

SOC 502

CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Spring 1999

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Office hours: by appointment.
Green Hall 2-C-8

Tuesdays: 9:30-12:30

This course offers an introduction to contemporary sociological theory for graduate students aspiring to lead a life of research in the social sciences. The first and primary goal is to provide guidelines for a reflection on the role of theory in sociological research. We will examine questions such as: What is theory? How is it to be evaluated? How can we build on available theories in constructing new ones? Our second goal will be to understand how theories are shaped by the context in which they are produced. We will also discuss whether the impact of contexts should prevent us from aspiring to the production of generalizable theories. A third, broader, objective will be to provide students with bases needed for achieving a decent level of intellectual literacy within the field of sociology.

Students who have not had exposure to sociological theory at the undergraduate level are encouraged to read one of the following books prior to our first meeting:

Randall Collins, 1994. *Four Sociological Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press (for true beginners)

Jonathan H. Turner, 1991. *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (exhaustive, with a functionalist twist)

George Ritzer, 1988. *Frontiers of Social Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press (most up-to-date).

These books will provide you with a general road-map of the field of sociological theory, as well as basic information on some of the approaches that we will not be cover due to time constrains (e.g., critical theory, exchange theory, neo-functionalism).

The first part of the course defines and contrasts various approaches to sociological theory. The second part focuses on structural approaches that privilege the objective properties of social reality. In particular, we will discuss the ongoing crisis of neo-Marxism.

The third part privileges cultural approaches that emphasize the subjective aspects of social reality. We will contrast traditional approaches (e.g., symbolic interactionism) with more recent work that focuses on the structural aspects of cultural phenomena. Our goal here will be to go beyond the structure/culture dichotomy that often organizes the teaching of postwar sociological theory. The fourth part turns to the post-, new, and improved European and American contributions which have had a powerful impact in transforming the meaning of theory in sociology and other disciplines. We will conclude with a general reflection on the impact of the material we have covered on our practice as sociologists.

Requirements:

- 1) Four memos on a group of weekly readings of your choice. These memos, of a maximum length of three to four pages, should be posted on the course's web-page at least 24 hours before our meetings. Their role is to help you and the other seminar participants prepare our discussion by pointing to a number of substantive and critical issues, and by identifying connections and contrasts between theoretical approaches (40 percent of the grade).
- 2) Several class presentation (15 percent of the grade).
- 3) A 5-7 pages paper that describes, sorts out, and analyzes the range of theories discussed in *Required Reading: Sociology's Most Influential Books* (edited by Dan Clawson). This collection includes reviews by leading experts of seventeen books judged "the most influential in American sociology over the past 25 years" (15 percent of the grade) (due April 27).
- 4) Take-home exam or a paper on a topic to be discussed with me (30 percent of the grade; due May 11th).

Readings:

The following books are available at the U-Store. A reading packet is also available at Pequod, 6 Nassau St.

Clawson, Dan, ed. 1998. *Required Reading: Sociology's Most Influential Books*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Elias, Norbert. 1982. *The Civilizing Process*. New York: Blackwell.

Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Culture*. New York: Basics.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Vintage.

Jenkins, Richard. 1996. *Social Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Mann, Michael. 1993. *The Sources of Social Power*. Vol. 2. New York: Cambridge.

Part 1: Introduction

Week 1 (February 2): What is Theory?

Alford, Robert R. 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry. Theories, Methods and Evidence*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 1-4 and chapter 3.

Calhoun, Craig. 1992. "Sociology, Other Disciplines, and the Project of a General Understanding of Social Life." Pp. 137-195 in *Sociology and Its Publics*, edited by Terence C. Halliday and Morris Janowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Black, Donald. 1995. "The Epistemology of Pure Sociology." *Law and Social Inquiry*. 20(3): 829-870.

Crane, Diana and Henry Small. 1992. "American Sociology Since the Seventies: The Emerging Identity Crisis in the Discipline." Pp.197-224 in *Sociology and Its Publics*, edited by Terence Halliday and Morris Janowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 2 (February 9): Overview and Approaches to Theory

Connell, R.W. 1997. "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (6): 1511-57.

Collins, Randall. 1997. "A Sociological Guilt Trip: Comments on Connell." *American Journal of Sociology*. 102 (6): 1511-57.

Lamont, Michele. 1987. "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida." *American Journal of Sociology*. 93 (3): 584-622.

Fuller, Steve. 1998. "From Content to Context: A Social Epistemology of the Structure/Agency Craze." Pp. 92-117 in *What is Theory? Philosophical Debates*, edited by Alan Sica. New York: Blackwell.

The Denzin/Griswold debate on "provincial positivism." *American Journal of Sociology*, 95 (6) 1990: 1577-1583. (If you have time, also look at Griswold's paper "The Fabrication of Meaning..." *American Journal of Sociology*, March 1987: 1977-1117; not included in the packet).

Part 2: Toward Structure

Week 3 (February 16): Rational Choice and Network Theory

Becker, Gary. 1996. "The Economic Way of Looking at Life." in *Accounting for Tastes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Pp. 139-161.

Somers, Margaret R. 1998. "We're no Angels: Realism, Rational Choice, and Relationality in Social Science." *American Journal of Sociology*. 104 (3): 722-84. (not included in packet).

Kiser, Edgar and Michael Hechter. 1998. "The Debate on Historical Sociology: Rational Choice Theory and its Critics." *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (3): 785-816. (not included in packet).

Wellman, Barry. 1988. "Structural Analysis: From Method and Metaphor to Theory and Substance." Pp. 19-61 in *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, edited by Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Emirbayer, Mustapha and Jeff Goodwin. 1994. "Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency." *American Journal of Sociology*. 99 (6): 1411-1454.

Week 4 (February 23): Neo-Marxism, Kindred, and Less-Kindred Spirits

Mann, Michael. 1993. *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. 2. Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20.

Pakulski, Jan and Malcolm Waters. 1996. "The Reshaping and Dissolution of Social Class in Advanced Society." *Theory and Society* 25 (5): 667-691.

Eric Olin Wright, 1996. "The Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis. Comments." *Theory and Society* 25: 693-716.

Grusky, David and Jesper B. Sorensen. 1998. "Can Class Analysis be Salvaged?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (5): 1187-1235.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1991. "Call for a Debate about the Paradigm." Pp. 237-256 in *Unthinking Social Science. The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*. London: Polity Press.

Part 3: Toward Culture

Week 5 (March 2): Symbolic Interactionism, Emotions, and Pragmatism

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday.

Collins, Randall. 1990. "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions." Pp. 27-57 in *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*, edited by Theodore D. Kemper. New York: State University of New York Press.

Joas, Hans. 1996. *The Creativity of Action*. London: Polity Press. Chapter 3.

Week 6 (March 9): Developments in Cultural Theory: Mental Maps et al.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Culture*. New York: Basic. Chapters 1,4,6, and 15.

Elias, Norbert. 1994. *The Civilizing Process*, New York: Blackwell. Pp. 443-524

Sewell, William H. Jr., 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transforamtion." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1-29.

Jepperson, Ronald. 1991. "Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism." Pp. 143-163 in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week of March 16: Spring break

Week 7 (March 23): Developments in Cultural Theory: Identity et al.

Somers, Margaret and Gloria D. Gibson. 1994. "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other': Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity." Pp. 37-99 in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. by Craig Calhoun. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Jenkins, Richard. 1996. *Social Identity*. London: Routledge. Selections.

Tilly, Charles. 1997. *Durable Inequality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Chapters 1-3.

Part 4: Post-, New, and Improved

Week 8 (March 30): Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

Lamont, Michele and Robert Wuthnow. 1990. "Betwixt and Between: Recent Cultural Sociology in Europe and the United States." Pp. 287-315 in *Frontiers of Social Theory: The New Synthesis*, edited by George Ritzer. New York: Columbia University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Vintage. 3-131 and 195-28

Gorski, Philip S. 1993. "The Protestant Ethic Revisited: Disciplinary Revolution and State Formation in Holland and Prussia." *American Journal of Sociology*, 99 (2): 265-316.

Week 9 (April 6): New French Theory

Brubaker, Rogers. 1985. "Rethinking Classical Social Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu." *Theory and Society*. 14-6: 745-775.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Pp. 9-125.

Wagner, Peter. 1994. "Dispute, Uncertainty, and Institution in Recent French Debates." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 2 (3): 270-289.

Lamont, Michele and Laurent Thevenot, 1999. "Introduction: Toward a Renewed Cultural Sociology" *Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States*. Unpublished ms., Department of Sociology, Princeton University.

Week 10 (April 13): Improved Feminist Theory

Stacey, Judith and Barrie Thorne. 1985. "The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology" *Social Problems*. 32 (4): 301-316.

Scott, Joan. 1988. "Gender as a Useful Category in Historical Analysis." Pp. 28-52 in *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fraser, Nancy. 1989. *Unruly Practices. Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Chapter 6.

Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *Texts, Facts, and Femininity. Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. London: Routledge. Introduction and Chapter 6.

Week 11 (April 20): Postmodernism and Postmodernity

Antonio, Robert J. 1998. "Mapping Postmodern Social Theory." Pp. 22-75 in *What is Social Theory? The Philosophical Debates*, edited by Alan Sica. New York: Blackwell.

Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. New York: Blackwell. Pp. 1-118.

Beck, Ulrich. 1994. "The Reinvention of Politics: Toward a Theory of Reflexive Modernization." Pp. 1-55 in *Reflexive Modernization. Politics, Traditions and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, edited by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Part 5: Conclusion

Week 12 (April 27): Metatheoretical and Practical Issues

Wrong, Dennis. 1993. "The Present Condition of American Sociology. A Review Article." *Comparative Study of Society and History*. 35 (10): 183-196.

Skocpol, Theda. 1984. "Emerging Agendas and Recurrent Strategies in Historical Sociology." Pp. 356-391 in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Van Den Berg, Axel 1998. "Is Sociological Theory too Grand for Social Mechanisms?" Pp. 204-237 in *Social Mechanisms. An Analytical Approach to Social Theory*, edited by Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press