

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL
Fall, 2011

Social Theory

(SOCI 700)

Tuesday/Thursday, 12:30–1:45 Hamilton 151

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Goals

1. To acquaint students with the idea of sociological *paradigms* and the tools for understanding and evaluating specific paradigms;
2. To introduce students to the “sociological canon” of major works in sociological theory;
3. To introduce students to the form, content, and practice of current debates in sociological theory;
4. To demonstrate the importance of sociological theory as a part of sociological research and practice; and
5. To consider critically the possibilities for empirical application and testing of social theory.

Requirements

1. Attendance and active participation in class discussions
2. Two team-based presentations of readings and discussion leadership
3. An in-depth writing project; select either:
 - Three short, critical essays, each considering the work of one theorist; or
 - One final paper considering at least two theorists and contributing an original comparative, synthetic, or applied argument relevant to some sociological concern.

Team Presentations

A team of students will be responsible for organizing the discussion of readings during each class session. These students, working together, are responsible for:

- Preparing a “seminar paper,” to be distributed via <http://sakai.unc.edu> to the rest of the class no later than 12:00 noon the day before class; and
- Organizing and directing class discussion of the readings for the class.

The seminar paper need not be a polished product; it should raise ideas, issues, concerns, and opportunities presented by the readings, and thereby form a provocative basis for the class discussion. The seminar paper should *not* be primarily a summary, nor primarily a list of discussion questions. It may be particularly helpful to focus our attention on particular pieces of the reading worth discussing in class.

Grading Policy

The main principle is this: *Nobody sees, or cares about, your grades in graduate classes.*

For the qualitatively inclined, the grading policy is essentially this: students who excel *both* in classroom elements of the course (e.g., seminar papers, presentations, discussion) *and* in the writing project will receive **H** grades. This is unlikely to be more than 2 or 3 students in a class, although it can of course vary. Students who excel in one or the other, but not both, will receive grades in the **P+** to **H-** range. The vast majority of students will receive a **P**, which represents substantive mastery, at a P.H.D. level, of sociological theory—a significant accomplishment.

For the quantitatively inclined, think in these terms:

Assignment	Grade percentage
Attendance & Participation	30%
Team presentations	20%
Final Paper	50%

READINGS AND RESOURCES

Most required readings that are not in the books listed below are available for download from the course readings site, <http://perrin.socsci.unc.edu/readings>. You will need a username and password to access this site; these will be provided in class.

The recommended readings listed under many class sessions are suggestions for further reading in the field. Students presenting on those dates, and those with particular interests in the areas, may find them useful. You are *not* required or expected to read them for the class.

Required Books

Pierre Bourdieu. *Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

Émile Durkheim (trans. Fields). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Free Press, 1995).

Émile Durkheim. *Suicide* (Penguin Classics, 2007).

Jon Elster. *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Michel Foucault. *The Foucault Effect* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills. *From Max Weber* (Oxford University Press, 1958).

Bruno Latour. *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Roxbury, 2002).

Recommended Book

All of the necessary material for our study of Marx is available from the <http://www.marxists.org> website. However, you may find it useful to have the definitive selection in your library for this and future classes.

Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels (ed. Tucker). *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd ed.* (W. W. Norton, 1978).

Textbooks

I have not assigned a textbook for this course; take your pick of one or more of these six if you would like a convenient reference.

Lewis Coser. *Masters of Sociological Thought* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972).

Craig Calhoun, et al.. *Classical Sociological Theory* (Blackwell, 2002).

Craig Calhoun, et al.. *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Blackwell, 2002).

George Ritzer. *Sociological Theory* (McGraw-Hill, 1996).

Jonathan Turner. *The Structure of Sociological Theory, 6th ed.* (Wadsworth, 1998).

Malcolm Waters. *Modern Sociological Theory* (Sage, 1994).

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 23 Introduction and course organization

- In-class reading: Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>
- Why theory? Introductions and substantive basis of the class
- Organization of presentation dates

August 25 Preliminary challenges

- Richard Ned Lebow, “If Mozart had Died at Your Age: Psychologic Versus Statistical Interference.” *Political Psychology* Volume 27 Issue 2, Pages 157 - 172. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118627944/abstract>
- Theodor W. Adorno, “Introduction” to *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* [WWW]
- Karl R. Popper, “The Logic of the Social Sciences,” in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* [WWW]

August 30 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Translator’s Introduction; Introduction; Book I, Chapter 1; Book II, Chapter 1

September 1 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Book II, Chapters 4, 8, and 9, and Conclusion

September 6 Durkheim, *Suicide*, Introduction; Book Two, Chapters 1 and 5; Book Three, entire.

September 8 Discussion of Durkheim with visiting scholar Karen Fields

Optional: Read the blog thread beginning at <http://scatter.wordpress.com/2011/06/06/sociologists-behavior/> continuing at <http://scatter.wordpress.com/2011/06/07/on-the-value-of-religious-experience-to-society/> and culminating with Kieran Healy’s very insightful comments at <http://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2011/06/08/durkheim-and-religious-experience/>.

September 13 Marx: The Philosophical Roots

- Excerpts from “The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844”: pp. 70–81, 93–105.
- “Theses on Feuerbach”: pp. 143–145.
- “The German Ideology: Part I,” excerpts: pp. 146–175.

September 15 Marx: The Theory of History

- “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.” pp. 594–617.

September 20 Marx: The Critique of Capitalism

- *Grundrisse*, pp. 228–232
- *Capital*, vol. I
- *Capital*, vol. III, pp. 439–441

Recommended:

- Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

September 22 Marx: Contemporary Extensions

- Pakulski, Jan and Malcolm Waters. 1996. “The Reshaping and Dissolution of Social Class in Advanced Society.” *Theory and Society* 25:667-91. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/w08200311462301g/>
- Szelényi, Szonja, and Jacqueline Olvera. “The Declining Significance of Class: Does Gender Complicate the Story?” *Theory & Society* 25:5, 725–730. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q46h373p765g41w7/>
- Fred Block, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule,” *Socialist Revolution* 33 (May-June, 1977). <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/SOC621/RulingClass.pdf>
- **Recommended:** Wright, Erik Olin. 1996. “The Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis.” *Theory and Society* 25:693-716.

September 27 Weber: Rationalization and Bureaucracy

- “Class, Status, Party,” 180–195 in *From Max Weber*
- “Bureaucracy,” 196–244 in *From Max Weber*

September 29 Weber: Religion and the Power of Ideas

- “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 245–252 in *From Max Weber*
- “The Social Psychology of the World Religions,” 267–301 in *From Max Weber*

October 4 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, entire essay (but not supplementary material)

October 6 Contemporary Ripples of Weber.

- Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell. “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, April, 1983, pages 147-160.
- John W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas, Francisco O. Ramirez. “World Society and the Nation-State,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 1, July 1997, pages 144-181.
- Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies.” *ASR* 51(April 1986): 273-286 <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-1224%28198604%2951%3A2%3C273%3ACIASAS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B>

October 11 Bourdieu I.

- “The Logic of Fields” and “Interest, Habitus, Rationality,” from Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992) [WWW](#);
- *Logic of Practice* pp. 1–51

October 13 Bourdieu, from *Logic of Practice*: pp. 52–142.

October 18 Bourdieu, “Political Representation: *Elements for a Theory of the Political Field*” and “Delegation and Political Fetishism,” from *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991) [WWW](#)

October 20 **Fall Break** – no class

October 25 Foucault:

- “What is Enlightenment?” <http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html>
- “Questions of Method” and “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect*

October 27 Michael Power, “Foucault and Sociology.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011), 35–56. <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150133>

November 1 Structure and Agency.

- Ann Mische and Mustafa Emirbayer. “What is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1998). (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782934>)
- William H. Sewell, Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation.” *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992). (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781191>);
- Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” (<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>)

November 3 Elster, Introduction and Section I (pp. 1–66)

November 8 Elster, Sections II and III part 1 (pp. 67–190)

November 10 Elster, Sections III part 2 and IV (pp. 191–298)

November 15 Elster, Section V (pp. 299–444)

November 17 Elster, “Conclusion: Is Social Science Possible?” (pp. 445–468); and Gross, Neil. “A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms.” *American Sociological Review* 74:3 (June, 2009): 358–379. <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/asoca/asr/2009/00000074/00000003/art00002>

November 22 Contemporary Challenges.

- Andrew Abbott, “Transcending General Linear Reality.” *Sociological Theory* 6:2 (Autumn, 1988): 169–186. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/202114>
- Donald MacKenzie and Yuval Millo. “Constructing a Market, Performing Theory: The Historical Sociology of a Financial Derivatives Exchange.” *American Journal of Sociology* 109:1, (Jul2003). p107, 39p. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/374404>

November 24 Thanksgiving – no class

November 29 Latour, pp. 27–140

December 1 Latour, pp. 173–262

December 6 (Tentative) conclusions: using and making theory as a sociologist

WHAT’S MISSING?

It is simply impossible even to touch upon all the subfields of sociological theory in a one-semester class. Given that constraint, there are lots of important pieces of sociological theory that are missing from our semester’s overview. I will be happy to discuss these with you, informally or formally, as any of them may turn out to be useful and/or interesting to you.

Missing classics. Additional Durkheim classics like *The Division of Labor in Society* are left out in favor of the, in my opinion, much more interesting argument to be found in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Also missing is the foundational work of Georg Simmel, August Comte, Gabriel Tarde, and Alexis de Tocqueville.

Older American sociology. Early American theorists such as Cooley, Mead, Dewey, Mills, Park, and Hughes are, sadly, neglected in favor of their more famous European contemporaries. American sociology was dominated between roughly 1935 and 1975 by the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons and the critiques thereof. These critiques were both relatively friendly in nature (e.g., by Robert K. Merton) and relatively hostile (e.g., Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman). These debates are very interesting historically, and genealogically they are crucial to the development of our discipline. You may find Lewis A. Coser's article, "Sociological Theory From the Chicago Dominance to 1965," *Annual Review of Sociology* 2(1976).

Frankfurt School and Post-Frankfurt critical theory. Probably the most interesting, and frustrating, strain of postwar theory emerged from the exile intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, particularly Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Recent echoes include the very influential sociologist/philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who was trained at and influenced by the Frankfurt School. The most important additional strains are post-colonial theory and contemporary feminist theory, each of which could easily be taught for a semester or more.

Recent French repertoire theory. There is very interesting work by scholars associated with Laurent Thevenot and Luc Boltanski on the modes of thought and justification and how to measure them.

Normative theory. Mostly found within our sister discipline, political science, there is a flourishing subfield of democratic theory whose aim is to discuss what constitutes a good society, a good polity, etc.

Theory-of. Any sociological study worth the paper it's written on contains theory: a theory of entrepreneurship, of health effects, of political participation.