

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL  
Fall, 2008

# Social Theory

(SOCI 700)

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Tuesday/Thursday, 11:00–12:15    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 demonstrate the importance of sociological theory as a part of sociological research and practice; and
4. 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.

### *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 **blackboard** 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.

## 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 Ph.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

**Andrew Abbott.** *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences* (Norton, 2004).

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

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

**Michel Foucault.** *History of Sexuality, vol. 1* (Vintage, 1990).

—. *Fearless Speech* (Semiotext(e), 2001).

**Sigmund Freud.** *The Ego and the Id* (Norton, 1990).

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

**Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (trans. Edmund Jephcott).** *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 2002).

**James Jasper.** *Getting Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

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

**Robin Wagner-Pacifici.** *Theorizing the Standoff: Contingency in Action* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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

### 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).  
*I have put several personal copies of this book in the Odum Lab for graduate students' use.*
- Craig Calhoun, et al.** *Classical Sociological Theory* (Blackwell, 2002).
- Craig Calhoun, et al.** *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Blackwell, 2002).
- George Ritzer.** *Sociological Theory, 4th ed.* (McGraw-Hill, 1996).
- Jonathan Turner.** *The Structure of Sociological Theory, 6th ed.* (Wadsworth, 1998).
- Malcolm Waters.** *Modern Sociological Theory* (Sage, 1994).

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### August 19 Introduction and course organization

- Why theory? Introductions and substantive basis of the class
- Organization of presentation dates

### August 21 Enlightenment, Modernity, and Social Theory

- Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung?* (“What is enlightenment?”) [www](http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html) <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>
- Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, pp. 15–36 and 120–129 [www](#)
- Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp. 6–18 [www](#)
- *Get started on next week's Durkheim reading!*

Recommended:

- Berman, 87-120, 287–348
- Rose Laub Coser, *In Defense of Modernity* (Stanford, 1991)

### *Sociological Classics*

**August 26** Durkheim, “The Field of Sociology” and “The Division of Labour and Social Differentiation,” in Giddens, ed., *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1972) [www](#)

**August 28** Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Translator's Introduction; Introduction; Book I, Chapter 1; Book II, Chapter 1

**September 2** Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Book II, Chapters 4, 8, and 9, and Conclusion

**September 4** Barry Schwartz, “Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II.” *American Sociological Review* 61:5 (October, 1996): 908–927. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096461>; Jeffrey C. Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama.” pp. 27–85 in *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford University Press, 2003). [www](#)

**September 9** Marx's early writings  
 (All from *The Marx-Engels Reader*)

- “On the Jewish Question”
- “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction”
- “Theses on Feuerbach”
- “The German Ideology: Part I,” pp. 146–175, 189–200

**September 11** Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy* [WWW](#)

**September 16** Marx, economic writings

- *Grundrisse*, pp. 228–232
- *Capital*, vol. I, pp. 302–361, 403–415
- *Capital*, vol. III, pp. 439–441

Recommended:

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

**September 18** Rubin, "The Traffic in Women"

**September 23** Weber: Rationalization and Bureaucracy

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

**September 25** 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*

**September 30 No Class:** Rosh Hashanah holiday

**October 2** Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, entire

**October 7** Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, entire

**October 9 No Class:** Yom Kippur holiday

### *Postwar Critique*

**October 14** Foucault, pp. 9–24 and 75–88 in *Fearless Speech*

**October 16 Fall Break**

**October 21** Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. I, Part III

**October 23** Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. I, Part IV

**October 28** Readings from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

- "The Concept of Enlightenment"
- "Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment"
- "The Culture Industry"

**October 30**

- John Levi Martin, "The Authoritarian Personality, 50 Years Later: What Questions Are There for Political Psychology?" *Political Psychology* 22:1 (March, 2001): 1–26. <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.11112F0162-895X.00223>
- Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory and Nonpublic Opinion: An Historical Note on a Methodological Controversy about a Political Problem." *Symbolic Interaction* 30:1 (Winter, 2007): 41–55. <http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/si.2007.30.1.41>

### *Contemporary Theory: Practice and Strategy*

**November 4** Bourdieu, from *Logic of Practice*: pp. 1–142.

**November 6** "The Logic of Fields" and "Interest, Habitus, Rationality," from Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992) [WWW](#)

**November 11** Jasper, *Getting Your Way*, Introduction and Chapters 1–4

**November 13** Jasper, Chapters 5, 6, and Conclusion  
**November 18** Wagner-Pacifi, *Theorizing the Standoff*, Chapters 1–3  
**November 20** Wagner-Pacifi, Chapters 4 and 5  
**Monday, November 24 Final Papers Due, 5:00 PM**  
**November 25** Abbott, *Methods of Discovery*, Chapters 1, 2, 3  
**November 27 Thanksgiving**  
**December 2** Abbott, *Methods of Discovery*, Chapters 4, 5, 6

## 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 *Suicide* and *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 and August Comte.

**Mid-20th Century American sociology.** 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).

**Theory construction and philosophy of social science.** Readings in this vein would include Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* as well as more recent work by Charles Taylor, Gary King, Charles Tilly, Arthur Stinchcombe, Andrew Abbott, Charles Ragin, and Howard Becker. In a more critical vein, recent work by Bruno Latour and Donald MacKenzie on the concept of "performativity" is quite important.

**Post-Frankfurt critical theory.** The most important strains here 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.

**Rational Choice and Game theory.** These are relatively recent attempts at grand theories of action. They are very important in certain subfields of sociology, but have not proved particularly successful at making progress in most of the discipline, although they are quite good for raising interesting research questions. See Hechter and Kanazawa's "Sociological Rational Choice Theory," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997), as well as Mancur Olson's classic *The Logic of Collective Action*.

**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.