Who Defines Family? Mennonite Reflection on Family and Sociology of Knowledge

Peter C. Blum

Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 12:47-50 (NRSV)

Recent reflection on family among Christians has taken on a rather urgent tone, whether the assumptions behind the reflections are more "conservative" or more "liberal," in any of the several senses attached to those terms. This tone has been increasingly present in Mennonite reflection, most recently and obviously in discussions of sexuality, but also in other areas, including divorce and remarriage, domestic violence, etc. While there are many dimensions to this sense of urgency, I will address only one dimension that is quite abstract and presuppositional and thus generally left implicit. I suggest that before we can clearly address questions of whether the family is somehow in trouble, or declining, or simply changing, we should give attention to how the very notion of family is defined. What I have in mind is neither a lexicographical nor theological inquiry, but a sociological inquiry. As 'sociological' might suggest rather narrow parameters, perhaps a more appropriate term is "social theoretical." I will convey the nature of the questions I want to raise by beginning at the level of personal reflections.

Peter C. Blum is associate professor of Sociology and Social Thought at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, MI.

I

My own thinking about family has been stirred most recently by reading *Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage* by novelists Dennis and Vicki Covington.[1] The Covingtons are Christians and have a strong desire to live a Christian life, yet the story of their marriage is fraught with infidelity, doubt, and pain. The chapters alternate between the voices of Dennis and Vicki, never quite allowing the reader the comfort of seeing the book as co-authored in the sense we might expect. Moments of prayerful oneness and even spiritual ecstasy are juxtaposed with disturbingly vivid accounts of extramarital relationships, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and various other actions which they do not hesitate to identify as "sin." The process of building a family is portrayed as extremely difficult and even painful, as the Covingtons first find themselves apparently unable to have children, and then successfully bring two children into the storm and stress that is their life together, facing the reactions of the children to their failures as well as the reactions of each other.

The Covingtons chose the word 'cleaving' for their title because it not only is a term with biblical resonance but also carries a double meaning. Vicki writes:

> In Genesis, the Bible says a man is to leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife. The word means to adhere to, to cling, to hold fast an attachment to someone or something, as in bone to skin, hand to sword, the tongue to the roof of the mouth in thirst. But in English, unlike Greek or Hebrew, cleave carries a second, opposite meaning: to part or divide as by a cutting blow.

> We cling as long as we can, but eventually every marriage ends with a cutting blow. Divorce takes half. Death takes all. And every step of the way, we *cleave*, knowing that we are being pulled apart. Love plays us like an accordion. Together, apart, together, apart. And though we may call marriage a sacred covenant, it is also an imperfect human contract, regardless of whether fidelity prevails. Marriage is a place for realists, for soldiers, for warriors, for lovers. *To wed* is derived from the German *wetten*, which means "to bet." Marriage is, at its root, a risk, a gamble.[2]

The Covingtons' book was both a painful and a joyous read, since I have always been ambivalent about literature that reflects on the difficulties of family life. Everyone knows that commitment to one's family can be arduous and painful as well as joyous and fulfilling. Yet I seldom find that the words of others give voice to the self-centered and adulterous impulses that sometimes haunt my heart and thus my marriage and my family life. The Covingtons' story of their stubborn love for each other and their children, their brutally honest story that does not pretend that love conquers all, clearly articulates my sense that building and maintaining a marriage is much more than simply applying someone's ideal. Indeed, the Covingtons clearly embrace an ideal of marriage and family life that is explicitly Christian. Their story reminds the reader, however, that an ideal turns out all too often to be a train in the distance, to borrow a lyric from Paul Simon: "Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance. Everybody thinks it's true."[3] Family (with a capital 'F') is a train in the distance, an ideal to which we pay reverent homage. Our own particular families are much more noisy and imposing because of their proximity, and usually more obviously in need of dreary, ongoing maintenance.

Contemporary Mennonite confessions of faith have clearly emphasized the ideal of biological family built around a monogamous, lifelong, heterosexual marriage relationship. The 1963 Mennonite Church *Mennonite Confession of Faith* states: "[God] ordained that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and that the two shall become one in love and mutual submission. It is God's will that marriage be a holy state, monogamous, and for life."[4] The more recent *Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective* similarly affirms: "We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life. . . . According to Scripture, right sexual union takes place only within the marriage relationship."[5] The 1975 Mennonite Brethren confession is equally clear on the matter.[6] This ideal has become increasingly manifest in recent Mennonite discussions of homosexuality. No one denies that Mennonites experience broken families, nontraditional families, families that are not based on a recognizably "churchy" marriage or even a legal marriage, families whose locus is a couple of the same sex, etc. Deviations from the ideal are often precisely the focus of attention. There is often a familiar subtext to contemporary discussions, however. It is assumed that the incidence of these "problems" is especially high in contemporary

society and that this is symptomatic of sociocultural decay.[7] The Covingtons' account of their marriage may strike many readers as confirmation of such decay, yet contemporary social science suggests that their experiences are neither especially unusual nor uniquely contemporary.

I experience the contrast here as tension in my own life, since I identify myself both with the discipline of sociology and with Christianity, and my reflection on my own family is unavoidably informed by both these identifications. The tension is heightened by the fact that I can identify with the Covingtons in many of my mental and emotional struggles. Inasmuch as friends and acquaintances drop hints of their own struggles, I find that I am not alone. Various lines of questioning can arise from this experience of tension, but I want here to focus mainly on a seemingly abstract set of questions which I will refer to as "sociology of knowledge" questions. These questions revolve around how the concept of family is socioculturally defined, and around how much influence various individuals and groups within a social context have on its definition. The central question is: Who defines family? I am not speaking here of a dictionary definition. To ask What is a family? is to ask about both our understanding of vision and our understanding of reality. But whose vision? Whose reality?

In an important sense, these questions are just as fundamental as our understanding of scripture. The intent of Mennonite confessions is to reflect current Mennonite readings of scripture, yet significant New Testament emphases are not made central. Most notably, there is generally no mention of Jesus' claim that he came not to bring peace but a sword, to set family members *against* one another (Matt. 10:34-39). That Christian discipleship can mean that the family does not have primacy in at least some cases is taken for granted by any Mennonite perspective. Still, some principles of selection always underlie the emphasis placed on this or that scriptural reference to family.

By focusing on sociology of knowledge questions, I do not intend to undermine or trivialize efforts to discern a normative vision for family in scripture, nor to suggest specific ways in which official Mennonite definitions of family have been misguided or in error. I do explicitly intend, however, to "make things difficult" in a Kierkegaardian or Nietzschean sense, to suggest that our discernment of a normative vision is a project that is "human, all too human," that there are elements of our finitude which will unavoidably cast

shadows on the project in one way or another, precisely because we all suspect that so much is at stake.

II

The phrase "sociology of knowledge" requires clarification. It is sometimes understood as implying a Marxian materialism, but I am not using it in that sense. My primary theoretical source for a sociology of knowledge perspective is the work of Peter L. Berger who, along with several co-authors, has probably done more than anyone else to popularize the phrase, "social construction of reality."[8] Though influenced by Marxian insights, Berger's sociology of knowledge endeavors to synthesize them with decidedly nonmaterialist currents issuing from Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, and perhaps most prominently, phenomenological philosophy. It is this more phenomenologically "constructionist" bent of Berger and his coauthors that I have in mind.

However, there are varying accounts of what it might mean for something to be "socially constructed," and as Ian Hacking has reminded us,[9] different "things" may be socially constructed in different ways and in different senses. I will make the predictable move of emphasizing that "family" is a social construction, but I will also clarify what this means in a Bergerian key, thus introducing a caution regarding other possible connotations.

Readers familiar with Berger's work will know how a phenomenological perspective places distance between his and more materialist varieties of the sociology of knowledge. Less often emphasized in discussions of his work is the ubiquitous influence of Nietzsche. Nietzschean suspicion is much more important to Berger's sociological enterprise, I would argue, than Marxian suspicion. The difference is that Nietzschean suspicion is an unquenchable suspicion. Marx's project assumed – as Karl Mannheim's also arguably did – that there is at least potentially a place to stand from which we can see with completely unclouded vision, a place free of illusion and untruth. Nietzschean suspicion is the suspicion that striving for this epistemological utopia is the greatest of lies. There is no time when one reaches a point of view that cannot be further questioned. There is no perspective that is immune to the question, as Berger puts it, "Says who?"[10] I believe that Berger embraces this unending Nietzschean suspicion as a part of his understanding of human finitude. It

does not lead to a facile, self-defeating denial that there is any truth but to an increasing allergy to the hubris that proclaims it has grasped the very hem of Truth's garment as opposed to seeing it, as Paul put it, "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

I have made a gesture toward showing that Nietzschean suspicion is not necessarily at odds with an Anabaptist Christian outlook in another context,[11] and Berger understands himself as somehow balancing it with Christian conviction, albeit of a theologically liberal variety.[12] Berger's sociology of knowledge is shot through with Nietzschean suspicion. Grasping this helps us understand Berger and Luckmann's programmatic placing the sociology of knowledge at the center of sociology.[13] In Berger's most popular book, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, it is as if the suspicion of Nietzsche is indistinguishable from a sociological perspective.[14] This also helps make sense of Berger's claim, following Weber, that sociology is value-free. Sociologists are obviously never free of value commitments, but the suspicion they bring to bear on value commitments is indifferent to whose knowledge it is aimed at or to whether their intentions are beneficent or malevolent. As a sociologist, I have no way of preventing my own suspicion from being turned upon my own values.[15]

With this in mind, we can fruitfully give our attention to some of the things that Berger and his associates have written about family. However I will not rely primarily on Peter and Brigitte Berger's book about what they called "The War Over the Family."[16] That book has been quite controversial in some sociological circles because it is perceived as being conservative in outlook, and justifiably so. The insights that Berger believes the sociology of knowledge yields regarding the family are found most explicitly in other writings and are mostly re-presented in summary fashion in the Bergers' book on the family. I want to draw attention, to insights developed in the well-known paper by Berger and Thomas Kellner, "Marriage and the Construction of Reality,"[17] and in two books Berger wrote in the sixties which established his reputation, *Invitation to Sociology* and *The Social Construction of Reality*.[18] These insights may be grouped under three headings: (1) Berger's general idea of the family as a social construction and its implications regarding the importance of "official" definitions of family; (2) the more specific characterizations of family as a locus of "nomos-building" and as a "mediating structure," which imply the

limitations of official definitions; and (3) the implications of Berger's views on the dialectic of structure and freedom for both official and unofficial definitions of family.

To call family a "social construction" for Berger is, first of all, to observe that it is an ongoing product of *negotiation*. The term "construction" is problematic partly because it may suggest a process that is wholly or in large part a matter of human volition. Though human freedom is one of Berger's central concerns, it is clear throughout his work that social construction is never a simple matter of individual choices. The reality of a marriage is built – or better, rebuilt – in the give-and-take of everyday conversation of husband and wife, with the constructors usually having little or no sense that they are literally remaking themselves so that their reality is a *shared* reality. It is never simply a matter of two individuals realigning their own perspectives to the reality of a new situation. Two distinct biographies – two distinct histories, we might say – must be rewritten. The writing of a present narrative necessitates the rewriting of past narrative.[19]

In Berger's analysis, this rewriting process is by no means isolated from larger projects of narration. We are never in a position to compose our story apart from the pressures of other stories not of our own making. Some of these stories are those of the others with whom we are doing the rewriting. Others are what I have already been calling "official" in one way or another, stories that we take for granted as valid or true because they are taken for granted as authoritative in our communities. Berger has always clearly endorsed Durkheim's view that social reality confronts us *as reality*, as the way things are objectively. Regardless of whether or not society is a "thing" in an ontological sense, it is just as thing-like in our experience as anything else.[20] As Berger notes, a courtship process, or more broadly, "falling in love," as spontaneous and irrational as it may seem, is completely shot through with normative expectations current in the social context.[21] It is the foreground in a cultural *Gestalt*, the background of which is mostly assumed as given, not chosen.

Official definitions provide the main background against which our own definitions are shaped, including those of marriage and family. They are, what make our own definitions possible. Official definitions are inextricably intertwined with the cultural webs of significance within which we become able to signify and to understand as individuals. Construction in Berger's sense

is emphatically not creation *ex nihilo*. It requires some sort of raw material and much of it was itself socially constructed before we arrived on the scene.[22] This is the sense in which human beings are social products. Whether our own reactions to them are positive or negative, there is no sense in which we have an option as to whether or not we will take official definitions seriously; it is as optional as breathing.

But Berger is no strong social determinist. Human beings are social products, but society is also a human product and not in a mechanistic sense. Human beings are not simply reactors but genuine actors who interpret their context and act based on their interpretations. This is evident in Berger's treatment of marriage as a "crucial nomic instrumentality in our society."[23] By "nomic instrumentality" Berger calls attention to the fact that the reality negotiated in a marriage, because of the intimacy and interactive density of the relationship, is of paramount significance in the individual's experience. For Berger, conversation between significant others is one of the most important loci for the construction and maintenance of a meaningful order in one's life, a *nomos*. We never make sense of either the world or ourselves in isolation from others, and the closer one's relationship to an Other, the more crucial is the interaction for the making of sense, of meaning.

Berger's view of the importance of intimate relationships is intertwined with his ongoing concern about the modernization process. Especially in the context of modern societies, where the distinction between public and private spheres is salient, intimate relationships become crucial for nomos-building. The family is one of several crucial "mediating structures" in modern society – institutional arrangements that provide a sort of nomic buffer between the impersonal social order (especially the state) and the individual in contexts that are highly industrialized and urbanized.[24]

Berger's use of a more "functionalist" idiom at this point is easily misread as implying straightforward determinism. But this would be to ignore the deep influence that existentialist thought has exerted on Berger's understanding of human agency. A central argument of *Invitation to Sociology* is that a broadly Sartrean conception of freedom – i.e., libertarian freedom in the philosophical sense – is compatible with sociological understanding.[25] Drawing on such sociological concepts as intentionality, charisma, role distance, and sociability, among others, Berger defends the view that human agency responds to

sociocultural imperatives with genuine choices based on interpretive understanding. The importance of the Sartrean concept of "bad faith" for this argument reinforces the insight that Berger is assuming a non-determined spontaneity at the heart of human agency. This does not mean that the effects of sociocultural situatedness are simply suspended in the end, or that we are not profoundly constrained by them.

My point here is that Berger's analysis of the family as a locus of meaningful ordering, or *nomos*-building, suggests there are imperatives driving the social construction of family that operate at various levels and that these imperatives can change as social context changes structurally. Some of these imperatives may operate below the level of overt definition, effecting the very frameworks within which choices are made. On Berger's analysis, even when they operate at such levels, the response of individuals to these imperatives is not blind but creative. Stories can be told in many different ways, even when there are relatively clear demands made by genre, plot, or convention. In the end, it is families themselves that define what families are in each case, and they do so more as artists or novelists than as culturally programmed computers. Recall that we are often most impressed, in art and literature, by those who *break* the rules in just the right way in order to shape their creation truly ('truly' as in the sense of an arrow that flies truly).

III

One way to summarize what I am drawing from Berger is by formulating two maxims. (I use 'maxim' here deliberately, following Alasdair MacIntyre's view that the results of sociological inquiry are much more like the maxims of Machiavelli than the law-like generalizations often expected of natural science.[26]) The first maxim is this: *Official definitions define family, regardless of families.* We cannot help but base our definition of family on "official" definitions. They remain an integral part of what we are even when we resist or oppose them. They make it possible for us to begin defining family, and hence they unavoidably shape our definitions in deep and decisive ways.

The second maxim is: *Families define family, regardless of official definitions.* If a social grouping becomes a family, if it is *experienced* as family, then in an important sense it matters little that it does not precisely fit an official definition. An academic colleague of mine was deeply disturbed by

the publication of the children's book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*.[27] He argues that the book is not simply morally problematic but in obvious error factually. "You know, of course, that [the book's title is] a lie. Heather doesn't really have two mommies; she's got only one. The other lady is just the woman mommy has sex with."[28] Inasmuch as we are talking about biology, this is obviously true. But who is talking about *biology* when they use the word 'mommy?' Certainly not a stepchild who refers to her biological father's wife as "mommy." Moral considerations notwithstanding, if Heather's *experience* is that she has two mommies, my colleague's attempt at wielding an official definition is unlikely to change that experience in any significant way. We should not be distracted by the controversial nature of the example. The point is that *both* maxims seem to tell us something right about how 'family' actually gets defined in everyday life.[29]

This may seem like a contradiction. We will understand why it is not if we recall the importance of dialectic in Berger's thought. That humans are a social product and that society is a human product is an expression of a dialectical relationship, for Berger. Also, Berger's view of dialectic is explicitly drawn not only or even primarily from Marx, but also from G. W. F. Hegel, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel, among others. Dialectic is often understood in a relatively simplistic way, using the old standby terminology of 'thesis,' 'antithesis,' and 'synthesis.'[30] Take one idea, oppose it with its negation, and you get a new (presumably better) idea. This way of introducing the notion is not adequate if we are to grasp what Berger means by the term in this context.

A dialectical relationship in the broadest sense is, for Berger, a relationship in which there is a deep tension that is ineradicable yet creative. There is a kind of unification or "synthesis" in a sense, but no real distinction between the tension and the unification. The tension is dynamic rather than static, and a simple resolution would mean not just the end of the tension but the failure of the synthesis as well. Simmel's understanding of the individual self, which has profoundly influenced Berger's thinking,[31] focuses on the tensions within the self – its fragmentation, so to speak – which in part constitute its very unity.[32] One of Berger's favorite examples of dialectical tension is that between charisma and institutionalization, explored at length by Weber.[33] Reading *Invitation to Sociology*, one gets the sense that this and other dialectical relationships usually refer, in Berger's thinking, to a fundamental dialectic of structure and freedom.

My two maxims, which are Bergerian in spirit if not in phraseology, are related in just this sort of dialectical way. We could not define family without official definitions, but we will define family in spite of them. The practical upshot of all this, in my estimation, is relatively easy to state, but much more difficult to elucidate. I think that we should always approach official definitions of family as necessary evils. That they are such is not only because they are unavoidable, but also because they are good. How could we even begin without them? I must already possess what I am seeking, in some sense, in order to seek it. But official definitions are also evil, because they are always at a remove from what they seek to define. We take them for truth in a way that Nietzsche warned us about.[34] If we already possess what we are seeking, then why seek it? In current Mennonite discussions, I sometimes get the impression that if my family is built around a heterosexual marriage where no one is physically abusing anyone else, then everything is basically fine. "Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance. Everybody thinks it's true." But the train in the distance can become a lie, in Nietzsche's sense of Truth being a lie. I suspect that it very often does become a lie, in fact.

My use of the terms 'good' and 'evil' will not seem entirely correct, of course. You might think that what I really mean is that official definitions *can become* evil, not that they *are* evil, as my maxim seems to state. There is a sense in which this would probably be a fair criticism. My suspicion, however, is that we will err less often by treating them as necessary evils than we will by seeing them as only potentially evil. This arises from my conviction that we very easily and very often lose track of our finitude. This is especially true when we are dealing with an ideal, with an official definition that we expect to function as a sort of modern Ark of the Covenant. Instead of a dynamic, transforming tension (dialectic) between ideal and real, we want to fix the ideal itself, to make it static. Everyone will agree that ideals can become idols, but this does not seem strong enough to me. I am inclined to suggest that they are always too close for comfort. We cannot, should not, and will not avoid official definitions. But may we treat them with discerning delicacy rather than with loving passion. The loving passion should be saved for the people whom our official definitions tend summarily to include or exclude.

But what exactly is "discerning delicacy"? My reflections here provide at best some prolegomena for further discussion of this question. That I am

inclined not to make any specific applications here is due, in part, to my suspicion that the supposed boundary between theory and application is a boundary in the political sense. That is, it is not a natural feature of the landscape of our experience so much as an imaginary line that marks tension and potential dispute. If I not only formulate theory in an impressive way but also apply it to your situation in a straightforward manner, then I have shown myself to be the expert whose word you must heed. If you reject my ruminations, then perhaps I am the prisoner of an ivory tower where my gaze has never lit upon the real world that you inhabit. More important, if I provide concrete proposals, the sense in which I have moved beyond theory may be illusory. As long as I am situated here, behind the voice you hear in this paper, there is no point at which I have entered your particular context and become anything more than an onlooker.[35]

In short, I believe that the exact shape of discerning delicacy must be established not by another official definition, but by prayerful, compassionate, and dynamic engagement of local communities of faith with the concrete lives of their members.[36]

Notes

[1] Dennis Covington and Vicki Covington, *Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage* (New York: North Point Press, 1999).

[2] Covington, 211-12.

[3] Paul Simon, "Train in the Distance," on *Hearts and Bones* (sound recording) (Warner Bros. Records, Inc., 1983); also included on Paul Simon, *Negotiations and Love Songs 1971-1986* (sound recording) (Warner Bros. Records, Inc., 1988).

[4] Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963), Article 15. Howard John Loewen, ed., *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 76.

[5] Article 19. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 72. The 1933 General Conference Articles of Faith do not explicitly state that the union must be between a man and a woman, though this would have been assumed. That other issues were more salient at the time of its drafting is clear: "We believe . . . that only such that are free from all others, and not too close in blood relationship, and fundamentally of the same faith, should be united in the holy bonds of matrimony. Such a union is to be for life, and divorces are unscriptural" (Article VIII); *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God*, 107.

[6] "We believe that God instituted marriage for the intimate companionship of husband and wife,

and for the procreation and nurture of children." Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith (1975), Article XI; *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God*, 177.

[7] The very assumption that society is in some sort of decline is deeply problematic. For a helpful recent discussion of this assumption, see Joel Best, *Random Violence: How We Talk About New Crimes and New Victims* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), especially 17-21.

[8] The *locus classicus* here is Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966), though Berger develops and deploys the general concept throughout his writings.

[9] Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[10] Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1963), 111.

[11] Peter C. Blum, "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism: Confessions of an Errant Postmodernist," in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, ed. Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press & Pandora Press U.S., 2000), 60-74. See also the outstanding and accessible discussion of Nietzsche in Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000).

[12] Berger understands his own theological perspective as broadly liberal in the sense of classical Protestant liberalism, as exemplified by Friedrich Schleiermacher. See Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1979).

[13] See especially the introduction and conclusion to *The Social Construction of Reality*.

[14] Nietzsche's name is not often mentioned explicitly but his influence is discernable throughout, sometimes in the guise of broadly Nietzschean themes that Berger draws more explicitly from Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialist sources.

[15] It may still be true that Berger's defense of Weberian *Wertfreiheit* as a kind of phenomenological "bracketing" is overstated and problematic. The point is that Berger seems to understand clearly that no one's evaluative judgments are ever immune to critique, and that this can be seen as building a rigorous value-neutrality into the critical gaze. Surely there are never any guarantees that inquirers will be uncontaminated by value, yet the commitment of a community of inquirers to ongoing critique prevents the process of inquiry from collapsing into the sort of hopeless subjectivism that is still the bogey of broadly positivistic methodological dogma.

[16] Peter L. Berger and Brigitte Berger, *The War Over the Family: Capturing the Middle Ground* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1983).

[17] Peter L. Berger and Hansfried Kellner, "Marriage and the Construction of Reality," in *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 5-22.

[18] *Op. cit.*

[19] The placement of the term 'narrative' here is more characteristic of my reading of Berger and Kellner than of their own usage. The idea of narrative – which has gained prominence in academic usage recently – nicely captures what Berger and Kellner actually use other terms to convey, most importantly the term 'biography.' For a recent example of constructionist work in which the

term 'narrative' is central, see James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[20] Durkheim's most explicit treatment of the objectivity of social reality is his discussion of "social facts." See Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. W. D. Halls, ed. Steven Lukes (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 50-59. Berger and Luckmann make clear that it is part of their project to make this conviction of Durkheim intelligible within a phenomenological framework. See, for example, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 18.

[21] See *Invitation to Sociology*, 35-36 and 88-89.

[22] This becomes especially clear in light of Berger and Luckmann's discussion of internalization in *The Social Construction of Reality*, 129-63.

[23] "Marriage and the Construction of Reality," 8.

[24] See Peter L. Berger, "In Praise of Particularity: The Concept of Mediating Structures," in *Facing Up to Modernity*, 130-41; and Peter L. Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977).

[25] *Invitation to Sociology*, 122-50.

[26] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Second Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 88-108.

[27] Leslea Newman, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1991).

[28] Michael Bauman, "No, Heather doesn't have two mommies," Guest Opinion, *Hillsdale Daily News* (Hillsdale, MI), November 30, 1992.

[29] Helpful examples and insightful discussion of how families are defined "from below" may be found in Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, *What is Family?* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990).

[30] These three terms, though they are commonly used in secondary discussions of Hegel, are actually more characteristic of Hegel's predecessors, Fichte and Schelling. Hegel was quite critical of the way in which these terms (and the implication of a constant tripartite pattern) suggest an overly rigid conception of dialectic, a "lifeless schema." See Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966), 74-77.

[31] Simmel's influence has been both direct (via Berger's own reading of Simmel) and indirect (via others such as Erving Goffman, whose understanding of self is thoroughly Simmelian).

[32] "The individual does not attain the unity of his personality exclusively by an exhaustive harmonization . . . of the contents of his personality. On the contrary, contradiction and conflict not only precede this unity but are operative in it at every moment of its existence." Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 71-72.

[33] This dialectic may be seen as pivotal to Weber's whole sociological outlook. It is so presented in Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

[34] See especially Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," 42-47 in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), and my own discussion of this notion in "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism."

[35] "Looking on" (or "beholding") is one of the original senses of *theoria*.

[36] This also seems to me fully consistent with an Anabaptist/Mennonite ecclesiology, though detailed development of this point is beyond the present scope. See my comments on local discernment in "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism."