

## **Peter Berger & the Sociology of Knowledge**

Two emphases & propositions (after McCarthy's [1996] *Knowledge as Culture*)

Proposition #1: Knowledge is socially determined.

Social structure —————> Knowledge

This proposition asserts that all of human knowledge develops out of and changes with social and material conditions.

Focus: Ideologies that justify the social order or social classes

Key figures: Marx, Durkheim, Mannheim

Proposition #2: Reality is socially constructed by knowledges

This proposition asserts that social reality is not a social fact in its own right, but is something produced and communicated, its meaning derived in and through these systems of communication.

Focus: Everyday commonsense knowledge

Key figures: Schutz (founder of phenomenological sociology), Berger & Luckmann (*The Social Construction of Reality*), Garfinkel (ethnomethodology)

### **Berger's Key Books**

*Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (1963)

*The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966, with Thomas Luckmann)

*The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1969)

*A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (1969)

## **Religion and World-Construction (Berger, chapter 1)**

Society is a human product that continually acts back on its producers. This process can be understood in three steps:

1. Internalization: socialization; incorporating social reality into our selves so that the structures of the social world become the structures of consciousness (thus allowing for internal conversations)
2. Externalization: “ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of [people].”
3. Objectivation: the products of human activity take on a (shared) reality that seems independent and external from us

It is “human nature” is to build worlds (since we don’t have an innate relationship with the world), but this is always a collective process.

As an objective reality society has coercive power, which can be seen in its procedures of social control.

Our biographies take place in these socially constructed worlds, which assign identities.

However, these socially constructed worlds are precarious. Their plausibility is maintained through conversation with others.

Socially constructed worlds order experience with their “knowledge,” all of the things that people know. This nomos (ordered reality) shields us from anomie and “terror” of meaninglessness. Death is the ultimate marginal situation that leads us to question the nomos.

Societies develop procedures for keeping people “reality-oriented,” to make social worlds “taken-for-granted.”

“Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established.... It can be said that religion has played a strategic part in the human enterprise of world-building. Religion implies the farthest reach of [people’s] self-externalization, of his infusion of reality with his own meanings. Religion implies that human order is projected into the totality of being. Put differently religion is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant.”