

# SOC755 General Sociology

19 September 2017

# Dilemmas

- I. Social problems and sociological problems
- II. Sociology and common sense
- III. Subject and method
- IV. Platonic and value-free sociology
- V. Nomothetic sociology and idiographic sociology

# I. Social problems and sociological problems

- P.L.Berger: Invitation to sociology
- Sociology vs. Normativity
- Everyday life as an object of doubt, of study
  - Georg Simmel (1905): How is society possible?
  - Pierre Bourdieu: „epistemic radicalism“

## II. Sociology and common sense

### Sociology

- Rules of a responsible discourse (reliability, openness, critique)
- Beyond individual biography (biography + history)
- Against particular worldviews (not from individual viewpoints)

### Common sense

- Explains but is not explained (confirms itself, is not subject to doubt)

# III. Subject and method

- E. Durkheim: The subject of sociology are social facts
  - Super-individual
  - Have power over individuals
- M.Weber: The method of sociology is understanding
  - Action carries meaning
  - Understanding (Verstehen) of it



## IV. Platonic and value-free sociology

- Auguste Comte: A science of society will allow us to understand social mechanisms and therefore govern the society in the right way
- Max Weber: Sociology is value-free. It does not comment on the normative status of its results.



## V. Nomothetic and idiographic sociology

- General laws and common features
- Individual, specific, historically contingent

# Émile Durkheim and the collective in society

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3 October 2017



# Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)



- The collective has primacy over the individual
- Society can be studied scientifically
- „*man is less a point of departure than a point of arrival*“ (Ritzer on Durkheim)

# Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)

- Social facts: external, coercive, constructed
  - Material and non-material
  - Collective consciousness and collective representations
- Mechanical and organic solidarity
  - Unification and difference
  - Division of labour
- Law and crime
  - A functional view of crime



# Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)



*M. and Mme. Durkheim and their grandson, Claude Halpben, 1916. Photo courtesy of Etienne Halpben.*

- Suicide: regulation and integration
  - Egoistic, altruistic, anomic, fatalistic
  - Anomie = lack/mismatch of norms and values
- The sacred and the profane
  - Religion, society as transcendence
  - Symbol and ritual

# Max Weber and the theory of action

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# Max Weber (1864-1920)

- Methodology of social science
  - Meaning and verstehen
  - Ideal Types
- Social Action
  - Means-ends (instrumental) rationality
  - Value rationality
  - Affectual action
  - Traditional action
- Value-free sociology: facts vs. values



# Max Weber (1864-1920)



- Power, domination and **authority**
  - Rational (legal)
  - Traditional
  - Charismatic
- Bureaucracy = the purest form of rational authority
  1. Continuous organization of offices bound by rules
  2. Each office has a sphere of competence
  3. Hierarchy
  4. Technical qualifications for office
  5. Staff do not own the means of production
  6. Positions not personally appropriated
  7. Actions, decisions and rules recorded in writing

# Max Weber (1864-1920)

- Rationality and rationalisation
  - Formal rationality
  - Heritage of enlightenment
  - Disenchantment (Entzauberung)
- Religion
  - As a factor of economic development
  - Protestant ethics and spirit of capitalism
    - Vocation/calling, ascetism
    - Rational and systematic pursuit of profit
    - Effectiveness as a virtue; planning, calculation
- Iron cage of rationality



# Georg Simmel, modernity and forms of the social

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# Georg Simmel (1858-1918)

- Formal sociology; forms are an object of study
- Forms as results of central conflict (Fashion, stranger, seduction)
- Money in modern culture
  - Money as a layer between person and object
  - A new relationship of dependence vs. independence
  - Means and ends; the vulgarity of money



# Georg Simmel: Conflict of modern culture



- Conflict of modern culture: life vs. Forms
- Life exists only through forms
- The attempt to escape forms

# Conflict of modern culture

- „perpetual struggle between life, with its fundamental restlessness, evolution and mobility, and its own creations, which become inflexible and lag behind its development. Since, however, life can take on external existence only in one form or another, this process can be clearly identified and described in terms of the displacement of one form by another.“

# Conflict of modern culture

- The mania for originality in so many young people of today (...)  
Originality is only the ratio cognoscendi, so to speak, which guarantees that life is purely itself and that no external, objectified, rigid forms have been absorbed in its flux, or its flux in them. We may have here a more general underlying motive for modern individualism

# Conflict of modern culture

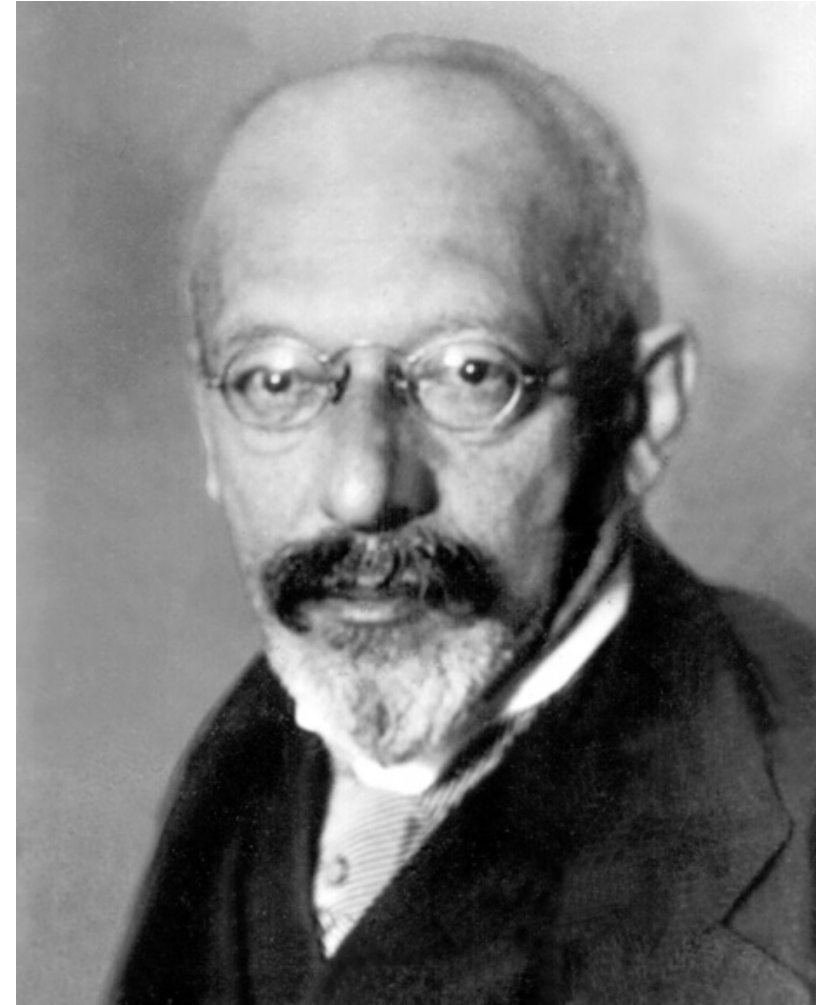
- It is the nature of life to produce within itself that which guides and redeems it, and that which opposes, conquers and is conquered by it. It sustains and enhances itself by way of its own products. The fact that these products confront it as independent judges is the very foundation of their existence, their modus vivendi. The opposition in which they thus find themselves to the life which is superior to them is the tragic conflict of life as mind. This conflict is now, of course, becoming more perceptible with the growing awareness that it is in fact created by life itself, and is therefore organically and ineluctably bound up with life.

# Conflict of modern culture

- **What we are** is, it is true, spontaneous life, with its equally spontaneous, unanalysable sense of being, vitality and purposiveness, but **what we have** is only its particular form at any one time (...) Life is ineluctably condemned to become reality only in the guise of its opposite, that is as form.

# Georg Simmel (1858-1918)

- Metropolis and mental life
  - „Blasé attitude“
  - Disengagement and rationality
  - Metropolis and money



# Michel Foucault: power, surveillance and control

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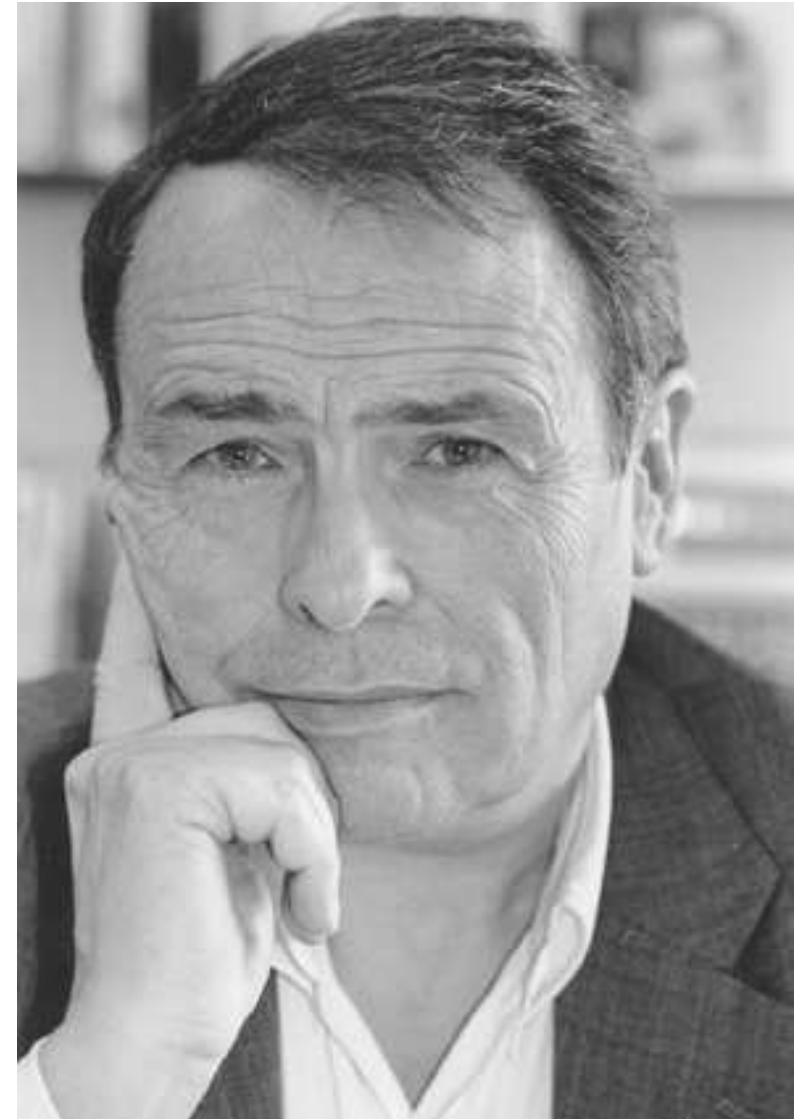
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# Pierre Bourdieu

- Symbolic capital
- Monopoly of the state
- Habitus

*„To exist means to exist socially.  
And to exist socially means to be  
perceived as distinct“*



Michel  
Foucault  
(1926-1984)



## Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

First, a strict spatial partitioning: the closing of the town and its outlying districts, a prohibition to leave the town on pain of death (...) Each street is placed under the authority of a syndic, who keeps it under surveillance; if he leaves the street, he will be condemned to death. On the appointed day, everyone is ordered to stay indoors: it is forbidden to leave on pain of death. The syndic himself comes to lock the door of each house from the outside; he takes the key with him and hands it over to the intendant of the quarter; the intendant keeps it until the end of the quarantine.

## Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

Every day, too, the syndic goes into the street for which he is responsible; stops before each house: gets all the inhabitants to appear at the windows (those who live overlooking the courtyard will be allocated a window looking onto the street at which no one but they may show themselves); he calls each of them by name; informs himself as to the state of each and every one of them

## Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

This surveillance is based on a system of permanent registration: reports from the syndics to the intendants, from the intendants to the magistrates or mayor. At the beginning of the 'lock up' , the role of each of the inhabitants present in the town is laid down, one by one; this document bears 'the name, age, sex of everyone, notwithstanding his condition': a copy is sent to the intendant of the quarter, another to the office of the town hall, another to enable the syndic to make his daily roll call.

„Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of 'contagions', of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder.“



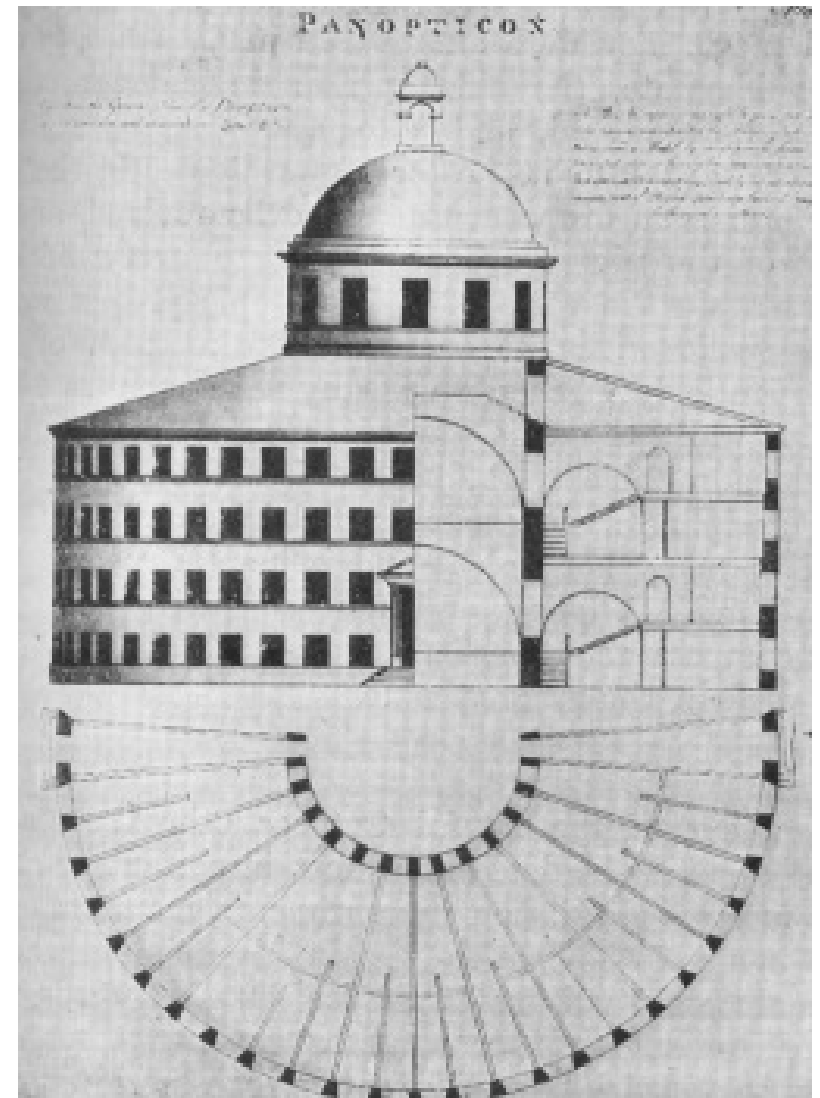
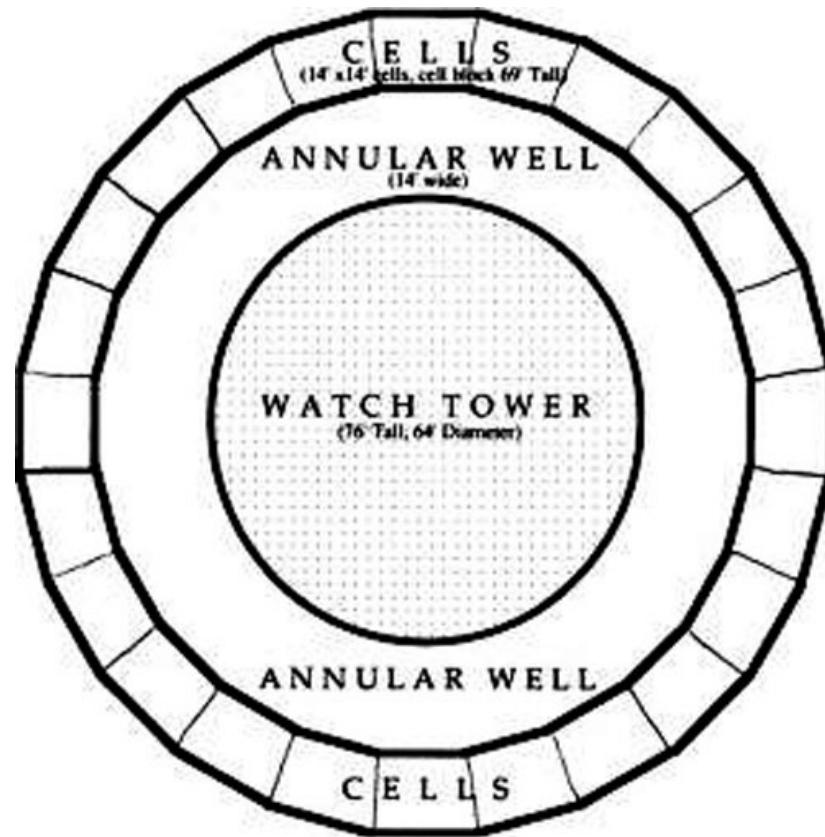


# Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

- Plague and its allocation: disciplinary society
- Leprosy and its segregation: clean society
- A political dream of disease; a model of power and discipline



# Panopticon









# Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

- Prison vs. Panopticon
- Directness of power
- Power: visible, untraceable, universal
- Functional spread of the panopticon
- From extraordinary situation to everyday situation
- Panopticon today?

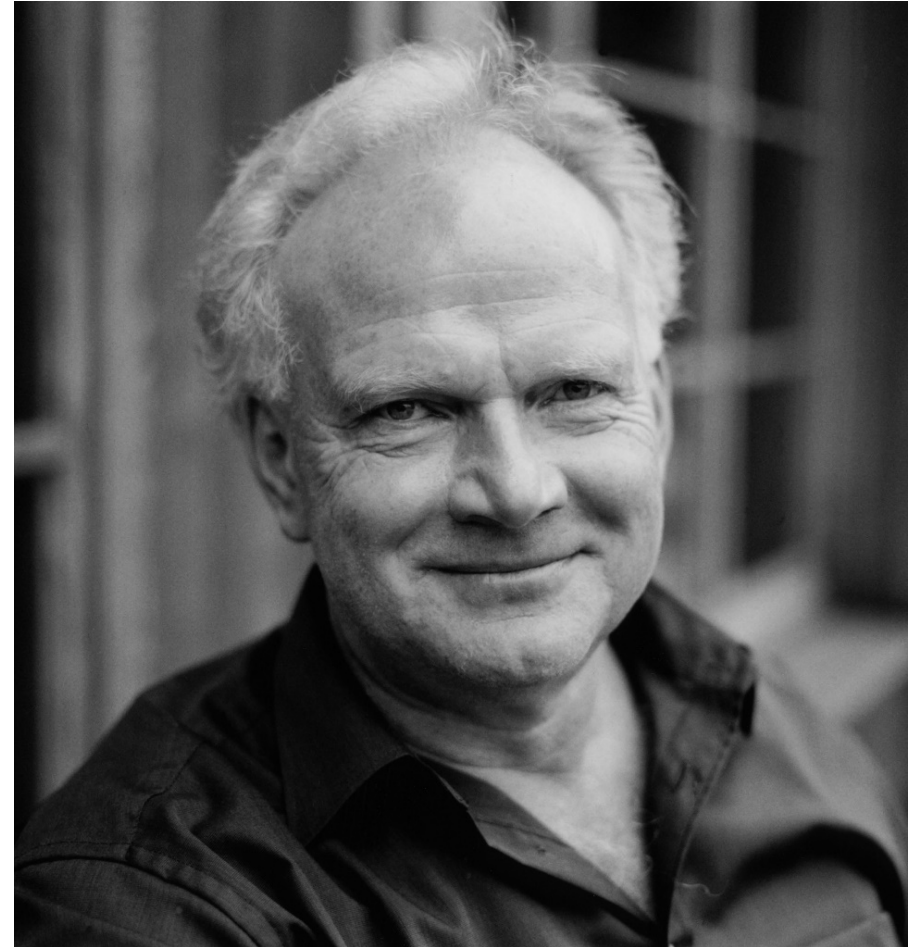
# Ulrich Beck and individualisation

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# Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)

- Risk society: towards a new modernity (1986)
- Second („reflexive“) modernity
- Risk society



# Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)

- Two phases of individualisation
  - Old individualisation (18th-20th century)
  - New individualisation (20th-21st century)
- Family, work, class
- Family
  - Changing structure of family
  - „standard biography“ vs. institutions
  - Changing male and female roles (life expectancy, nuclear family, motherhood, divorce rate, equal education chances)
  - Education for women vs. Labour market for women

## Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)

„On the one hand, the labor market demands **mobility without regard to personal circumstances**. Marriage and the family require **the opposite**. Thought through to its ultimate consequence, **the market model of modernity implies a society without families and children**. Everyone must be independent, free for the demands of the market in order to guarantee his/her economic existence. (...) This contradiction between the requirements of a relationship and those of the labor market **could only remain hidden so long** as it was taken for granted that marriage meant renunciation of a career for women, responsibility for the children and 'comobility' according to the professional destiny of the husband. The contradiction bursts open where both spouses must or want to be free to earn a living as a salary earner.“



# Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)

- Family
  - Institutional (structural) contradiction, but private solutions!
  - („the personal is political!“)
  - Cultural factors
    - Rise in the importance of relationship
    - Rise in the value of children

# Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)

- Work
  - Axis of industrial (first) modernity
  - Contract, place and time of work
  - Flexibilisation of work (blurring of the formal-informal border)
  - Inflation of diplomas, escalator effect
  - Return of the personal criteria: education has lost its function of distributing social statuses

# Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)

- Class
  - Class structure loosening: hierarchisation, differentiation
  - Working class and labour unions
  - From class problems to individual problems
  - From production to consumption
  - From materialism to postmaterialism?

# Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)

- Private biography = political problem
- Structural problems – individual solutions
- Individualisation of responsibility

„Nor only that pedagogy and medicine, social law and traffic planning presume active 'thinking individuals', as they put it so nicely, who are supposed to find their way in this jungle of transitory finalities with the help of their own clear vision. All these and all the other experts dump their contradictions and conflicts at the feet of the individual and leave him or her with the well intentioned invitation to judge all of this critically on the basis of his or her own notions.“