell conventions (party?)*

C. Literature

α) Books (copies of various articles from the readers and some chapters from the Giddens’ book will be available to the students)

- *Autobiographies of Transformation* (2006), Ed. by Mike F. Keen and Janusz L. Mucha, Routledge, London and New York;
- *Detraditionalization* (1996), Ed. by Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, & Paul Morris, Blackwell, Cambridge, USA;
- Giddens, Anthony (2002), *Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK;
- *Sociology in Central and Eastern Europe – Transformation at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (2003), Ed. by Mike F. Keen and Janusz L. Mucha, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, London;

β) Articles (various sources; all copies will be available to the students)

- “Aristotle’s Three Types of Knowledge in The Nicomachean Ethics...”, <https://aquileana.wordpress.com>;
- Chambers, Ben and Zeb Dahl, “The four Idols of Sir Francis Bacon”, www.sirbacon.org/zeb-ben.htm;
- Giddens, Anthony, “Tradition” (1999), BBC REITH LECTURES;
- Hall, Manly, “The Four Idols of Francis Bacon & the New Instrument of Knowledge”, www.sirbacon.org;
- Keil, Frank C. (2006), “Explanation and Understanding”, *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, No. 57;

- Lazić, Mladen (2006), „Class and values in post-socialist transformation in Serbia“, Sociologija, Beograd.
- Little, Daniel (2008), “What is hermeneutic explanation?”, [http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~delittle/Encyclopedia entries](http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~delittle/Encyclopedia%20entries);
- “Philosophies of *Verstehen* and *erklären*“, *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (2001), Eds. N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes, Elsevier Sciences Ltd., Oxford;
- “Plato and Aristotle on Knowledge” – an essay;
- “The Kuhn’s Cycle” (paradigms in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, by Thomas Kuhn), (2015), <http://thwink.org/sustain/glossary/KuhnCycle.htm>
- Turza, Karel (2004), “On modernity in general and on the main obstacles to modernity in Serbia in the 20th century – and afterwards“, Sociologija, Vol. XLV, No. 2;

D. Evaluation

From the very beginning of the course students will be strongly encouraged to choose the topics/issues they are interested in, to analyze them, to prepare their (power point) presentations, and to expose orally their own views on the issues/topics – initiating thus discussions, and hopefully fruitful contributions to thorough understanding of the subject matter(s)[•]. The presentations will follow or precede the lectures, depending on the subject matter.

- Contribution of the kind brings – 60%;
- Essays (between 1500 and 2000 words) are obligatory to all students (students are supposed to submit them at the last but one session, namely on Thursday, 22 10; topics will be available from the middle of the course: Wednesday, 14 10); evaluation: 40%;

[•] This way of work has brought about very good results in my teaching activities over the past ca 10 years (by the way, in the period I have taught 9 subjects with more than 2200 students per year).

- Those who for some reason lack sufficient points will be obliged to pass an examination test (10 questions on the main issues of the course)