

SOCIOL 710

# Social Theory from Marx to Parsons

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Wednesdays 10:05am–12:35pm.

Say what you mean. Bear witness. Iterate.  
John M. Ford, “[De Vermis](#)”.

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate-level course is an intensive introduction to some main themes in social theory, where that is understood as work that has been influential in the discipline of sociology. It is the first of a two-part sequence required of first year Ph.D students in the sociology department. It is not a general introduction to the history of social or political thought.

## REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

This is a graduate seminar. I take for granted that you have a basic interest in the material, an enthusiastic attitude toward participation, and a respectful attitude to your peers. I expect you to attend each meeting, do the reading thoroughly and in advance, and participate actively in class. Participating actively means contributing to class discussion, something that involves both speaking and listening. You should also be reading beyond the course requirements as much as possible. In addition, two other kinds of work are required:

1. Except for the first week, each week you will write a brief (up to two pages) memo and send it to me in PDF format via the class Dropbox folder. It is due by 3pm the day before class. This is a hard deadline. Your memo should discuss a topic, a problem, or questions arising from the week's reading. The memos are writing and thinking exercises. I do not expect a finished paper or a polished short essay. However, I do expect them to engage with the readings in a clear and intelligent way. Use them to develop ideas informally, and raise issues that seem to you worth discussing in class or pursuing further in your own writing. I will read them each week and sometimes give you written feedback, in addition to using them to help focus class discussion. You are required to share your memos with everyone else in the class. (Putting them in the class Dropbox folder will accomplish this.)
2. A final paper is required. It should be fifteen to twenty pages in length and address an interesting *empirical* question of your choice, discussing at least two possible explanations for it, using the perspectives developed in the seminar. Exegetical or purely conceptual papers—e.g., papers devoted to questions internal to some theory—will not be accepted. You should work on your paper throughout the semester. I encourage you to discuss the topic with me ahead of time.

## A WORD ABOUT THE APPROACH

As is standard practice in our field, the department requires its graduate students complete a two-semester survey course in social (or “sociological”) theory. Theory within sociology is in a strange position. Normally, the core ideas of a field—its theories—are what hold it together. But there are no longer any theorists in sociology. There are theories, or things people call theories; there are theory courses, people who teach theory, theory journals, and theory articles. Inside research papers there are theory sections. Inside the American Sociological Association there is a Theory Section. There are career returns to being thought of as the sort of clever person who can do good theory. Indeed, you cannot get published in a top-flight journal without convincing the reviewers that you have made a theoretical contribution. It's true that there are people in the field who started out as theorists, and who still think of themselves primarily as such. But they are getting old. Since the late 1980s or early 1990s there has been no *occupational* position of “theorist” within American sociology. No-one gets a job as a theorist.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For more on this, see Lamont (2004) and also Healy (2007). Crudely, the sort of people who once would have thought of themselves—and hoped to be hired—*primarily* as theorists now typically think of themselves as sociologists of culture instead, or (much less often) as disciplinary historians of ideas.

As a consequence, many people are not sure what, from a disciplinary point of view, theory in sociology is supposed to be any more, or how it should be done, or what if anything distinguishes it from intellectual history, or philosophy, or normative political theory, or humanities-style “Theory”, or applied mathematics. And yet, even now, a presumed acquaintance with a stream of “theoretical” thought—beginning with Smith or Marx, pausing to throw stones at the beached and rotting carcass of Parsons, and ending with one of several more recent thinkers in an attitude of reverence or contempt, according to taste—is very nearly the only material you can rely on being shared by everyone across the field, along with a statistics sequence up to the generalized linear model and a proseminar focused on how to submit a paper to the ASA Meetings. As the course unfolds, we will occasionally examine the reasons for this odd state of affairs.

In deference to our professional duty, we follow much of the standard “theory stream” this semester. [In the Spring](#) you will move to a survey of contemporary work in the sequel to this course. Inevitably, a great deal will get left out, both now and next semester. Some of what is omitted might be covered in the theory sections of other courses offered by the department. The rest will be covered in the extracurricular reading that you will be doing in your spare time.

## READINGS

All required readings will be available either via a link in the syllabus or through the course Dropbox. I encourage you to buy and read as many of the required and recommended books as you can. These books—even the quite obscure ones—are generally available for purchase new or used online.

If you do not have a strong background in social theory coming in to the class, it is worth reading one or more of the following books:

- Raymond Aron. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vol. 1. London: Weidenfeld / Nicholson.
- Raymond Aron. 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vol. 2. London: Weidenfeld / Nicholson.
- Barry Barnes. 1995. *The Elements of Social Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Craig Calhoun, ed. 2007b. *Sociology in America: A history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thomas J. Fararo. 1989. *The Meaning of General Theoretical Sociology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Anthony Giddens. 1971. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Geoffrey Hawthorn. 1987. *Enlightenment and Despair: A history of social theory*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

If you *do* have a strong background in social theory coming into the class, you are probably overestimating how strong it really is, so start reading anyway.

## SCHEDULE

### 1. TURN YOUR KEY, SIR

#### *Required*

- Claude Lévi-Strauss. 2011. *Tristes Tropiques*. New York: Penguin. Chapter 38, “A Little Glass of Rum”.
- Krishan Kumar. 1991. *Prophecy and Progress: The sociology of industrial and post-industrial society*. London: Penguin. Chapters 1–3.
- Geoffrey Hawthorn. 1987. *Enlightenment and Despair: A history of social theory*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2.
- Justin E.H. Smith. 2015. *Nature, Human Nature, & Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 1–69, 207–268.
- Marshall Berman. 1983. *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso. Introduction, “Modernity: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow.”

#### *Recommended*

- Ronald L. Meek. 1976. *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### 2. SMITH, MARX, AND MODERNITY

- Adam Smith. 2000. *The Wealth of Nations*. New York: Modern Library. Excerpts.
- Marshall Berman. 1983. *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso, pp.87–130.
- Karl Marx. 1992. *Early Writings*. London: Penguin, excerpts from the “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”.
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels “[Manifesto of the Communist Party](#)”.
- E.P. Thompson. 1967. “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism.” *Past & Present* 38:56–97. doi:[10.1093/past/38.1.56](https://doi.org/10.1093/past/38.1.56).
- Terrell Carver. 2010. “Marx and the Politics of Sarcasm.” *Socialism and Democracy* 24 (3): 102–118. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2010.513608>.

#### *Recommended*

- Maurice Dobb. 1973. *Theories of Value and Distribution Since Adam Smith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Emma Rothschild. 2001. *Economic Sentiments*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Jonathan Sperber. 2014. *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life*. New York: Liverlight.
- Gareth Steadman Jones. 2016. *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Allen Wood. 2004. *Karl Marx*. Second edition. New York: Routledge.

### 3. MARX'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

#### *Required*

Robert C. Tucker, ed. 1978. *The Marx–Engels Reader*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Read the following selections:

- Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (pp. 3–6). [[LINK](#)]
- “Wage Labor and Capital” (pp. 203–217).

Karl Marx. 1990. *Capital*. Vol. One. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin. Excerpts.

Robert Paul Wolff. 1988. *Moneybags Must Be So Lucky: On the literary structure of Capital*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

#### *Recommended*

Allen Wood. 2004. *Karl Marx*. Second edition. New York: Routledge.

Duncan Foley. 1986. *Understanding Capital: Marx's Economic Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

G.A. Cohen. 2000. *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. Expanded edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Adam Przeworski. 1985. *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frank Parkin. 1979. *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*. New York: Columbia University Press.

### 4. WEBER ON ACTION AND IDEAS

#### *Required*

Max Weber. 1978. *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 3–56, 518–589.

Max Weber. 2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge. “Politics as a Vocation”, in W.G. Runciman, ed. 1978. *Weber: Selections in translation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

#### *Recommended*

Reinhard Bendix. 1977. *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. Berkeley: California.

Stephen Kalberg. 1996. “On the Neglect of Weber's Protestant Ethic as a Theoretical Treatise: Demarcating the Parameters of Postwar American Sociological Theory.” *Sociological Theory* 14 (1): 49–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/202152>.

David Beetham. 1974. *Max Weber and the theory of modern politics*. London: Allen & Unwin

## 5. WEBER ON CLASS, RATIONALIZATION AND BUREAUCRACY

### *Required*

- Max Weber. 1978. *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 212–254, 302–307, 926–939, 956–963, 973–975, 980–989, 990–994, 1111–1125.
- Michael Mann. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power, volume I: A history of power from the beginning to A.D. 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Pp 1–104.

### *Recommended*

- Randall Collins. 1980. “Weber’s Last theory of Capitalism: A Systematization.” *Classical Theory, Social Prerequisites of Markets and Capitalism*, *American Sociological Review* 45:925–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094910>.
- Charles Camic, Philip S. Gorski, and David M. Trubek, eds. 2005. *Max Weber’s ‘Economy and Society’: A Critical Companion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wolfgang Mommsen. 1989. “The Antinomical Structure of Max Weber’s Political Thought.” In *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*, 24–43. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- “The History of the Piano”, in W.G. Runciman, ed. 1978. *Weber: Selections in translation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Max Weber. 1995. *General Economic History*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

## 6. DURKHEIM AND THE DIVISION OF LABOR

### *Required*

- Émile Durkheim. 1984. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Translated by W.D. Halls. New York: Free Press.
- Émile Durkheim. 2007. *On Suicide*. Alexander Riley, editor; Robin Buss, translator. New York: Penguin. Excerpts.
- John Levi Martin. 2000. “What Do Animals Do All Day? The Division of Labor, Class Bodies, and Totemic Thinking in the Popular Imagination.” *Poetics* 27:195–231. <http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0304422X9900025X>.

### *Recommended*

- Steven Lukes. 1992. *Émile Durkheim: His life and work*. London: Penguin.
- Anthony Giddens, ed. 1972. *Émile Durkheim: Selected Writings*. New York: Cambridge University Press, Pp. 1–50.
- Susan Stedman Jones. 2001. *Durkheim Reconsidered*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Warren Schmaus. 2004. *Rethinking Durkheim and His Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## 7. DURKHEIM ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND MORAL ORDER

### *Required*

- Émile Durkheim. 1997. *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*. Karen Fields, Translator. Free Press. Excerpts.
- Peter Bearman. 1997. "Generalized Exchange." *American Journal of Sociology* 102:1383–1415.
- Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields. 2017. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. New York: Verso.

### *Recommended*

- Peter Bearman. 1991. "Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norms in the U.S. Civil War." *Social Forces* 70:321–342. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2580242.pdf>.
- Mary Douglas. 2002. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge.
- Mary Douglas. 1996. *Natural Symbols*. New York: Routledge.
- Marcel Mauss. 2000. *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. New York: Norton.
- Albert Bergesen. 2004. "Durkheim's Theory of the Mental Categories: A review of the evidence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:395–408. <http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110549>.

## 8. SIMMEL'S FORMAL SOCIOLOGY

### *Required*

- Donald Levine, ed. 1972. *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Read the following selections:
- "How is Society Possible?" and "The Problem of Sociology" (Pp. 6–35).
  - "Conflict" (Pp.70–95).
  - "Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality" (Pp. 251–293).
  - "The Stranger", "Fashion", "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (Pp. 143–149, 294–339.)
- Georg Simmel. [1907] 1978. *The Philosophy of Money*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan, excerpts.
- Ronald L. Breiger. 1974. "The Duality of Persons and Groups." *Social Forces* 53:181–190. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2576011>.

### *Recommended*

David Frisby. 1984. *Georg Simmel*. London: Routledge.

## 9. SOME EARLY AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

### *Required*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman. 1997. *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. New York: Dover Books, excerpts.

George Herbert Mead. 1981. *Selected Writings: George Herbert Mead*. Edited by A.J. Reck. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, excerpts.

W.E.B. DuBois. 1996. *The Philadelphia Negro*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, excerpts.

W.E.B. DuBois. 1997. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*. New York: Free Press, excerpts.

Robert E. Park. 1925. “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment,” in Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Roderick D. McKenzie, *The City* (University of Chicago Press, pp.3-46).

### *Recommended*

Aldon Morris. 2007. “Sociology of Race and W.E.B. DuBois: The Path Not Taken” in Calhoun 2007b, 503–534.

## 10. SOCIETY IN TURMOIL

### *Required*

Karl Polanyi. 1980. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Cambridge: Beacon Press, Chapters 4–6, 11, 21.

Joseph Schumpeter. 1950. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper / Row, Chapters 7, 11–12.

### *Recommended*

Jonathan Levy. 2012. *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Tim Rogan. 2017. *The Moral Economists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Amy Dru Stanley. 1999. *From Bondage to Contract*. New York: Cambridge University Press.



## 11. SOCIETY IN EQUIPOISE

### *Required*

- Talcott Parsons. 1968. *The Structure of Social Action Volume I: Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim*. Second. New York: Free Press, Part I.
- Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils. 1951. "Values, Motives and Systems of Action." In *Toward a General Theory of Action*, edited by Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, 53–79. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Robert K. Merton. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Enlarged Edition. Glencoe: Free Press. Pp. 39-117, 175-213.

### *Recommended*

- Barry Barnes. 1995. *The Elements of Social Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chapter 2, "Functionalism".
- N.J. Demerath and Richard A. Peterson, eds. 1967. *System, Change and Conflict*. New York: Free Press.
- Jon Elster. 1983. *Explaining Technical Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2, "Functional Explanation".
- David Lockwood. 1964. "Social Integration and System Integration." In *Explorations in Social Change*, edited by G.K. Zollschan and W. Hirsch, 249–267. London: Routledge.

## 11. METHODS AND ATTITUDES

### *Required*

- Jeffrey Alexander. 1987. "The Centrality of the Classics." In *Social Theory Today*, edited by Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner, 11–57. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gabriel Abend. 2008. "The Meaning of 'Theory'." *Sociological Theory* 26:173–199.
- Stanley Lieberman and Freda B. Lynn. 2002. "Barking up the Wrong Branch: Scientific Alternatives to the Current Model of Sociological Science." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:1–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/3069232.pdf>.
- Kieran Healy. 2017. "Fuck Nuance." *Sociological Theory* 35:118–127.

### *Recommended*

- Craig Calhoun. 2007a. "Introduction." In *Sociology in America: A history*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 1–38. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- R. W. Connell. 1997. "Why Is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102:1511–1557. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782710>.
- Randall Collins. 1997. "A Sociological Guilt Trip: Comment on Connell." *American Journal of Sociology* 102:1558–1564. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782711>.

## REMAINDER

Catch-up, byways, and matters arising.

## References

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- Alexander, Jeffrey. 1987. "The Centrality of the Classics." In *Social Theory Today*, edited by Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner, 11–57. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vol. 1. London: Weidenfeld / Nicholson.
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- Calhoun, Craig. 2007a. "Introduction." In *Sociology in America: A history*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 1–38. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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- Camic, Charles, Philip S. Gorski, and David M. Trubek, eds. 2005. *Max Weber's 'Economy and Society': A Critical Companion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Carver, Terrell. 2010. "Marx and the Politics of Sarcasm." *Socialism and Democracy* 24 (3): 102–118. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2010.513608>.
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- Connell, R. W. 1997. "Why Is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102:1511–1557. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782710>.
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- Hawthorn, Geoffrey. 1987. *Enlightenment and De-spair: A history of social theory*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Healy, Kieran. 2007. "Sociology." In *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Second edition, edited by Robert E. Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas Pogge, 1:88–117. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- . 2017. "Fuck Nuance." *Sociological Theory* 35:118–127.
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- Lamont, Michèle. 2004. "The Theory Section and Theory Satellites." *Perspectives* 27, no. 1 (January): 1, 10, 14, 16.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 2011. *Tristes Tropiques*. New York: Penguin.
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- Lukes, Steven. 1992. *Émile Durkheim: His life and work*. London: Penguin.
- Mann, Michael. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power, volume I: A history of power from the beginning to A.D. 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- Marx, Karl. 1990. *Capital*. Vol. One. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin.
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- Mauss, Marcel. 2000. *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. New York: Norton.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1981. *Selected Writings: George Herbert Mead*. Edited by A.J. Reck. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meek, Ronald L. 1976. *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Merton, Robert K. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Enlarged Edition. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Mommsen, Wolfgang. 1989. "The Antinomial Structure of Max Weber's Political Thought." In *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*, 24–43. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Morris, Aldon. 2007. "Sociology of Race and W.E.B. DuBois: The Path Not Taken." In Calhoun 2007b, 503–534.
- Parkin, Frank. 1979. *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Parsons, Talcott. 1968. *The Structure of Social Action Volume I: Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim*. Second. New York: Free Press.
- Parsons, Talcott, and Edward A. Shils. 1951. "Values, Motives and Systems of Action." In *Toward a General Theory of Action*, edited by Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, 53–79. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Polanyi, Karl. 1980. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Cambridge: Beacon Press.
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- Rothschild, Emma. 2001. *Economic Sentiments*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Runciman, W.G., ed. 1978. *Weber: Selections in translation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmaus, Warren. 2004. *Rethinking Durkheim and His Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schumpeter, Joseph. 1950. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper / Row.
- Simmel, Georg. [1907] 1978. *The Philosophy of Money*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan.
- Smith, Adam. 2000. *The Wealth of Nations*. New York: Modern Library.
- Smith, Justin E.H. 2015. *Nature, Human Nature, & Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sperber, Jonathan. 2014. *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life*. New York: Liverlight.
- Stanley, Amy Dru. 1999. *From Bondage to Contract*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, E.P. 1967. "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism." *Past & Present* 38:56–97. doi:10.1093/past/38.1.56.
- Tucker, Robert C., ed. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. New York: W.W. Norton.

- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1995. *General Economic History*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- . 2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge.
- Wolff, Robert Paul. 1988. *Moneybags Must Be So Lucky: On the literary structure of Capital*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Wood, Allen. 2004. *Karl Marx*. Second edition. New York: Routledge.