

# The Life Course and Social Change

January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Agency and Structure

# My Research Interests

- Individualization, relationships, intimacy
- Values
- Family sociology
- Economic Sociology
- Social change and modernization
- Urbanization
- Socio-biology
- Critical theory

# Outline

- Review
- Determinism and Free will
- Example from Popular Culture
- Plato's Allegory of the Cave
- Critical Theory
- Structure and Agency, Structuration,  
Life course policy
- Seminar-tutorial: Settersten text,  
Agency and Structure

# Review

- Mannheim's generation: social location, generation as an actuality, generational units
- Other “generations“: of a family, popular „Pepsi Generation“
- Cohorts (same time interval, when a particular event occurs: birth, first marriage, business start-up etc.)

# Determinism vs. Free Will

Free will: the ability to act, make choices, free from external constraints

Determinism: events are caused, predictable (by culture, biology, laws of nature, physics, psychology, god)

Moral consequences

Compatibilism

Illusion of will

# Popular culture

# Two issues

Accurate perception of reality

Freedom to act within this reality



The fire

shadows cast  
on wall

Prisoners

Roadway where  
puppeteers perform



# Critical Theory

Rationality, science, and the holocaust

Perception of reality vs illusion: role of consumer culture, ideology in masking reality

Freedom to act: limited due to rational, scientific control amid “dumbing down” of society

# Structure and Agency

- Agency vs structure perspectives
- Life course policy
- Structuration; anchored in „social practices ordered across time and space“

# Readings for Next Week

- Glenn

1. What examples of age, cohort and period effect do you know?
2. What data should be used for separating age, period, and cohort effects?
3. What statistical methods you would use to separate these effects?

- McAdams

1. How would you go about analyzing such an interview?
2. Which life course concepts would you use in your analysis?
3. Which person, other than your parents or grandparents, over 50 years of age, will you interview?