

SOCIOL 710

Social Theory from Marx to Parsons

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Fall 2017. Sociology/Psychology 331.

Wednesdays 1:25pm–3:55pm.

You know, a little theory goes a long way.

Reinhard Bendix, quoted in Stinchcombe 1968, v.

Say what you mean. Bear witness. Iterate.

[John M. Ford](#), *De Vermis*.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate-level course is an intensive introduction to some main themes in social theory. It is the first of a two-part sequence required of first year Ph.D students in the sociology department.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

This is a graduate seminar. I take for granted that you have a basic interest in the material and an enthusiastic attitude toward participation. (Otherwise, why are you here?) I expect you to attend each meeting, do the reading thoroughly and in advance, and participate actively in class. You should also be reading beyond the requirements as much as possible. In addition, two other kinds of work are required:

1. Except for the first week, where there is a different assignment, each week you will write a brief (2-4 page) memo and send it to me as a PDF document, 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. They should be used to develop ideas informally, and raise issues that seem to you worth discussing in class or 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 also required to share your memos with everyone else in the class.
2. There will either be a final exam or a final paper, depending on the particular needs of the class. I will let you know in good time which it's going to be.

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 and there are people who teach theory; there are theory journals, and theory articles. Inside research papers, theory sections are mandatory; inside the American Sociological Association there is a Theory Section; there are career returns to being thought of as a clever sort of person who can do good theory; 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 as such. But 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.¹

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 particular stream of thought—beginning with

¹For 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.

Marx, passing alongside Parsons, and ending at one of several more recent thinkers according to taste—is, together with a statistics sequence up to the generalized linear model, very nearly the only material you can rely on being known across the field. As the course unfolds, we will occasionally examine the reasons for this odd state of affairs.

In deference to our professional duty, then, we follow much of the standard “theory stream” this semester. In the Spring we will move to a more thematic 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

Readings are available either via a link in the syllabus or through the [course webpage](#). I will provide you with a username and password to access the page. 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. GETTING STARTED

Assignment

Come to class having completed the writing exercise that Luker gives at the end of the excerpt from *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Bring the memo you wrote with you.

Required

- Howard S. Becker. 2007. *Telling About Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, excerpts.
- Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.218–247.
- Kieran Healy. 2017. “Fuck Nuance.” *Sociological Theory* 35:118–127.
- Kristin Luker. 2008. *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Excerpts.

2. THE NIGHTMARE FROM WHICH WE ARE TRYING TO AWAKE

Required

- 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.
- Marshall Berman. 1983. *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso. Introduction, “Modernity: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow.”

Recommended

- 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.
- 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>.
- Ronald L. Meek. 1976. *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alan Swingewood. 2001. *A Short History of Sociological Theory*. Third edition. London: Palgrave.

3. 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. [[PDF](#)]

Recommended

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

4. 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.
- Maurice Dobb. 1973. *Theories of Value and Distribution Since Adam Smith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frank Parkin. 1979. *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*. New York: Columbia University Press.

5. 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

6. 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.
- “The History of the Piano”, in W.G. Runciman, ed. 1978. *Weber: Selections in translation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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.
- 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.
- Wolfgang Mommsen. 1989. “The Antinomial Structure of Max Weber’s Political Thought.” In *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*, 24–43. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Max Weber. 1995. *General Economic History*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

7. 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.

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.

8. DURKHEIM ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND MORAL ORDER

Required

Émile Durkheim. 1997. *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*. Karen Fields, Translator. Free Press. Excerpts.

Émile Durkheim. 2007. *On Suicide*. Alexander Riley, editor; Robin Buss, translator. New York: Penguin. Excerpts.

Mary Douglas. 2002. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge. Excerpts.

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>.

Peter Bearman. 1997. "Generalized Exchange." *American Journal of Sociology* 102:1383–1415.

Mary Douglas. 1996. *Natural Symbols*. New York: Routledge.

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>.

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>.

9. 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.

Recommended

Ronald L. Breiger. 1974. “The Duality of Persons and Groups.” *Social Forces* 53:181–190. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2576011>.

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

10. 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.

11. CAPITALISM AND SOCIETY

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.

12. PARSONS, ACTION THEORY, AND FUNCTIONALISM

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.

REMAINDER

Catch-up, byways, and matters arising.

References

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- Douglas, Mary. 1996. *Natural Symbols*. New York: Routledge.

- Douglas, Mary. 2002. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge.
- DuBois, W.E.B. 1996. *The Philadelphia Negro*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- . 1997. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*. New York: Free Press.
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- . 1997. *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*. Karen Fields, Translator. Free Press.
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- Giddens, Anthony. 1971. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
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- Kalberg, Stephen. 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>.
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- Lamont, Michèle. 2004. "The Theory Section and Theory Satellites." *Perspectives* 27, no. 1 (January): 1, 10, 14, 16.
- Levine, Donald, ed. 1972. *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lockwood, David. 1964. "Social Integration and System Integration." In *Explorations in Social Change*, edited by G.K. Zollschan and W. Hirsch, 249–267. London: Routledge.
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- 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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- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1985. *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge 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.
- Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. New York: Harcourt, Brace / World.
- Swingewood, Alan. 2001. *A Short History of Sociological Theory*. Third edition. London: Palgrave.
- 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.