



# **BVPS**

**Blog da Biblioteca Virtual do Pensamento Social**

## **SYMPOSIUM**

### **SOCIAL WORLD AND PANDEMIC**

Edited by

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#### **Howard Becker**

Professor Becker preferred to explain the reasons why he could not answer the questionnaire.

**1. Sociologists and social scientists in general seem mobilized to interpret the social and political impacts of the covid-19 pandemic. Is sociological theory up to the challenge of understanding and explaining the phenomenon?**

**2. How can your research area contribute to examining different dimensions of the phenomenon?**

**3. Is the pandemic provoking deep social, political and cultural changes? Or is it speeding up trends of change already underway? If so, is it possible to glimpse the contours of post-pandemic societies?**

**4. What work(s) of Sociology or Social Sciences can help us to comprehend and dialogue about the challenges underway?**

**Answer:**

I'm sorry to say that I can't answer any of these questions, for the simple reason that I don't know very much about this phenomenon, having had experience with it only in my immediate environment (a few blocks in San



Francisco). I would feel silly proposing any answers to these questions, posed as they are in the most general terms and calling for worldwide generalizations. They all assume a vast knowledge of what is going on everywhere—or, alternatively, a general theoretical understanding of Society in General that would automatically deliver detailed knowledge sufficient to produce answers to such specific questions.

I don't have that kind of knowledge and, to be truthful, I don't think that anyone else does either. So that this is simply one more instance of a mistake frequent in our field: imagining that you can deliver conclusions about specific situations without knowing anything about them.

At best, a theory might suggest where to look to acquire enough detailed knowledge to answer such questions about some specific situation. But that would take a long time. If we all started now to make detailed observations of a specific place, and its people and organizations and their responses to these events, and compared what we had found out, we would have the beginning of a possibly interesting study.

There was a field many years ago called “disaster studies,” whose practitioners made a bare beginning in such a venture, observing and interviewing around situations like tornados, floods, fires, etc. I think it finally disappeared. You might write to Professor Kai Erikson, at Yale University, who studied a major flood disaster in the U.S. many years ago.

**Howard Becker** is an American sociologist. He was a professor at many universities, including Northwestern and Washington, USA. He is the author of *Outsiders* and *Tricks of the Trade*, among others.

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