

#40DayChallenge – Day 6

Outline and explain TWO reasons why sociology should not be seen as a science (10)

One reason that sociology should not be seen as a science is put forward by interpretivists. They would argue that human beings cannot be measured in a scientific way as everyone's understanding of society is unique to them and made up of the interactions that they have with others. In comparison to the natural sciences, where elements with similar properties will react in a predictable manner, human beings will not. If a piece of iron is heated, regardless of the size or the colour or the density, the same reactions will occur, whereas humans from the same social class, ethnic group, gender or age, will react differently based upon their understanding of events and therefore it is impossible to study humans objectively or by using scientific methods. Instead, interpretivists propose that a greater insight, or *verstehen*, needs to be obtained in order to understand the meanings and motivations that individuals attach to certain actions. Interpretivists would further argue that there is no predictable formulaic cause and effect to human behaviour, but that sociologists should look retrospectively at behaviours and try and understand why individuals act in the way that they do. Therefore, sociology cannot be a science, as these conclusions will often be highly subjective and open to interpretation.

A second reason that sociology should not be a science is the nature of science itself. Thomas Kuhn suggested that science is based upon paradigms, or collections of knowledge about certain phenomena. Kuhn suggests that in the natural sciences, knowledge evolves through a set of paradigm shifts, for example it was once proposed that the Earth was flat, where we now understand it to be spherical. Before the paradigm shifts, much knowledge that opposes the dominant paradigm is rejected because it opposes the existing body of knowledge. Consequently, this may limit our understanding of human behaviour by discarding any new knowledge that contradicts firmly established behaviours. Therefore, adopting a scientific approach would be undesirable for sociologists such as post-modernists and interpretivists who all suggest that individuals do not act according to laws but rather based upon their interpretation of a situation.