

Sociology: Some Definitions

- “The science that formulates things everybody knows in a way no one understands.”
(Saying among sociologists)
- “Science of society, social institutions, and social relationships, and specifically the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction, and collective behavior of organized human groups.”
(Encyclopedia Britannica)
- “The study of the origin, development, and structure of human societies and the behavior of individual people and groups in society.”
(MSN Encarta)
- “Scientific discipline studying human societies including the manifold dimensions of social action and the organization of social relations.”
(Lehrbuch der Soziologie, Campus)
- “Sociology is the study of human social life, groups and societies, giving special emphasis to modern, industrialized systems.”
(Anthony Giddens, Sociology)

A good definition of sociology

“The science that describes, analyses and explains the social action of people living together according to more or less fixed rules, as well as the relatively durable structures of social action, and the changes that occur in patterns of behavior and social structures.”

(de Jager and Mok, Grondbeginselen der sociologie, 1964)

- Sociology is a **science**. Remember the ‘double hermeneutics’ (Giddens), i.e. the fact that sociologists use the meaning and interpretations of their ‘objects’.
- Sociological research includes (often: combines) **description**, **analysis** and **explanation** (causal, other).
- **Social action** is a basic unit of sociological research (_Max Weber)
- People live together and act according to **rules** and **structures** (_structures influence our action, and are created by it at the same time: ‘duality of structure’ (Giddens)).
- Rules and structures are subject to **social change** (_history)
- Social change may follow **rules & patterns** (remember Ibn Khaldun or Comte).

Tasks of Sociology

- Describe the characteristics of societies (e.g. social structure)
- Find out about the causes of social change (progress?) or social stagnation
- Describe and analyze the actions (behavior, communication, thinking...) of individuals and groups in a society
- Relate the actions of individuals and groups with social structures

Hermeneutics and criticism in sociology

- Sociology is irreversibly linked to the social world, its object, via:
 - Concepts (ordinary language uses words like ‘action’, ‘power’, ‘order’ or ‘change’).
 - Ways of reasoning
 - A need for understanding and analysis of situations, other people etc.
- On the one hand, sociologists are ‘embedded scientists’ (cf. ‘embedded journalists’). On the other, sociologists are critical scientists, i.e. they challenge everyday knowledge, convictions, meanings etc.
- “...the greatest strength of the social sciences lies in their ability to revise the prevailing images of the world.” (V.C. Uchendu, *Manpower and its Development: Problems and Possibilities. Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 8, 1982: 48–65)
- “The social sciences occupy a crucial place in societal development. This derives largely from the ability of the social sciences to re-examine or re-interrogate prevailing notions of the world. This appraisal process aims at discovering the real extent of societal development, obstacles to development and the way forward.”
(Edlyne E. Anugwom, *African Social Sciences and Development in the New Century: Challenges and Prospects*, 2004)

Sources and problems of criticism in sociology

- How do sociologists (scientists in general) know about ‘the real extent of societal development’ and the right ‘way forward’?
- Answer 1 (**Internal Criticism**): There are always different, if not conflicting social groups with different (conflicting) views of development and progress (normative views of social development). Sociologists simply choose the ‘right’ groups and their views.
 - Problem: Which group/view is ‘right’?
 - Implication: Sociologists (as any other group) cannot escape the problem of justification of the norms by which it criticizes.
- Answer 2 (**External Criticism**): Scientists have a privileged understanding of social reality. Their criticism originates from this better understanding.
 - Problem: What makes an understanding a privileged understanding?
 - Implication: Normative justification needs a social basis
 - Sociologists (including their scientific training and exercise) are parts of society
 - If criticism is meant to change society, it has to ‘reach’ it, i.e. society needs a capacity to ‘incorporate’ that criticism, to process it, realize it.

Basics: Concepts of humans and human agency

- The way we perceive humans and assess the role of human agency influences the way we conceptualize society ('Menschenbild' influences type of sociology).
- Core dichotomies of 'Menschenbild':
 - Biology ('nature') versus culture ('nurture')
 - Rationality vs. irrationality
 - Individualism vs. collectivism
 - Freedom vs. determinism
 - Optimism vs. pessimism
- Traditionally, sociologists tend to an 'oversocialized conception of man' (*homo sociologicus*) (Dennis Wrong, 1961), whereas economists adhere to an 'undersocialized concept' (*homo oeconomicus*) (Mark Granovetter, 1985).
 - "economics is all about how people make choices; sociology is all about how they don't have any choices to make." (James Duesenberry, 1960)
- Today, this separation seems to be outdated and overcome:
 - Institutional economics
 - Rational Action Sociology
 - New Economic Sociology (Mark Granovetter, Jens Beckert)

Models of human agents

	Homo Sociologicus	Homo Oeconomicus	RREEMM Model
Resourceful			X
Restricted		X	X
Evaluating	X		X
Expecting	X		X
Maximizing		X	X

Homo sociologicus:
Various sociologists by and large; e.g. Emile Durkheim.

Homo oeconomicus:
Neoclassical economic theory by and large.

RREEMM: Meckling, Lindenberg, Esser. Hegel? Marx?

- Resourceful: Humans are reasoning about the consequences of change in their environment and their own behavior (Resources = capabilities of the actor).
- Restricted: Humans are confronted with opportunities and limitations; their resource base is restricted (a) with regard to its availability (cf. natural or social scarcity), and (b) with regard to the actor's abilities to control it (physically, morally...).
- Evaluating: Humans are applying norms and values to their perceptions and actions—either intentionally and deliberately, or unintentionally.
- Expecting: Humans have no perfect information. They expect future situations to occur, and they apply probabilities.
- Maximizing: Human agents have preferences and try to maximize their utility in a wider sense. _What is a 'rational action', or how do I maximize my utility?

Some basic sociological concepts

- Social action
- Values, norms, and institutions
- Social role
- Social structure and social system
- Markets, hierarchies, networks
- Class, state, party
- Social change

Social Action

- (Social) Action ≠ (Animal) Behavior
- **Action:** The acting individual(s) attaches a **subjective meaning** to a behavior (external or internal behavior, failure or refrain).
- **Social Action:** The acting individual takes account of the **behavior of others** and is thereby oriented in its course.
- **Meaning:**
 - a) **Factual/empirical** meaning
 - i. the subjective meaning of the **factual** or **historical case** of a particular actor
 - ii. the **average** or **approximate** subjective meaning attributable to a mass of actors
 - b) **Conceptually constructed** pure type of thought (≠ 'correct' meaning in a scientific or 'true' meaning in metaphysical sense)
- **Understanding:** The interpretative grasp of meaning
 - a) the **actually intended** meaning for concrete action
 - b) the **average** of, or an approximation to, the actually intended meaning
 - c) the meaning appropriate to a scientifically constructed pure type (an **ideal type**)

Values, Norms, Institutions

Values

- Human societies are integrated—inter alia—by shared values, i.e. general goals of (human) life that are perceived as intrinsically meaningful and important.
- Examples: Freedom, independence, solidarity, love, heroism, honor, wealth, well-being, gentleness, face-keeping, family, order, holiness...
- In any given society, there are values that are more and those that are less important.
- Linton 1936: Universals, specialties, alternatives
- The existence and/or relevance of values (or value rankings) differs from society to society (culture).
- Values change over time.
 - Ronald Inglehart: From materialism to post-materialism due to economic progress and generational experiences.

Values, Norms, Institutions

Norms

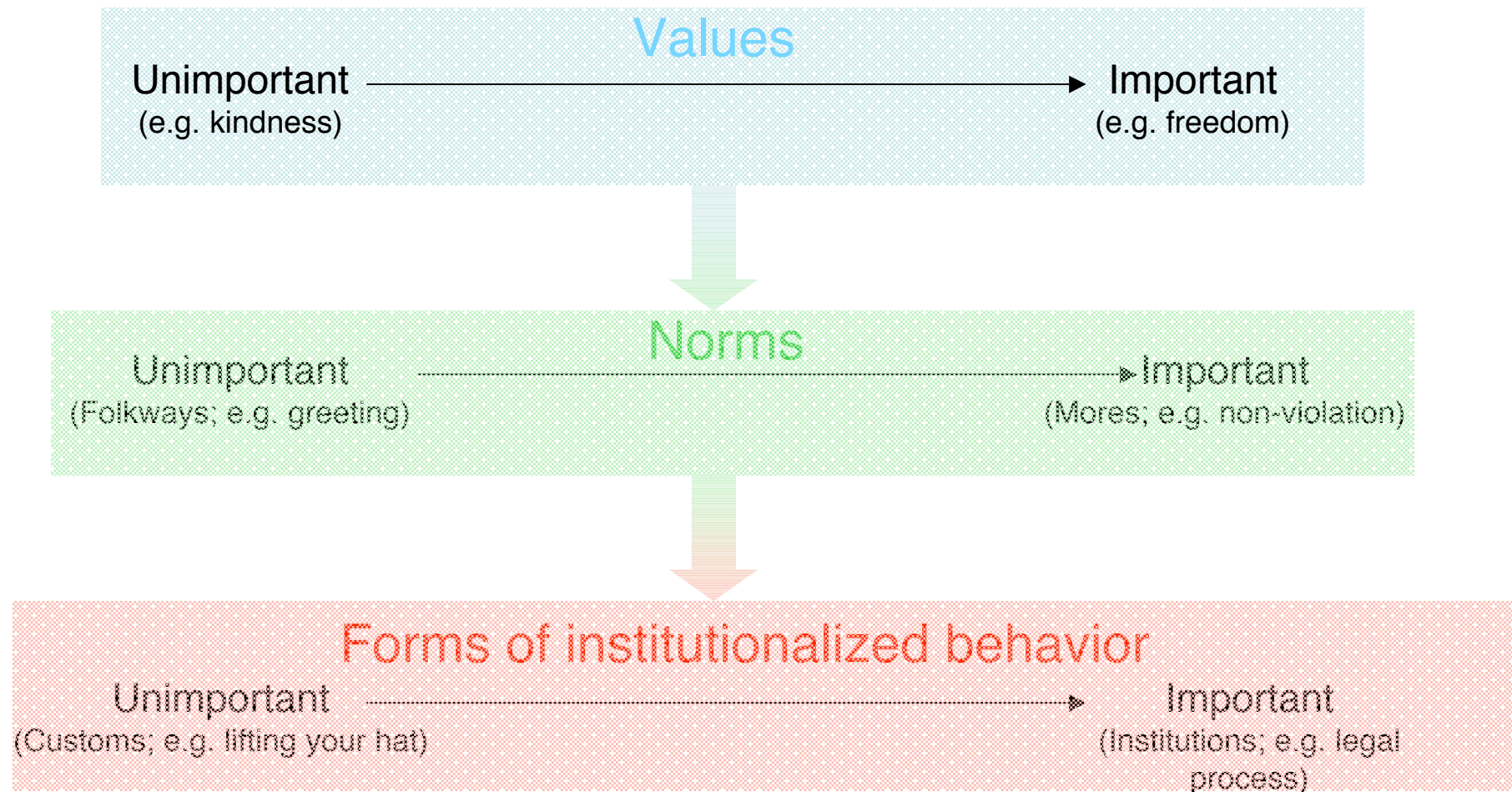
- While values are general goals, human action is concrete, situation specific, and subject to fundamental uncertainties. Values have to be interpreted and implemented.
- Most norms are interpretations and implementations of values according to the specifics of social action.
- Norms are prescriptions for human behavior, held by social agents, directly or indirectly oriented towards values which they try to interpret and implement in situations of social action.
 - Probabilistic element: we expect others to behave (think...) in a specific way.
 - Normative element: we expect them to do so for normative reasons.
- Norms can be violated; they are no natural laws or regularities. Norm violation is usually sanctioned (ranging from weak to strong sanctions). Norm compliance is sometimes honored (honor, money...).
- Again, there are more important and less important social norms (Sumner 1906: folkways vs. mores).
- Some values do never ('beautiful weather') or rarely ('holiness') translate in universal social norms.
- Norms relate to the 'power structure' (Weber) of a society: often dominant norms are the norms of a dominant group (class, caste, elite...). But remember: the power structure of a society at large is often complex, and always a vector of the power of different groups.

Values, Norms, Institutions

Institutions

- While norms describe (mutual) expectations regarding social behavior, humans tend to standardize their behavior according to these norms in order to reduce complexity and uncertainty.
- An institution is a form of standardized behavior, realizing one or several norms in a socially visible way.
 - Many people share the value 'love' and the norm 'to marry'. The institution that many societies have found here is a 'patrimonial relationship' (marriage).
- Often institutions are confused with organizations, e.g. standardized forms of behavior with the social agents that are engaged in them.
 - The initiation rites of an American student corporation are an institution. Sometimes we call the corporation itself an institution. But it is an organization, and one of its main goals is to perform the institution 'initiation' in a specific way.

Values, Norms, Institutions



Social role 1

A social role is a bundle of specific norms (normative expectations) that a reference group has towards the bearer of a social position.

- **Position.** Every social system is differentiated and stratified.
 - Social differentiation often occurs according to functional (reproduction oriented) requirements, whereby ‘function’ reflects both ‘real operations’ (e.g. economic or political necessities) and values. Examples: Soldier, teacher, worker, priest, salesperson, mother...)
 - Every social differentiation has some hierarchical (vertical) meaning, i.e. reflects the different degree of social esteem (status, prestige).
 - Ascribed positions (like age or sex) have to be distinguished from achieved positions (like professions).
- **Positions.** Positions are often systematically linked, so that many roles are systematically related (e.g. teacher—student, soldier—officer, mother—father/kids).
- **Reference group.** The more or less formalized group that does have the normative expectations towards the bearer of the position (e.g. students, the administration and the public in case of professors, or newspaper readers in case of journalists). Usually endowed with more or less efficient sanctions.
- **Bundle of specific norms.** Positions are ‘nodes’ in a concrete social network. The normative expectations towards these nodes have to be specific. Usually there are more than one norm defining one position (e.g. teacher: knowledge, authority, empathy, correctness, impartiality, loyalty...).
- **Types of Norms.** ‘Must’ norms: usually legally defined. ‘Should’ norms: defined by non-normative normative expectations. ‘Can’ norms: may be around, but not shared by everybody.

Social role 2

- Individuals 'play' a role, i.e. they act in ways that realizes (confirms) the bundle of normative expectations associated with their position. The theater metaphor has been stressed by some sociologists (like Erving Goffman: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959 (German translation: *Wir alle spielen Theater*)).
- Implication: There is a difference between the self (individual) and the social role. **_Role distance.**
- However: Social reality is not playing on a stage. And even actors identify with certain roles. **_Role identity.**
- Performance: 'Playing' a role is always an 'interpretation of a text/script' by the individual. It implies both the identification with the role (e.g. via imitation of role models), and the distance towards the role.
- One role combines different, sometimes conflicting normative expectations (e.g. teacher: engage for kids vs. being impartial; or being loyal to the institution vs. helping kids). **_Intra role conflict.**
- Individuals 'play' more than one role (e.g. student, jobber, son, Protestant, black African...). These roles can conflict each other (e.g. when a manager has to fire a friend). **_Inter role conflict.**
- Roles change over time, as the expectations of the reference group change. But reference groups adjust their expectations according to enduring performances of specific roles.

Social role 3

- **Relevance.** When studying the behavior of individuals (or influencing it), always try to find out what can be attributed to the social role of that person.
 - What is the **social system** the person is located in?
 - What **social position** does the person have?
 - Which **norms** define the role of the person?
 - Degree of obligation (must, should, can)
 - Source of norms (reference groups)
 - How does the person **interpret** her role? Is she aware of her obligations? Are there alternative ways of interpreting the same role (performing the task)?
 - How strictly do the **reference groups** of the respective role perceive the norms (is there room for change...)?
 - What (legal, normative) **latitude** does the person have—and does she perceive it?
 - What is the **strictly individual** (personal, private, idiosyncratic...) part of a person's behavior?
 - If unsatisfied with a role performance: can you imagine **alternative ways** of interpreting/performing the same role in a more rational manner? Or should one re-think the whole position—and the social system defining it—altogether?

Social Structure and Social System

- The structure of something is the way in which its parts or components are related to each other (_pattern).
- In contrast with process, which is how the things change, the structure is how they are connected.
- A social structure is the way in which the elements of a society (individuals, organizations, values...) are related to each other.
- A social system is an entity of interacting elements. Other than in structure, in system we are interested in the elements and in their functioning together.

Example: Social Structure of the USA

Upper class Disproportionate amount of influence (income commonly \$150,000+)	
Upper middle class (ca. 15%)	White collar salaried management and professional employees, advanced college degree Household income commonly above \$100,000, but may be considerably less for 1 income earner households or some lesser paid professionals, active in politics and social issues
Lower middle class (ca. 33%)	Bachelors degree, White collar employees with considerably less autonomy than upper middle class professionals, Incomes commonly between \$30,000 and \$75,000 depending on the number income earners, emulate consumption patterns of the more affluent, overworked, little leisure
Working class (ca. 30%)	Blue collar and clerical workers, work often in uncomfortable environments, little job security, prone to out-sourcing, closely supervised, Household income commonly between \$16,000 and \$30,000, pride themselves in doing "Real work."
Lower Class (ca. 17%)	Prone to job-loss, often work multiple jobs, Household income often less than \$16,000

Archetypes of Social Organization: Markets, Hierarchies, Networks

Markets are interaction systems of mutually independent actors that exchange 'goods' on a free (supply and demand) basis.

Hierarchies are interaction systems that presuppose the mutual interdependency of actors and the asymmetry of decisions.

Networks are interaction systems with deliberately dependent, but principally free actors. Their interdependence is based on solidarity, which might either be based on tradition (e.g. family) or choice (e.g. neighborhood network).

Social Entities

- Individuals: Single human actors, endowed with resources (e.g. a body, natural resources, intellectual capacities...) and interests (needs, wants, purposes...).
- Aggregates: Sets of (uncoordinated) social actors with similar properties.
- Markets: Special forms of aggregates, where groups of actors interact (exchange resources) in short term processes, gaining short term equilibria.
- Collective Actors (in general): Uncoordinated aggregates of actors with similar interests, worldviews, and actions (e.g. social classes or lifestyle groups).
- Social Relations: Mutually oriented actions of actors (e.g. love relation, argument, strategic negotiations)
- Simple Social Systems: Localized and temporalized interactions of concrete actors (e.g. on a party, in a train compartment)
- Groups: Collective actors with partially common interests, loose contacts, no formal membership, no formal organization (e.g. a group of friends, foreigners in a city).
- Organizations: Collective actors with a (pre-defined) common goal, formal membership, organizational rules (formal and informal), and specified and entitled staff to enforce rules (e.g. administrations, corporations, associations).
- Corporate Actors: Constituted collective actors, i.e. organizations with a defined leadership and representation functions (e.g. a university, the catholic church).
- Society: Encompassing and relative self-sufficient institutional framework of social actions and interactions for individuals, groups, organizations, and corporate actors.

System Theory: Parsons 1



- Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)
- Studied in Germany (1925-27)
- Died in Germany 1979, when celebrating the 50th anniversary of his doctoral dissertation (on capitalism in Weber and Sombart)
- Did a lot to distribute European sociology (especially Weber) in the U.S.
 - The Structure of Social Action (1937)
 - The Social System (1951)
 - Working Papers in the Theory of Action (1953) (with Robert F. Bales & Edward A. Shils)
 - Economy and Society (1956) (with Neil J. Smelser)
 - Societies (1966)
 - The System of Modern Societies (1971)
 - The American University (1973) (with Gerald M. Platt)

Systems Theory: Parsons 2

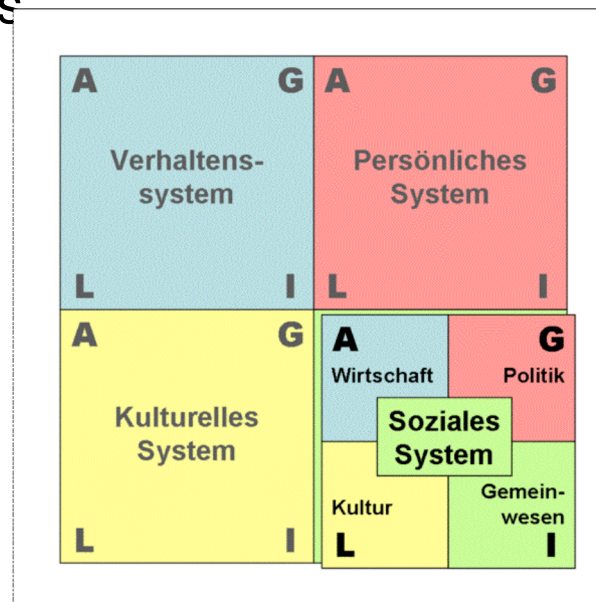
- Parsons tried to develop a general theory of social action, synthesizing theories from Durkheim and Weber. He was looking for a particularly sociological theory, and criticized the dominance of economic theory.
- In his system theory period (about after 1950), he is interested in the structure of the social system, i.e. the functional specifics of relations between entities

Adaptation System
(Needs)

Personal System
(Goal attainment;
motives)

Social System
(Integration; norms)

Cultural System
(Latency; Values)



Adaptation System
(Economy)

Political System
(Goal attainment;
motives)

Community
(Integration; norms)

Cultural System
(Latency; Values)

Systems Theory

Parsons 3

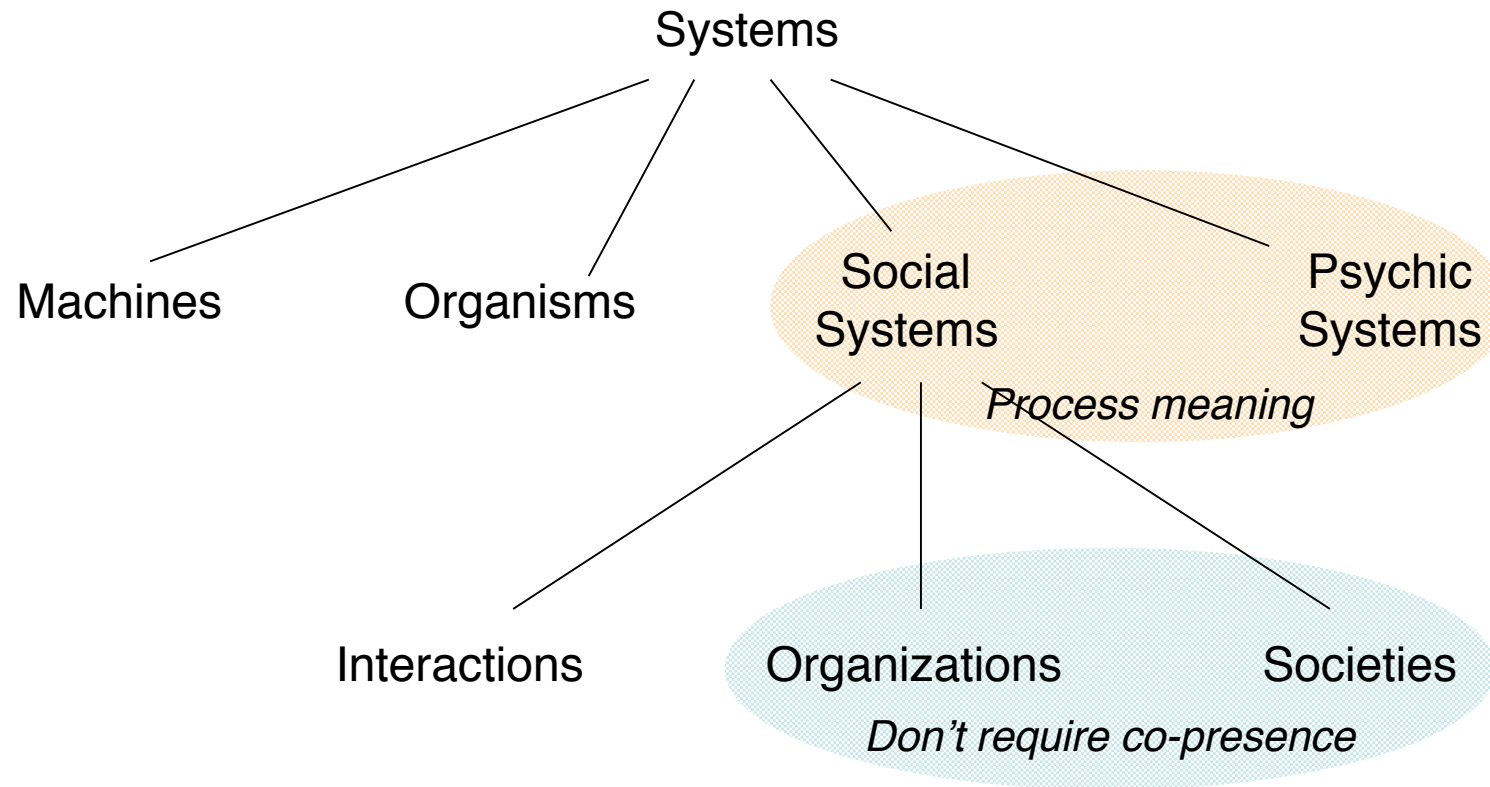
- Parsons has done a lot for establishing sociology as a systematic science of its own.
- After WW II, his sociology was dominant in the U.S. and world wide.
- He can help to look at different social realms and to identify the specific modes of processing and integration.
- Problem of the actor. Where does she reside?
- Problem of social change. How does it come about?
- Problem of empirical science. How immune is sociology against experience?

System Theory: Luhmann 1



- Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998)
- Member of the 'skeptical generation' (Schelsky).
- Started as a bureaucrat, studied with Parsons in the early 1960s.
- Sociological observer, against ideologies, also against left sociologists.
- Came to Bielefeld University. Asked for his projects when entering in 1969: "Theory of society; duration: 30 years; costs: none").
- Around 1980 influenced by theory of self-organization (autopoiesis) (Maturana and Varela).
 - Funktionen und Folgen formaler Organisationen (1964)
 - Legitimation durch Verfahren (1969)
 - Liebe als Passion (1982)
 - Soziale Systeme (1984)
 - Ökologische Kommunikation (1986)
 - Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft (1997)
 - Die Politik der Gesellschaft (2000)

System Theory: Luhmann 2

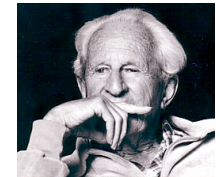


System Theory: Luhmann 3

- Other than Parsons, Luhmann does not derive the system from a structure, but from functions. Functional differentiation as basic characteristic of modern societies. No segmentation and no hierarchic structure.
- Radical constructionist approach to social systems. No interdependence (as in Parsons). Systems operate on a closed, auto-referential basis. 'Structural coupling' as a more or less mysterious interchange.
- Psychic systems are by no means part of the social system. They are the environment of the social system.
- Opposes against any idea of political steering of society. Both systems follow different logics.

Critical Theory: Core Authors and Works

- Max Horkheimer (1895-1973)
 - Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft als Bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie (Habilitation), 1925
 - Anfänge der bürgerlichen Geschichtsphilosophie (1930)
 - Traditionelle und kritische Theorie (1937)
 - Dialektik der Aufklärung (Th. W. Adorno) (1947)
 - Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft (1967)
- Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969)
 - Kierkegaard. Konstruktion des Ästhetischen (1930)
 - Dialektik der Aufklärung (M. Horkheimer) (1947)
 - Minima Moralia (1950)
 - Negative Dialektik (1966)
 - Ästhetische Theorie (1970)
 - Sociology Lectures (1972)
- Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979)
 - Hegels Ontologie und die Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit (1932)
 - Eros and Civilization (1955)
 - The One-Dimensional Man (1964)
 - An Essay on Liberation (1969)
 - Counter-Revolution and Revolt (1972)
- Jürgen Habermas (*1929)
 - Das Absolute und die Geschichte. Von der Zwiespältigkeit in Schellings Denken (Dissertation) (1954)
 - Student und Politik. Eine soziologische Untersuchung zum politischen Bewußtsein Frankfurter Studenten (1961)
 - Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft (Habilitation) (1962)
 - Erkenntnis und Interesse (1968)
 - Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus (1973)
 - Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (1981)
 - Faktizität und Geltung (1992)
 - Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze. (2005)
- Other authors (more or less 'core')
 - Erich Fromm
 - Walter Benjamin
 - Franz Neumann
 - L
 - Henrik Großmann
 - Franz Borkenau
 - Karl August Wittfogel



Critical Theory: Some Background

- ‘Critical Theory’ (CT) is a brand name invented by Horkheimer to characterize (and to some degree: hide) the specific form of **Western Marxism** that the members adhere to.
- The **Marxist** tradition is valid, but not in a ‘dogmatic’ (Marxist-Leninist) form. This means mainly:
 - A particular interest in commodity theory and commodity fetishism.
 - No cult of the proletariat; it can be wrong, and in fact is subject to ideological forms of integration into capitalism.
 - No party ideology (e.g. Communist Party); intellectuals serve the true interests of the proletariat best if they remain independent.
 - No cult of the Soviet Union; CT is against the oppression of opposition and individualism in general by the USSR.
- The **philosophical tradition** (especially the German Idealism (Kant, Hegel)) remains an important source of theoretical inspiration. _The combination of philosophy, social theory, and empirical studies is a unique feature of CT.
- In 1932, Horkheimer and Adorno do have academic careers at the University of Frankfurt am Main (and its Institut für Sozialforschung (IfS)), they also edit a journal: **Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung**, the intellectual forum of the early CT:
 - Programmatic articles
 - Empirical projects
 - Book reviews (Marcuse important)
- **Exile** a core experience. Most members of the first generation of CT (or Frankfurt School) are left-wing German Jews. _After Nazi government in 1933, all members leave (1933: Geneva, 1934: Paris, 1939: New York). Last (mainly English) edition: 1941.
- From 1942, CT members become more or less integrated in the U.S. academic and political system (e.g. via advisory activities for the U.S. government during WW II). **Growing competition and differences** (e.g. Adorno and Marcuse, or Adorno and Marcuse against Fromm).
- After WW II, some members go back to Germany (most importantly: Horkheimer and Adorno to Frankfurt), while others remain in the U.S. (mainly Fromm and Marcuse). In his early years, Adorno supports empirical research in sociology, later he opposes (_Science politics, ‘Positivismusstreit’, Soziologentag 1968).
- CT is one of the main intellectual **resources** for the student movement of 1968 (cf. Marcuse in Frankfurt and Berlin). However, many left activists even attack CT as not political enough. (_Death of Adorno).
- Today, the older CT has much less relevance for sociology. Habermas is much more important.

Critical Theory: Domains & Methods

- Domains
 - Philosophy
 - Epistemology
 - Dialectics
 - History of Philosophy
 - Sociology
 - Theory of Society
 - Ideology Analysis (e.g. Mass Media)
 - Class Analysis & Social Movements
 - Psychology
 - Social Psychology
 - Family Research
 - Aesthetics
 - Social Context
 - Music
 - Literature
- Methods
 - Dialectics
 - Historical Materialism
 - Some good empirical work (e.g. Authoritarian Personality, ca. 1950, F-Scale)
 - Idiosyncrasy, Aphorism (Adorno)

Critical Theory: Some Main Messages

- Theory is part of society.
- Science has traditionally been an instrument of domination (nature, individual, society) (_Foucault)
- Analyze society as a totality. Don't get lost in the details!
- Limited scope for individual action due to organized capitalism and dominant 'inclusory' ideologies. Core element: commodity fetishism.
- Even the most promising historical subject—the proletariat—is subject to ideologies, authoritarian political forms, and repressive psychological characteristics.
- In 'late capitalism', the mass media and consumption are some of the most important sources of ideology.
- Independent critical science can help society.
- Marginal aspects or actors may represent the 'true' future development of a society (especially Marcuse).
- The ultimate goal is a 'rational' society in a wider sense, including:
 - Production and consumption systems that don't serve profit interests, but human needs and wants.
 - A true social subject is needed, i.e. the non-repressive integration of social actors. The capitalist state is only a surrogate, and sometimes even worse (_Fascism).
 - The free unfolding of the total human nature includes production, consumption, aesthetics, and sexuality. (_some Gender theories use CT)

Critical Theory: Relevance

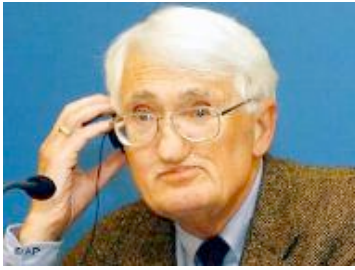
- Against the strict separation of sociology from other social sciences and humanities (such as philosophy).
- Make a flexible use of methodologies, but select those that help you to find inner contradictions and tensions, because they are important drivers of change (_Hegel)
- Always ask yourself: Is the social mainstream 'right'? Is the (social, scientific) consensus 'correct' or 'true'?
 - What legitimation is given for a particular claim? Does it hold water? What are the implications/hidden assumptions?
 - Who gave it, and what are the interests?
 - What alternatives do exist/have been excluded?
 - Trust your own utopian ideas (and those of others).
- Skeptical view on economic growth and commodification of social life (_Criticism of neo-liberal globalization, AdBusters etc.).
- Remember the 'non-identical' wherever you can meet it: nature, the individual, sexuality, marginal groups...)



A special version of CT: Jürgen Habermas 1



- Born in 1929, Habermas was **not in exile**; his intellectual development is closely linked to post-war West Germany.
- Despite being a 'scholar' of Horkheimer and Adorno during the late 1950s and early 1960s, his attachment was not without problems; he kept a **distance**.
- Habermas did always identify with the principles of the German constitution; he defended a socially responsible form of **political liberalism** (John Rawls). He has been one of the most influential **public intellectual** in Germany since the 1970s. He engaged vividly in public debates, but never as a 'radical left intellectual', but as an engaged and responsible enlightenment representative (somehow at odds with his 1962 book, but fully in line with his 'Hegelianism').
- Habermas seeks the **constructive debate** with other approaches & the philosophical and sociological tradition (Kant, Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Parsons, Wittgenstein, Rawls...). He uses empirical results much more than the older CT did (but in line with their programmatic statements).
- His theory building is characterized by **synthesis** of elements from different sources, informed by a strong conviction: that a reasonable social development, however endangered by some processes, is nevertheless possible. (Hegel: The reality of reason).
- His major work (Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (TKH); Theory of Communicative Action, 1981) was motivated by the experience of a **political disaster** in post-war Western Germany: the heyday and final crisis of left-wing political terrorism in 1977.



A special version of CT: Jürgen Habermas 2



- In TKH, Habermas follows a basic intuition through modern philosophy and classical sociology:
 - **Communication** (basic paradigm: language) is the core institution of human society. There is more than communication, but without communication nothing works, and no coordination can take place.
 - There are **different functions, forms and regularities** in human communication. Reconstructing these different forms leads to different forms of social integration, which is crucial for any social theory.
 - The basic function of human communication is **mutual understanding**, or **consensus** (Einverständnis). Even acts of dissent presuppose consensus, e.g. for the future, or based on former experience. This presupposition is a **transcendental fact** of language use. One cannot deny it without stopping communication.
- Besides communicative action, H. knows '**instrumental action**', i.e. action that intends to change something in the world (in the social world this is called strategic action). Strategic (or, vulgo, manipulative) action always rests upon communicative action, not the other way around (parasitism). (This **asymmetry** between the 'wrong' and the 'right' means: 'bad' social institutions have their roots in 'good' ones, and progress is possible in principle)
- H. accepts **systems theory** in so far as modern societies can partly be described as social systems (and subsystems). Systems integration can do without communicative action, e.g. in the economic sphere, where 'money' is the coordinating medium.



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- However, there is a crucial distinction to be made between **system and life world**:
 - Systems are functional units (mechanisms) for the coordination of actions; they integrate via media (like ‘money’ in the economy or ‘power’ in the state). System integration does not immediately rely on communicative action (Parsons, Luhmann)
 - The life world of everyday social actors is no system, but displays specific characteristics of experience and action (immediately given, disperse, cross-cutting, meaningful, relevant...) (Phenomenology). Here, communicative action is core.
- A ‘good’ society tries to ‘give the system what we owe to it’, i.e. integrates via systemic processes what does not (substantially) need communicative action. Pathologic developments arise, when processes that substantially need communicative action are dealt with by systemic integration. H. calls this the **‘colonization of the life world’** through the system.
 - Bureaucratization of social life
 - Economization of the private and public spheres
- The goal of CT is to **prevent or reverse colonization processes**. Criticism is possible due to the fact that
 - communicative action is the basis for instrumental and strategic action,
 - Basic institutions of modern societies have implemented this (e.g. basic and human rights; parliamentary debate precedes decision)
 - Science, social movements and the public sphere (the critical mass media) provide social nodes of criticism.