

Contemporary Sociological Theory - Sociology 2050

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Course Description

This course is not a survey course. It is not an overview of the state of contemporary sociology. Many theorists and traditions that deserve inclusion are absent. It is a course that instead focuses on developing theoretical skills by closely and intensely engaging a small number of texts by theorists who have been selected for their paradigmatic impact. Gramsci, Habermas, Foucault and Bourdieu all developed unique and comprehensive theories of modernity, and more specifically of bureaucratic and capitalist society. All engaged classical sociological theory. We will examine each of these theorists on their own terms, where they can be located with respect to the classical theorists (Marx, Weber, Durkheim) and where and how they compare to each other. Marx, Weber and Durkheim were concerned with the transition to capitalism and provided first-generation theories of the logic of modern society. In asking the question of how social order can be maintained in highly differentiated societies they respectively answered with theories of class domination, rationalization and integrative norms (organic solidarity). Gramsci updates Marxism by bringing in ideology and civil society, and in his theory of hegemony gives new life to class analysis. Habermas extends the concept of rationalization both to develop a theory of how the logic of the modern state (power) and the market (profit) have crowded out reason, but also to explore the emancipatory potential of civil society in his theories of the public sphere and communicative action. Bourdieu confronts the question of resilient class inequality in the context of formal legal equality to develop a theory of how everyday social practices reproduce social differences. And Foucault, the most central figure in the post-modern turn, provides a theory of the power-effects of knowledge.

We then examine how a range of other recent theorists - Nancy Fraser, Michael Burawoy, Adam Przeworski, Craig Calhoun, Anthony Giddens, Jeffrey Alexander, Anthony King, Alan Hunt, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato - have made use of and/or critiqued these four thinkers.

Requirements:

You must do ALL the readings. If you do not do the readings, you should not come to class. You must come prepared to participate.

* 8 x 1 page thought papers to be shared with class. These are required, but not graded. You must write one thought paper for the first two weeks of each of the 4 theorists. These are due in class.

* 1 or 2 team presentations depending on class size.

Take-home essays - 2 options:

Option 1: Four 5-6 pages essays on each of the theorists

Option 2: One final 20 page paper with my approval.

Rules for Discussion:

Participation is required. The point of this seminar is to *struggle* with theory. These are all difficult texts. Discussion should begin with as much effort at clarification as possible. Confusion is to be expected, and working through the arguments carefully is the only way to understand this material. To ensure that discussion remains as focused and as dialogical as possible a few norms should be affirmed. 1) Clarification questions ALWAYS have priority. We need to understand what the theorist is arguing before we either apply, extend or critique the argument. 2) No references to readings outside the course should be made unless absolutely necessary. 3) Follow up questions should always been given priority over a new line of questioning. If your intervention does not follow from what has just been said, then think about postponing it until the point on the table has been clarified.

All the books for this course can be purchased at the Brown Book Store. The course packet is available from Alegra. All the readings with a * are in the course packet.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979

Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The structural transformation of the public sphere : an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press., 1989.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Giddens, Anthony. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: an Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971.

Alexander, Jeffrey. *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2006.

Course Outline

Week 1 Jan 27

Introduction

Week 2 Feb 3

Gramsci, Antonio. *The Prison Notebooks*

Week 3 February 10

- *Przeworski, Adam. "The Material Bases of Consent," pp. 133-170, in Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- *Burawoy, Michael. 2003. "For A Sociological Marxism: the Complementary Convergence of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi." *Politics and Society* 31:193-261.
- *Cohen, Jean L. pp. 194-228 from *Class and Civil Society : The Limits of Marxian Critical Theory*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.
- *Guha, Ranajit. *Selections from Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* Cambridge: Harvard university Press, 1997.

Week 4 February 17

- *Habermas, Jurgen. 1992. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere. Pp. 109-143 in *Habermas and the public sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1981. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*

Week 5 February 24

- Habermas, Jürgen. 1981. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*
- *Habermas, Jürgen. 1996. Selections from *Between facts and norms : contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- *Habermas, Jürgen. 2001. *The postnational constellation: political essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Week 6 March 3

- *Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." Pp. 109-143 in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- *Fraser, Nancy. "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" The Case of Habermas and

Gender,” pp. 113-143, in Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

*Cohen and Arato. “Discourse Ethics and Civil Society,” pp. 345-420 in Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.

Mouffe, Chantal.

Week 7 March 10

*Calhoun, Craig. “Contemporary Sociological Theory: Pierre Bourdieu,”

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinctions*.

Week 8 March 17

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinctions*.

*Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14:723-744.

*Wacquant, Loic. 1989. "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu." *Sociological Theory* 7:26-63.

Week 9 April 7

*Alexander, Jeffrey. The Reality of Reduction: the Failed Synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu,” pp. 128-217 in Jeffrey Alexander, *Fin the Siecle Social Theory*. London: Verso., 1995

*King, Anthony. 2000. "Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus." *Sociological theory* 18:417-433.

*Fowler, Bridget. 2003. "Reading Pierre Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination*: Notes Towards and Intersectional Analysis of Gender, Culture and Class." *Cultural Studies* 17:468-494.

Week 10 April 14

*Foucault, Michel. “Governmentality,” pp. 87-104 in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* ed. Graham Curchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

Week 11 April 21

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

*Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures" pp. 78-108 and "Truth and Power," pp. 109-133 and "Power and Strategies," pp. 134-145 in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings* (edited by Colin Gordon), 1980.

*Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power," pp. 8-26 in *Readings in Contemporary Political Sociology* ed. Kate Nash. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000.

*Foucault, Michel. "What is Enlightenment?" in the *Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Week 12 April 28

*Fraser, Nancy. "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," pp. 17-34 and Michel Foucault: "Young Conservative"? Pp. 34-54 in Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

*Pickett, Brent. 1996. "Foucault and the Politics of Resistance." *Polity* 28:445-466.

*White, Stephen . 1986. "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory." *American Political Science Review* 80 (2):419-432.

*Hunt, Alan. 1993. "Foucault's Expulsion of Law: Toward a Retrieval." *Law and Social Inquiry* 17:1-38.

Week 13 May 5

Alexander, Jeffrey. 2006. *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.