

FRIDAY 22 APRIL 2022, 16:00 - 17:00

THEORY STREAM PLENARY

Working in Durkheim's "Social Fact" Tradition: Garfinkel, Goffman, Parsons and Sacks as the Authors of a Sociology of Practice and its Implicit Moral and Empirical Prerequisites

Abstract

The work of Talcott Parsons and Harold Garfinkel was met from the beginning by misreadings that have in turn encouraged contemporary misunderstandings of social theory. Consequently, Durkheim and Parsons – two of our most important social theorists – are misunderstood. In particular, the popular idea that everything is either micro or macro, structural or individual, conceptual or material – dichotomies that are incompatible with classic conceptions of sociology as the study of “social facts” – sneaks classical problems that were overcome by Comte and Durkheim back into Sociology to create contradictions. If “social facts” must be continually made and remade by people in social interaction, then what sense could be given to a distinction between concepts and materiality? If individuals do not exist as such until and unless they are mutually achieved as social selves in social interaction, then what sense is to be made of the structure/individual/agency distinction? These and other problems have torn the guts out of sociological theory, with the result that those actually making sociological arguments have seemed to mainstream thinkers to be making no sense. Using archival materials to sketch out new relationships between Garfinkel, Parsons, and Goffman – and new readings of texts to tie them to classic positions – this talk will argue that Garfinkel, Goffman, Sacks and Parsons were working in Durkheim's social fact lineage to bring the argument that social facts rest on an implicit social contract – and its implications for social justice – to fruition.

Anne Warfield Rawls is Professor of Sociology at Bentley University (Waltham, Massachusetts), Research Professor at the University of Siegen (Germany), and Director of the Garfinkel Archive. Teaching social and interactional theory for over forty years, Rawls has written extensively on the history of sociology with a focus on Durkheim, Du Bois, Goffman, Garfinkel, and the implications of their work for coming to terms with racism and social justice. Her *Epistemology and Practice: Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2004, Cambridge University Press) is a groundbreaking re-interpretation of Durkheim's epistemology. *La Division du Travail Revisited: Vers une Théorie Sociologique de la Justice* (Edited by Philip Chaniel, translated by Chaniel and Callegaro, 2019 Paris: Le Bord de l' Eau), reprises Durkheim's argument in the *Division of Labor*, that the purpose of sociology in diverse modern societies is to demonstrate empirically why morality and justice are necessary in modern contexts of diversity and differentiation. *Tacit Racism* (2020, University of Chicago) co-authored with Waverly Duck, brings Rawls' conception of Interaction Orders to bear on how racism manifests in social interaction – detailing how a lack of racial justice can make mutually meaningful interaction impossible. Rawls' work editing and explaining the relationship between Garfinkel and Parsons (2019, *Parsons' Primer*, by Harold Garfinkel, and Rawls and Turowetz, 2021, “Discovering Culture' in Interaction: Solving Problems in Cultural Sociology by Recovering the Interactional Side of Parsons' Conception of Culture.” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*) illuminates key debates in cultural sociology, suggesting that Parsons was a more interactional and overall more interesting thinker than usually given credit for. Rawls has published in *The American Journal of Sociology*, *Sociological Theory*, *The*

European Journal of Social Theory, Organization Studies, The Information Society, Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften, Mauss Review International, and Etnografia Ricerca Qualitativa.