

What is Sociology?

“Sociology” = the science of society

OK. Then what is society? What is science?

What is the difference between sciences and social sciences?

What is the difference between sociology and the other social sciences?

Born in the 19th century. Why so late?

Name giving: August Comte

- 1st part of the 19th century
- positivism
- sociology
 - physique sociale
 - Adolphe Quetelet
 - “Savoir pour



The place: in the middle

Natural world		Human world
sciences		humanities
explaining structure & behavior		understanding meanings
	social sciences Kulturwissenschaften sciences humaines explaining structure & behavior + understanding meanings	

What is society?

Well, people, of course



A lot of people



Yes, but there is
something more













Culture

- a lot of people
- + something connecting them in space & time:
- CULTURE
- $\text{society} = \text{people} + \text{culture}$

What is culture?

- ≠ common sense meaning
- material & spiritual
- things -- words -- habits
- values -- norms
- life forms, modes of life

Aspects of culture

- diversity: cultures, subcultures
- external, extracorporeal (outside the body)
- inherited (cultural heritage)
- cumulative (history or evolution)
- freedom & coercion
 - contrainte: an external force existing apart from us, imposing its commands upon us
 - but at the same time liberating us

"Homo sociologicus"

economics	biology (sociobiology, evolutionary psychology)	sociology (& anthropology)
homo oeconomicus	homo biologicus	homo sociologicus
interest-driven behavior	gene-driven behavior	norm-driven behavior
profit maximizing machines	fitness maximizing animals	culturally programmed humans
eternal human nature shapes culture (& society)		there is no eternal human nature; culture shapes human nature
		even if true, human nature is irrelevant (just like geography)

Why in the 19th century?

- the usual answer:
 - 1. The Great Transformation
 - political revolutions
 - industrial revolution
- two other answers:
 - 2. The Century of Sciences
 - 3. The Birth of Society

• 3. The Birth of Society

- there was no society before capitalism

- traditional societies: state = society

- economic power needs political power,
&

- political power needs economic power

- capitalism: exploitation without the use of violence

- differentiation of State and Society

citoyen	bourgeois	homme
(political)state	(civil) society	
public sphere	private sphere	
state	market	home
politology	economics	psychology
	sociology	

Paradigms I. consensus and conflict theories

consensus	conflict
functionalism	marxism

Paradigms II.: macro- & microsociologies

macro	functionalism & marxism
micro	symbolic interactionism & ethnomethodology

Paradigms III.: positivist & interpretative sociologies

positivist		interpretative
functionalism	marxism	ethnomethodology
symbolic interactionism		

Paradigms IV.: mainstream & feminist sociologies

mainstream	functionalism	marxism	ethnometodology
	symbolic interactionism		
feminist	feminism		