

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL  
Fall, 2009

# Social Theory

(SOCI 700)

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Tuesday/Thursday, 9:30–10:45    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 **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. 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 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*

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

**Randall Collins.** *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Max Weber.** *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* (McGraw-Hill, 1996).
- Jonathan Turner. *The Structure of Sociological Theory, 6th ed.* (Wadsworth, 1998).
- Malcolm Waters. *Modern Sociological Theory* (Sage, 1994).

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### August 25 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 27 Preliminary challenges

- Richard Ned Lebow, “If Mozart had Died at Your Age: Psychologic Versus Statistical Inference.” *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](#)

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

**September 3** Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Book II, Chapters 4, 8, and 9, and Conclusion

**September 8** Durkheim, *Suicide*, Introduction; Book Two, Chapters 1 and 5; Book Three, entire.

**September 10** Discussion of Durkheim with visiting scholar Karen Fields

**September 15** 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”
- Excerpts from “The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844”: pp. 70–81, 93–105.

**September 17**

- “Theses on Feuerbach”
- “The German Ideology: Part I”

**September 22** Marx, later writings

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

Recommended:

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

**September 24** “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.”

**September 29** Weber: Rationalization and Bureaucracy

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

**October 1** 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*
- “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber*

**October 6** Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, entire essay (but not supplementary material)

**October 8** Contemporary Ripples of Weber.

- Jacques Delacroix and Francois Nielsen. “The Beloved Myth: Protestantism and the Rise of Industrial Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe.” *Social Forces*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (Dec., 2001), pp. 509-553. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2675588>;
- 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 13** 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](http://www.uchicago.edu/~larryswedner/WWW/);
- *Logic of Practice* pp. 1–51

**October 15** Bourdieu, from *Logic of Practice*: pp. 52–142.

**October 20** 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](http://www.uchicago.edu/~larryswedner/WWW/)

**October 22** Fall Break – no class

**October 27** Foucault, Ch. 3 of *Discipline & Punish*, <http://foucault.info/documents/disciplineAndPunish/foucault.disciplineAndPunish.panOpticism.html> and “What is Enlightenment?” <http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html>

**October 29** Foucault, “Questions of Method” and “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect*

**November 3** Latour, pp. 1–86

**November 5** Latour, pp. 87–172

**November 10** Latour, pp. 173–262

**November 12** 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.html>)

**November 17** Contemporary Challenges

- Andrew Abbott, “Transcending General Linear Reality.” *Sociological Theory* 6:2 (Autumn, 1988): 169–186. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/202114>
- Sanderson, “Reforming Theoretical Work,” comments by Perrin, Adams, Kidd, and Wilkes, and reply by Sanderson. (<http://www.csun.edu/~egodard/asatheory/docs/theoreticalplural.pdf>).

**November 19** Recent practice theory.

- Vaisey, Stephen. “Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action.” *American Journal of Sociology* 114:6 (May, 2009): 1675–1715. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/597179>.
- 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 24** Performativity.

- Wendy Nelson Espeland and Michael Sauder. “Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds.” *American Journal of Sociology* 113:1 (July, 2007)
- 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://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=11652037&db=afh>

**November 26 Thanksgiving** – no class

**December 1** Collins, Chapters 1, 2, and 4

**December 3** Collins, Chapters 5, 6, and 9

**December 8** (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).

**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.