Welcome to Sociology: The Sociological Imagination

¶ 1.1

Moving beyond common sense to understand the social forces shaping human life.

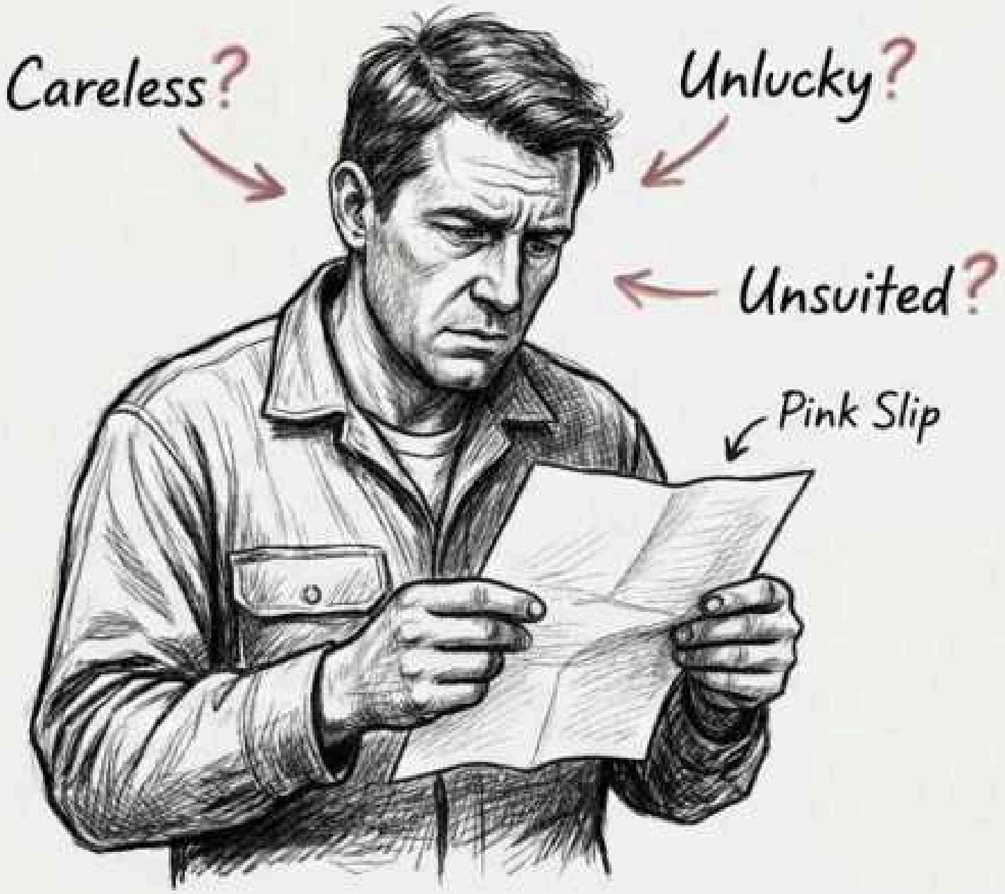


The Scale of Explanation

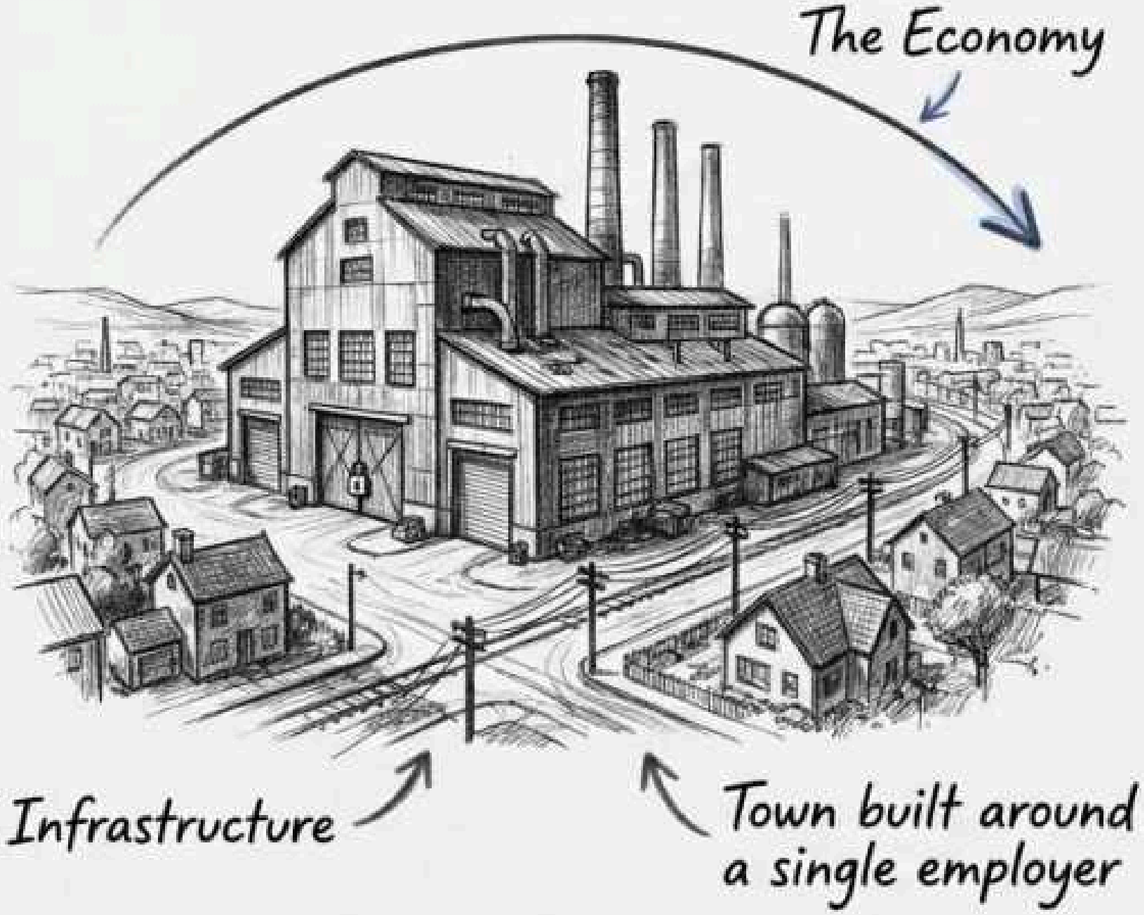
¶ 1.2

1 Job Lost ≠ 3,000 Jobs Lost

The Personal



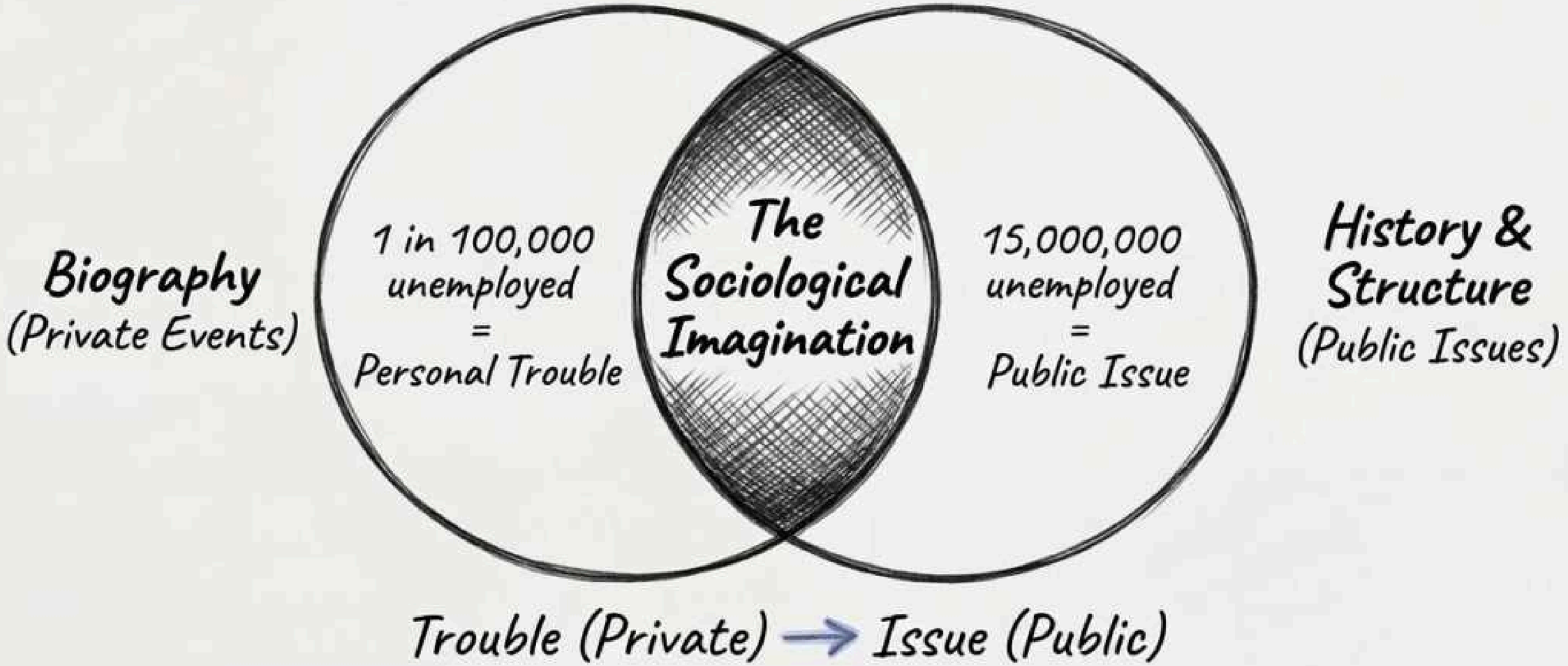
The Systemic



The Sociological Imagination

¶ 1.3

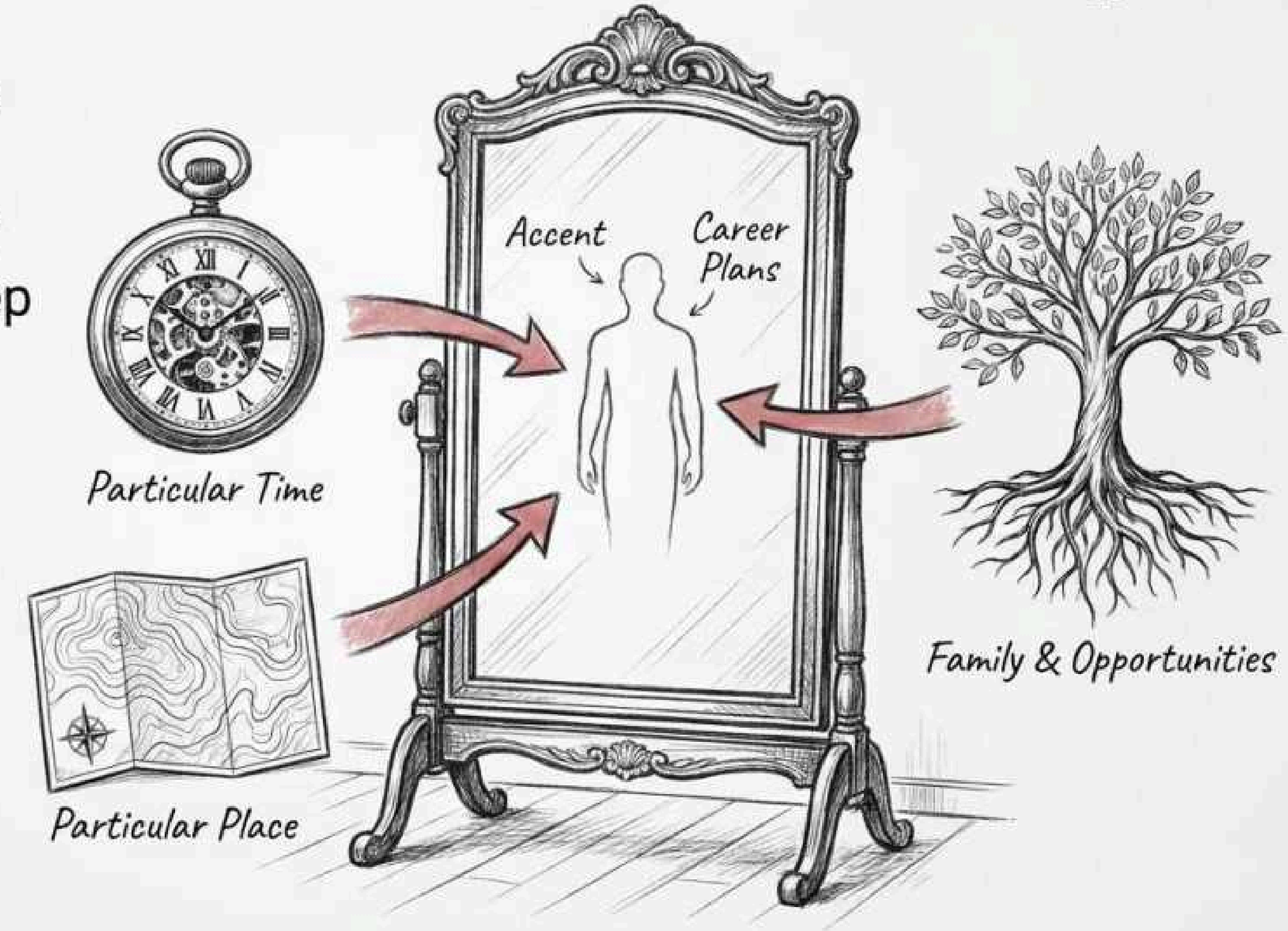
Coined by C. Wright Mills (1959). The vital ability to connect the private events of a **life** to the **history** and **structure** of a **society**.



The Outsider's View of the Self

¶ 1.4

Adopting this view adds a wider panorama. Everything you consider 'simply yours" has a deep social history.



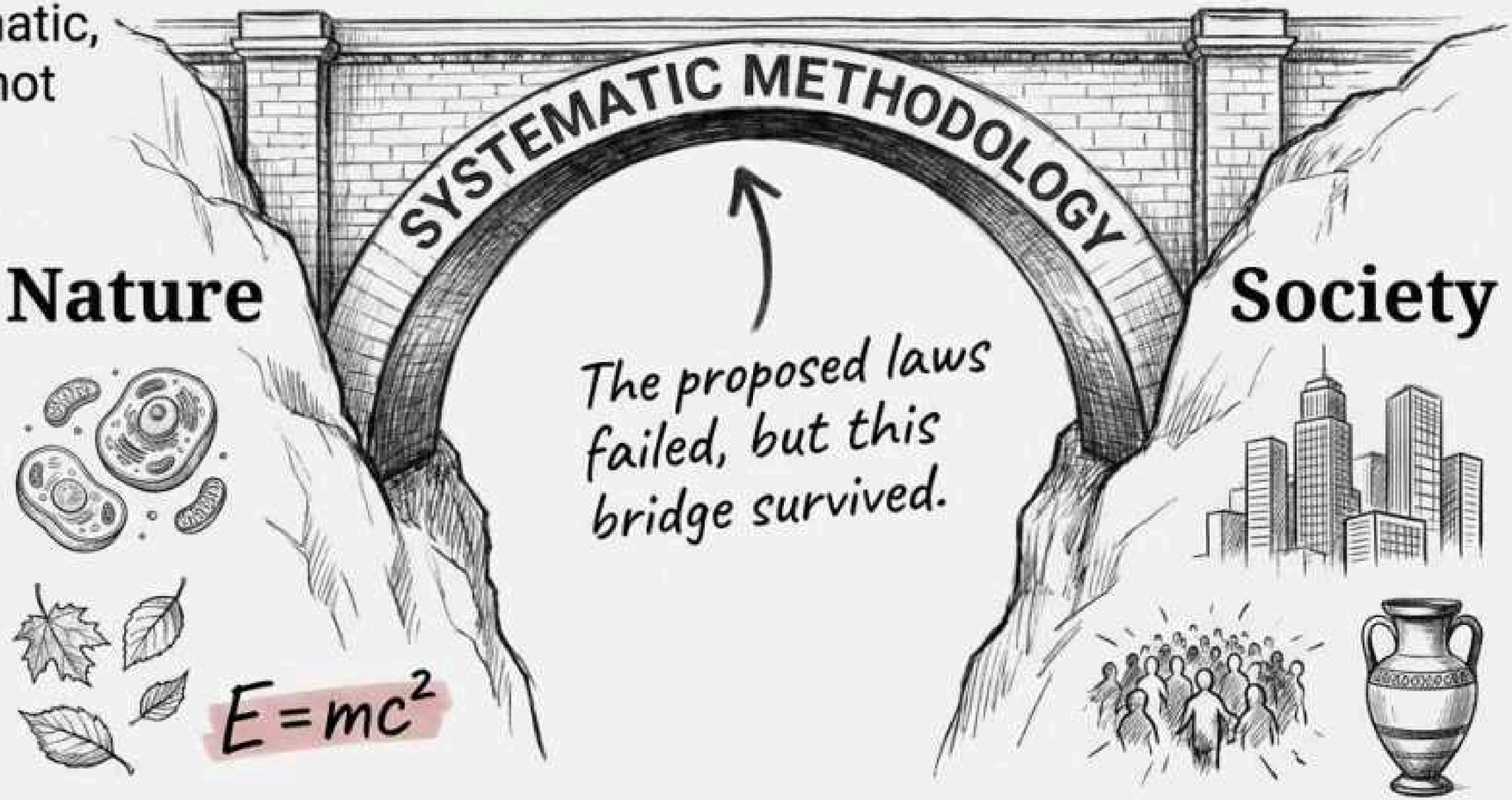
Auguste Comte and the Scientific Society

¶ 1.5

Coined “Sociology” (1838).

Core idea: Human society is a proper object of systematic, evidence-based study, not merely a realm of opinion and tradition.





Emile Durkheim and the Social Fact

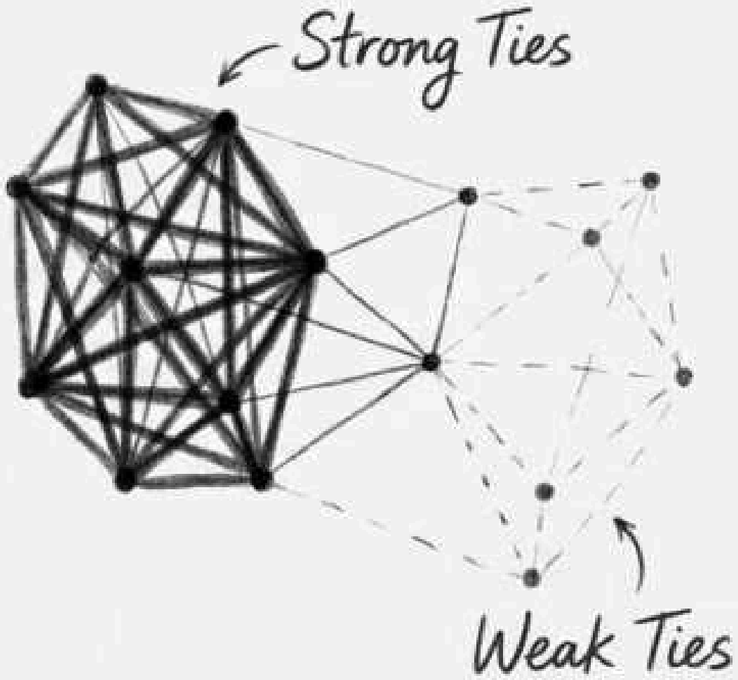
¶ 1.6

Durkheim's 1897 study proved an intensely private act changes predictably based on the strength of a group's social ties.

Social Fact:

A pattern existing outside any single person that shapes individual action.





$$S \propto \frac{1}{T}$$

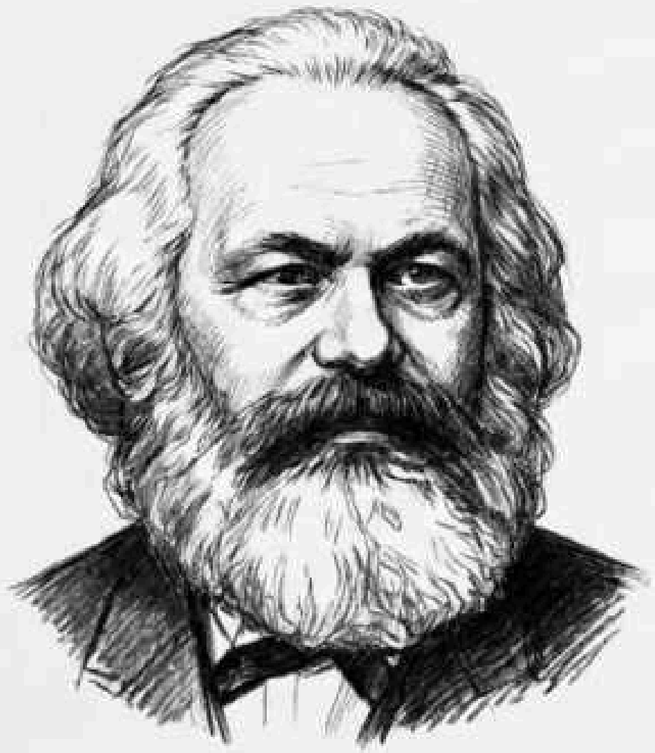
S = Suicide Rate

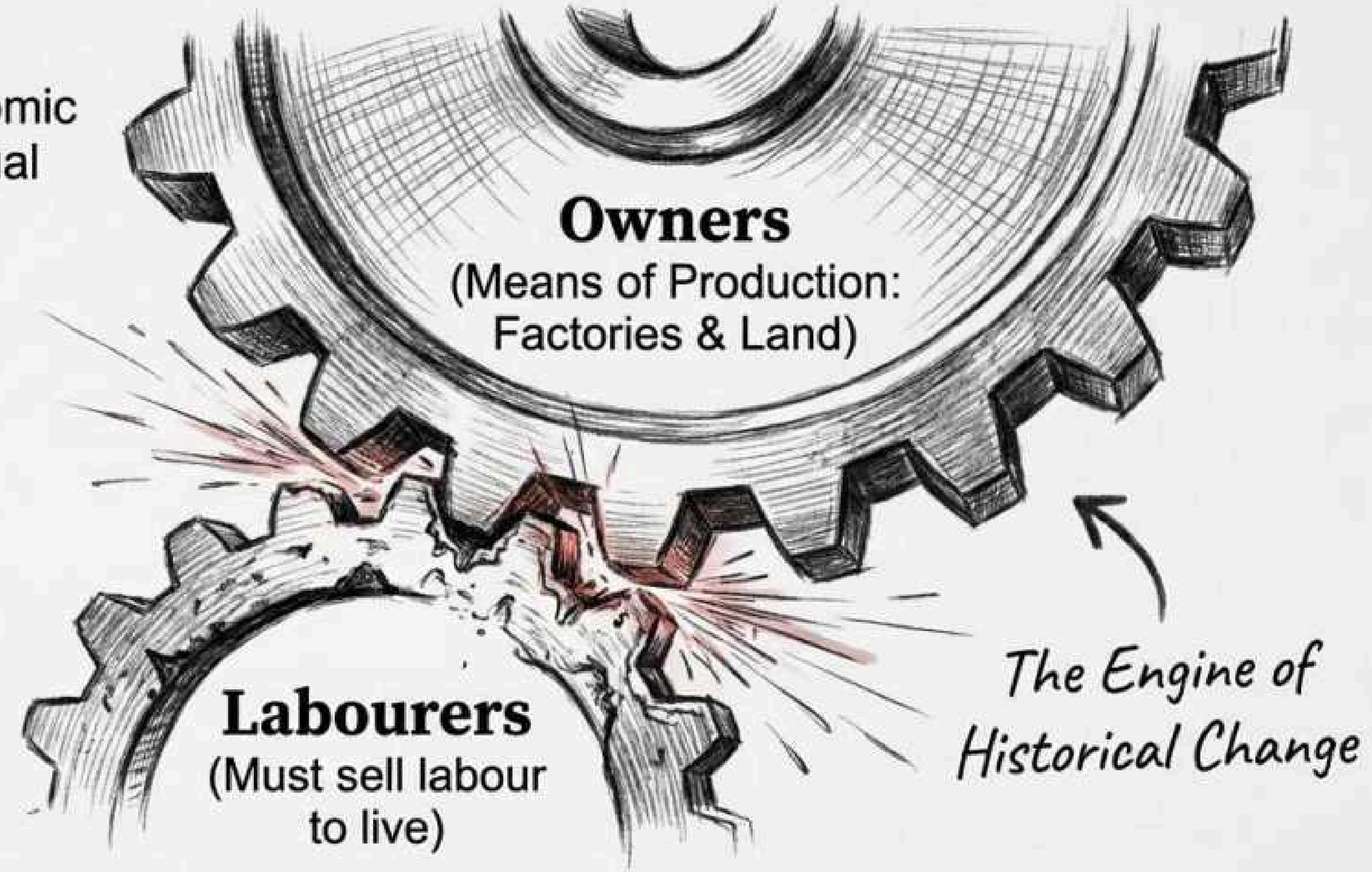
T = Strength of Social Ties

Karl Marx and Economic Conflict

¶ 1.7

Society viewed entirely through the lens of economic power, creating a perpetual conflict of interests.



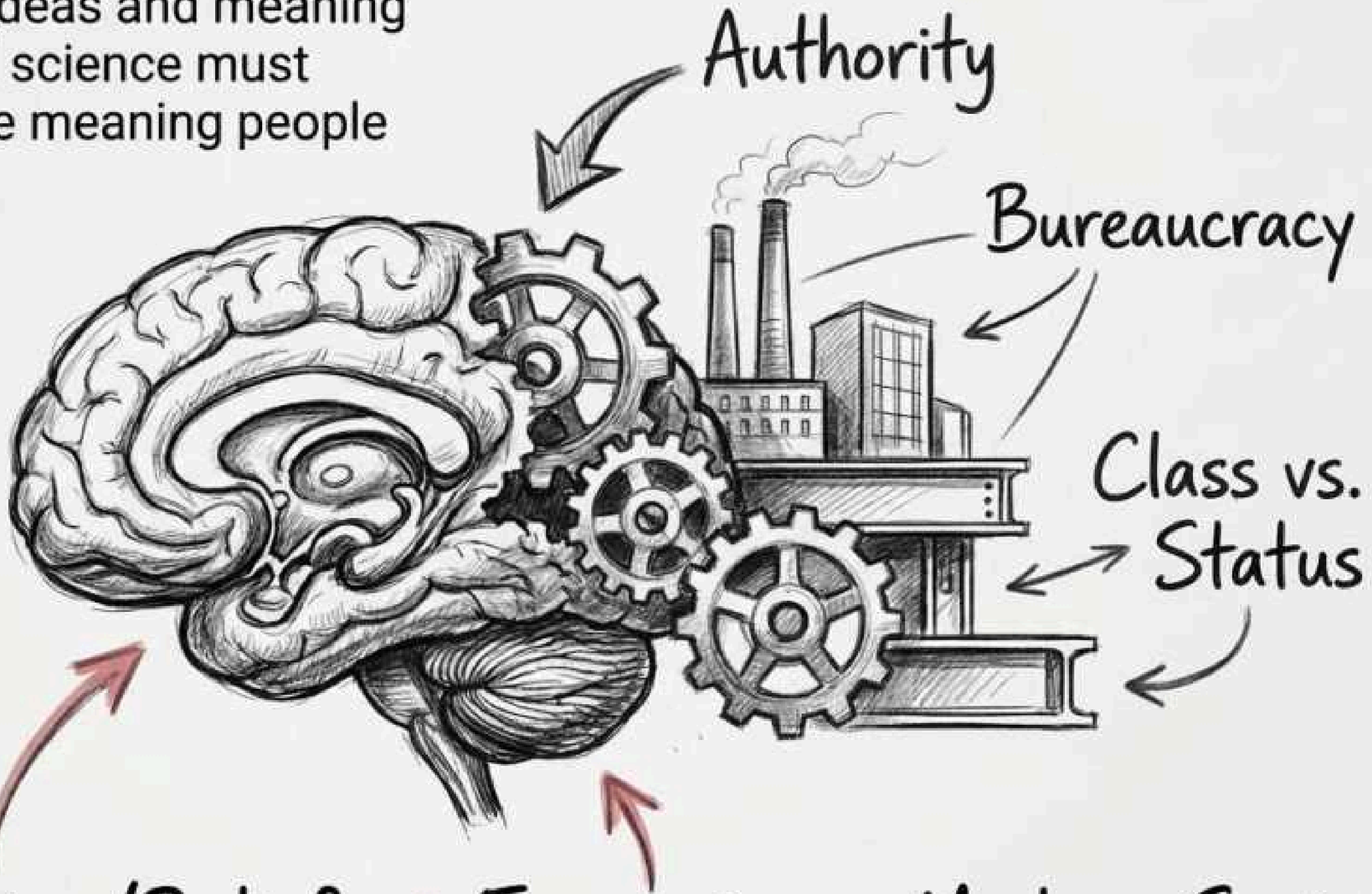


Max Weber and Subjective Meaning

¶ 1.8

Economics matters, but ideas and meaning hold equal weight. Social science must understand the subjective meaning people attach to their actions.



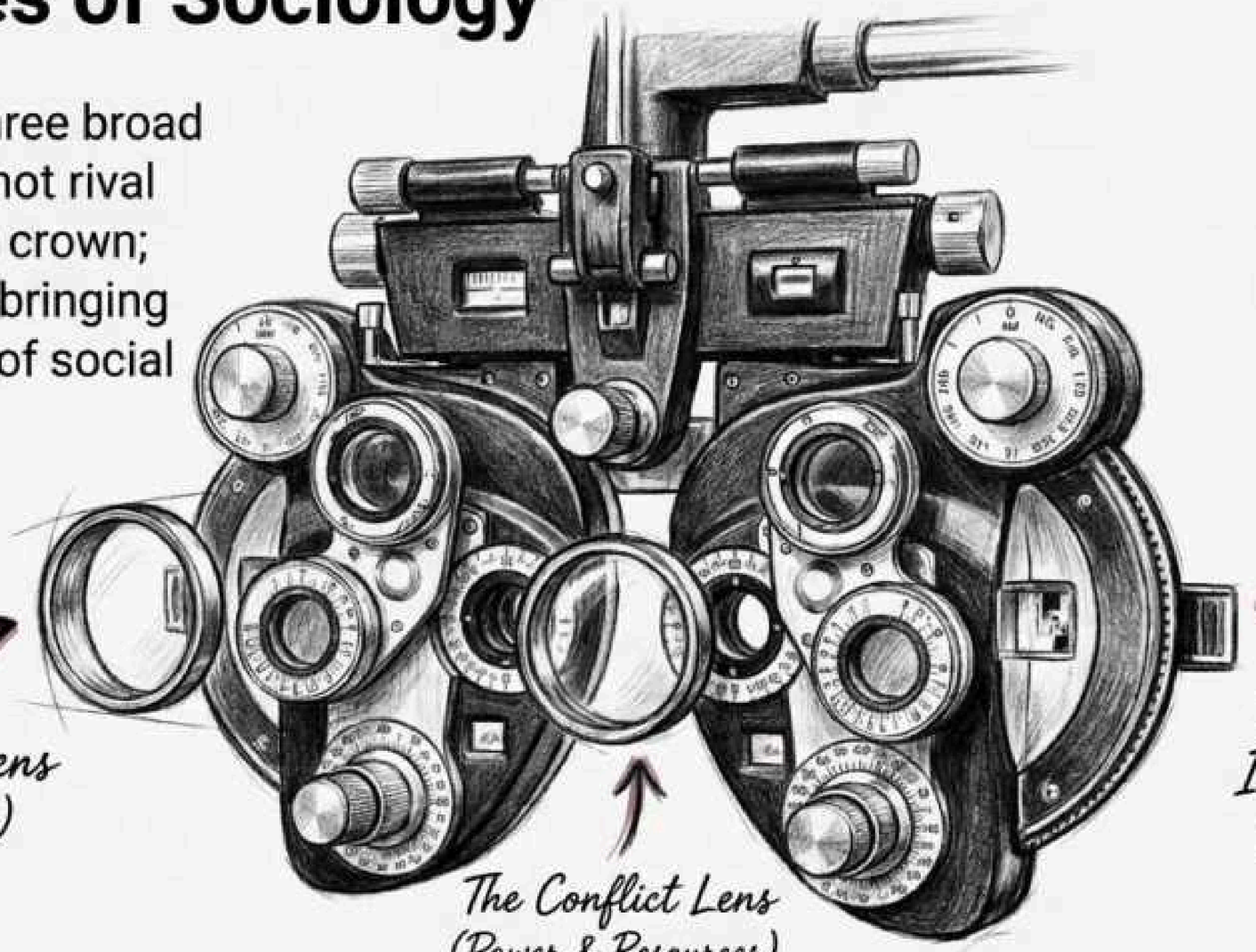


Subjective Meaning/Beliefs + Economics = Modern Society

Three Lenses of Sociology

¶ 1.9

Sociology inherited three broad paradigms. They are not rival theories fighting for a crown; they are lenses, each bringing different dimensions of social reality into focus.



The Functionalist Lens
(System & Stability)

The Conflict Lens
(Power & Resources)

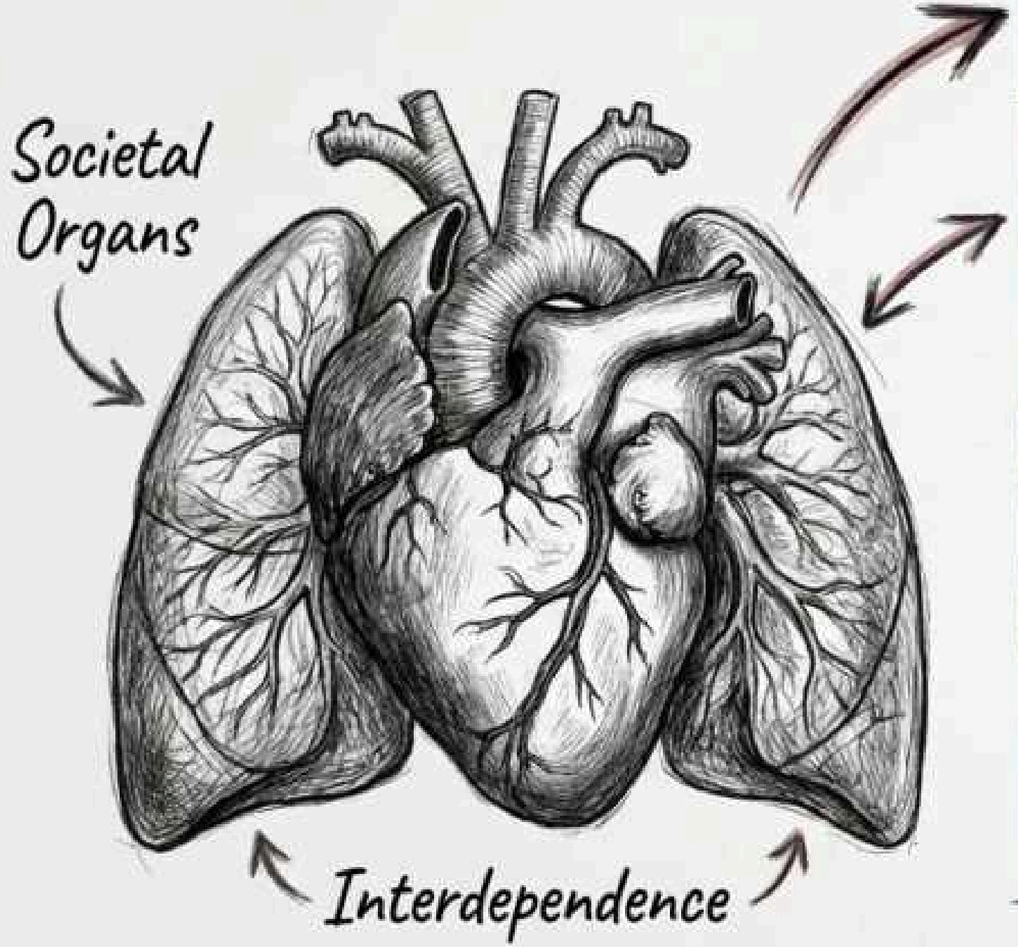
The Symbolic Interactionist Lens
(Meaning & Scale)

Viewing society through different glass yields different truths.

The Functionalist Perspective

¶ 1.10

Viewing society as a system of interdependent parts contributing to the stability of the whole.

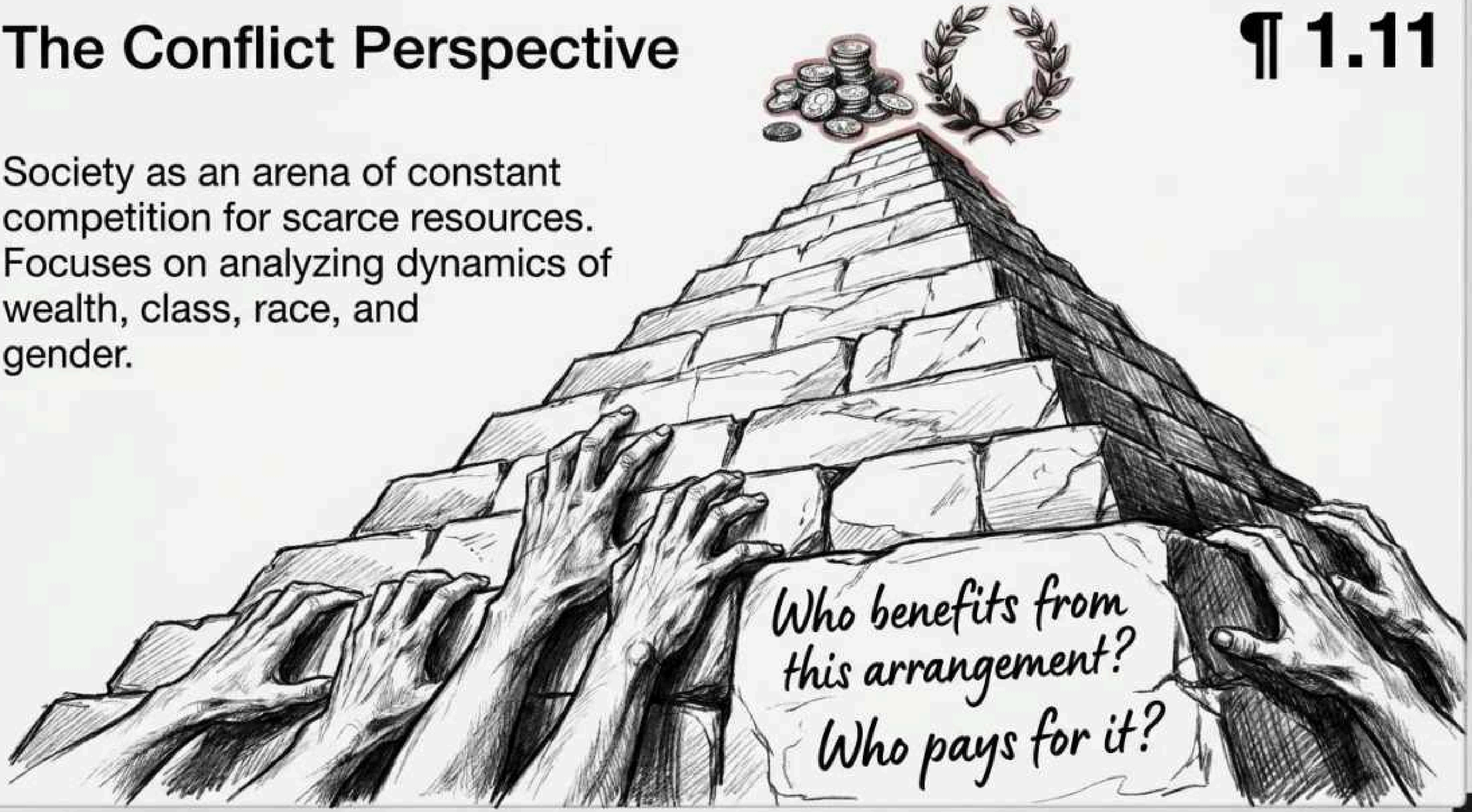


Manifest Function (F_m)	Latent Function (F_l)
Intended and obvious.	Unintended side effects.
	
College = Education	College = Finding partners & building friendships

The Conflict Perspective

¶ 1.11

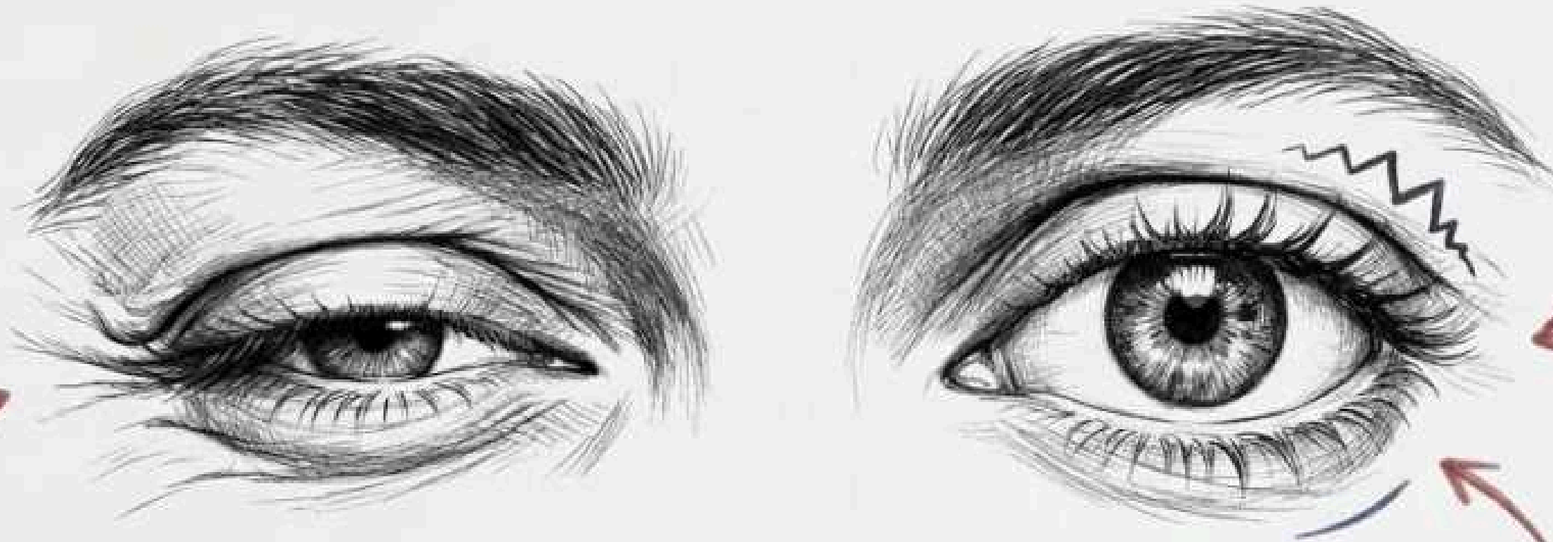
Society as an arena of constant competition for scarce resources. Focuses on analyzing dynamics of wealth, class, race, and gender.



Symbolic Interactionism

¶ 1.12

Focuses on the small scale of face-to-face encounters. People act on the meanings they give to things, built entirely through interaction.



Twitch: Spasm, biological misfire, meaningless

Wink: Shared meaning, complicity, humor

Twitch litner

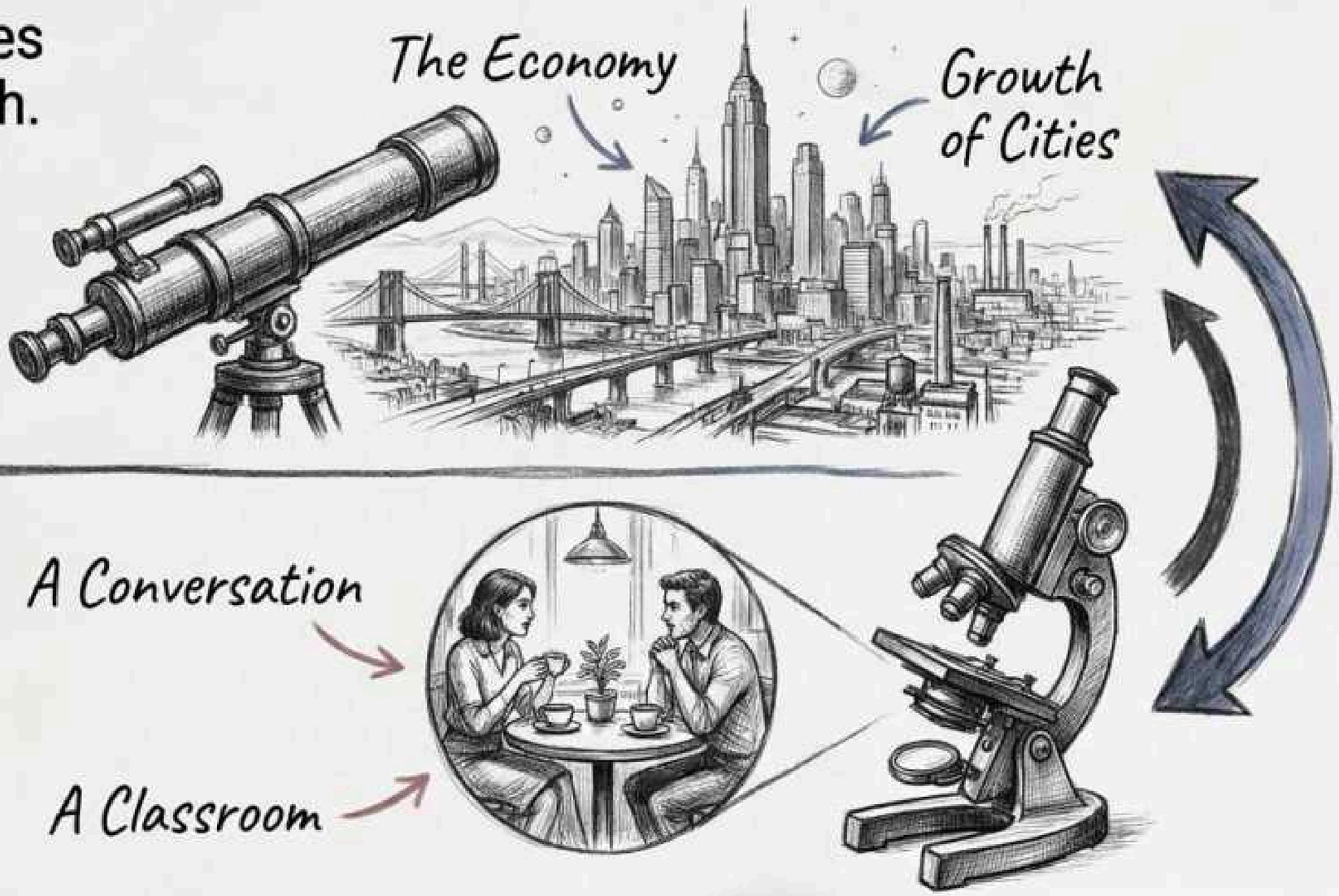
Mechanically identical.
Socially opposite.

Two Levels of Analysis

¶ 1.13

Good sociology breathes by cycling between both.

Macrosociology:
Large structures and long processes.



Microsociology:
Individuals in small settings.

The Methods of Discovery

¶ 1.14

How do sociologists actually find things out?

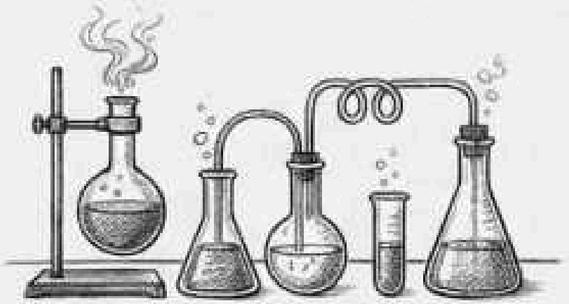
Sociological Inquiry

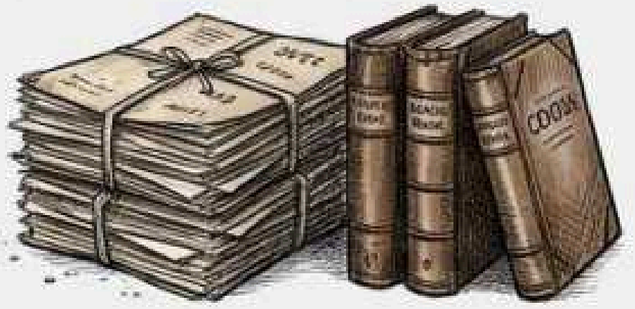
- **Surveys** (Large samples, statistics)
- **Participant Observation** (Watching from within)
- **Interviews** (People's own words)
- **Experiments** (Cause and effect)
- **Existing Records** (Studying what cannot be asked)







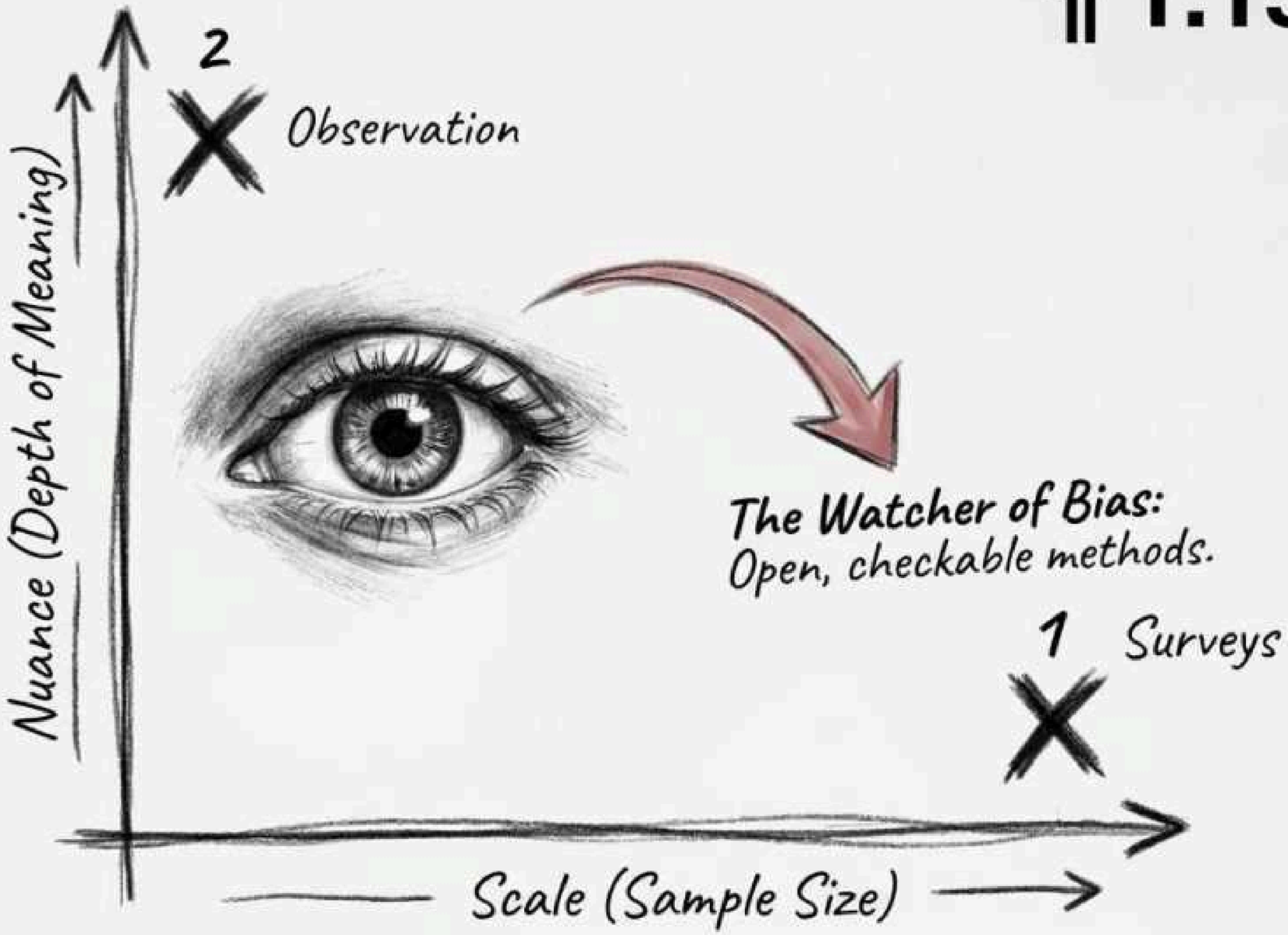




Trade-offs and Objectivity

¶ 1.15

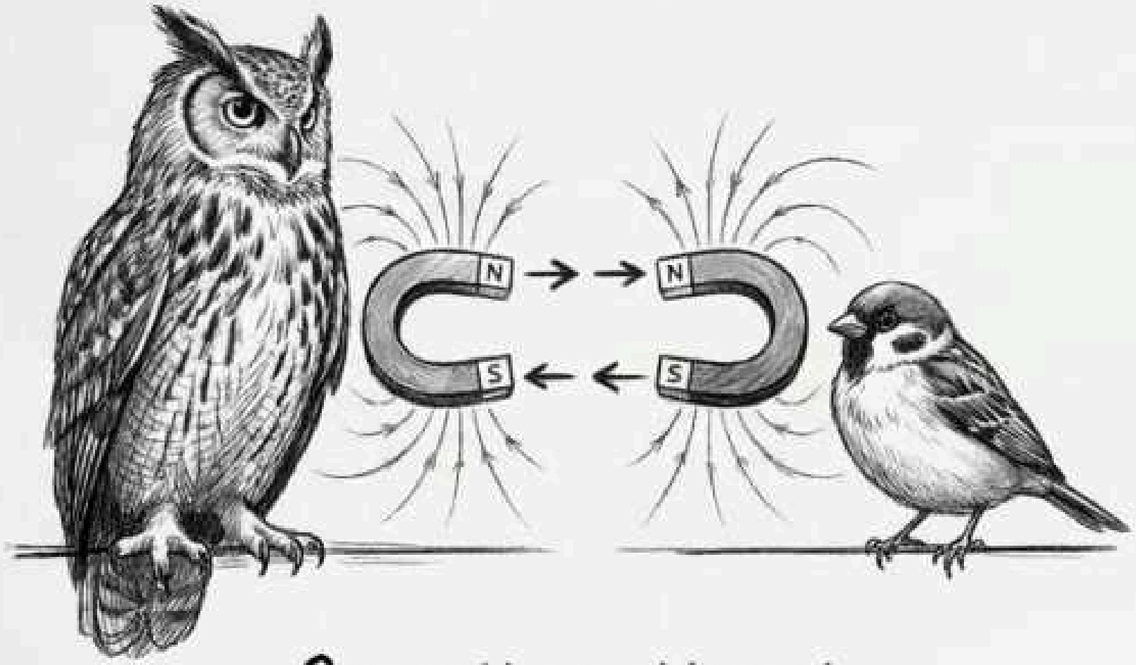
Every method has structural weaknesses. Sociology relies on open, checkable methods to fight bias.



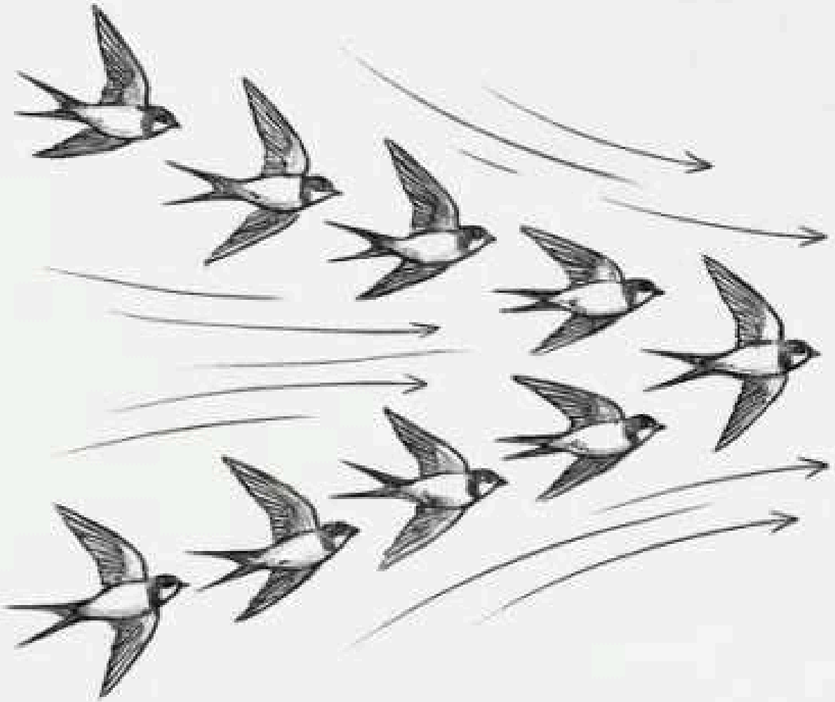
The Limits of Common Sense

¶ 1.16

Common sense is an unreliable guide.
We must test against evidence.



Opposites attract.



Birds of a feather flock together.

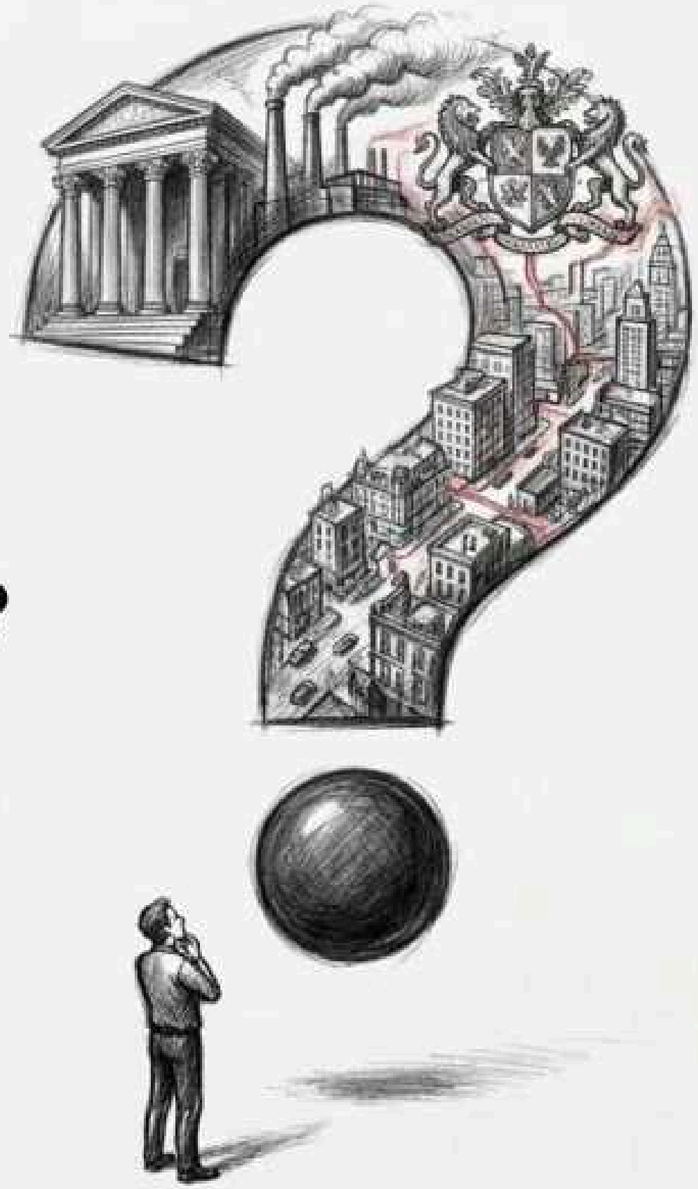
Both sayings cannot be the universal truth.

Common Sense ≠ Evidence

The Takeaway Question

¶ 1.17

Describe a personal story (a move, a job, a friendship). Now, identify the **social forces** behind it. How does the story change?



Preview of Lecture Two: Culture & Socialization

¶ 1.18

How a society gets inside the minds and habits of the people who belong to it.

