

Emory University
Department of Sociology
Fall Semester 2021
MW 2:30-3:45 p.m./Callaway C101

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Office Hours: MW 11:15-noon

SOC 457: DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Content and goals

This course shows how sociological theory developed. We will analyze, apply, and compare the ideas of major theorists and place those ideas in context. The main purpose of the course is to convey and reflect on the rich and diverse insights contained in sociological theory. Especially with regard to classic texts, we will repeatedly address three central problems:

1. The problem of explanation: How can we best account for how people do things together and how societies work?
2. The problem of modernity: How can we best describe, understand, and assess the rise of modern societies?
3. The problem of relevance: How can theory provide guidance on how to make society work better and to foster effective reform?

As we turn to contemporary developments, using recent scholarship, we will address three other issues to gauge the strengths of different types of theory:

1. The issue of testing: How can we critically evaluate a theoretical argument in light of empirical evidence?
2. The issue of advancement: How can we extend and improve classic arguments by modifying them creatively?
3. The issue of application: How can we use theory to make sense of contemporary trends?

Throughout the semester, we will engage critically with all authors. By the end of the course, you will have a good sense of the main lines of sociological thought and the way they inform important work in sociology. You should also be able to address current issues with the intellectual tools provided by the major theorists and their successors. This writing-intensive course will help you refine your academic skills.

Readings

All readings (see Schedule below) will be supplied via Canvas or on Course Reserves.

Requirements

1. **Two reflective essays**, responding to prompts, about 4 pages, synthesizing course material, procedure TBA/take-home component to be decided, the first worth 20% of your final grade, the second 25%. Due dates: 10/6 and 12/13.
2. **Four mini-assignments**, about one page each, testing a theoretical argument, each worth 5% of final grade. You will get five assignments but you may skip one. Guidelines TBA.
3. **Four essays**, about 4 pages each. All will be graded, but **only the best three** will count toward your final grade, worth 10% each. To satisfy the College writing requirement in this course your average grade for all assignments must be at least a C. Guidelines TBA.
 - Essays form the basis for a conversation; active participation can enhance your grade.
 - Essays that are seriously incomplete (e.g., because they do not cover all parts of the assignment) or do not reflect due care (e.g., because of sloppy writing) will be graded F and count as one of the three assignments that determine the assignment grade.
 - The TA and I stand ready to provide assistance. We especially encourage you to submit a draft of one of the first two essays 48 hours before it is due, so that we can provide timely feedback. We will also comment on submitted essays.
 - The schedule lists five assignments; you may choose to skip one. When you do skip, you must still post a brief, approximately 150-word outline to indicate that you have thought about the subject and as a basis for your contribution to discussion.
4. **Participation and attendance**, more than two unexcused absences leads to automatic zero, you get credit for informed answers to questions and voluntary contributions, 5%.

Grading

- All work will be graded on a 100-point scale
- Letter grade equivalents are as follows: 92-100: A; 90-91.99: A-; 88-89.99: B+, etc.
- Example of final grade calculation: first reflective essay: 90; second reflective essay: 84; assignments: 95, 95, 95, 95; best three essays: 90, 90, 90; participation: 100. So final grade is: $.2 \times 90 + .25 \times 84 + .05 \times 95 \times 4 + .1 \times 90 \times 3 + .05 \times 100 = 90$ (A-).

Honor code

Follow the Honor Code, especially with regard to plagiarism. Please note:

The honor code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, and to commit any form of academic misconduct. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the Honor Council.

Assistance

- I am available to meet during office hours, usually right after class, and at other times by appointment, including for coffee or a meal (e.g., Wednesday afternoon or early evening), to discuss issues pertaining to the course or anything else you would like to bring up.

- The TA, Talia Crowther, is also available to answer questions and can be especially helpful in giving feedback on essay ideas and drafts. See Canvas for contact information.
- For assistance with writing or English as a second language, consult tutors in the [Emory Writing Center](#).
- For assistance with access or disability issues, contact adsrstudent@emory.edu.

Schedule of sessions, readings, and tasks

- The schedule is subject to minor adjustments, changes, or additions
- Italicized book titles and most article titles refer to excerpts, all posted on Canvas or Course Reserves
- Class dates marked in boldface will consist of two parts, to discuss testing and advancing theory
- Plan to spend about two hours preparing for each class, occasionally more

8/25 Introduction
Lechner, "Introduction" [strongly recommended]

Unit 1 Adam Smith and exchange theory

8/30 How do we form and follow norms?
Lechner, "Adam Smith" [this contains background and all Smith text excerpts]
Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* [excerpts in the posted Smith Readings]
Martha Nussbaum, "'Mutilated and Deformed': Adam Smith on the Material Basis of Human Dignity"

9/1 What causes economic and social progress?
Smith, *Wealth of Nations*
Jennifer Pitts, "Adam Smith on Societal Development and Colonial Rule"

9/8 Is it really true that labor markets and features of jobs explain income inequality?
Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, section on income inequality; mini-assignment 1
If we have a basic propensity to exchange, what does that mean for social life?
Lechner, "Exchange"

9/13 Does globalization lead to greater integration and equality?
Essay 1: Smith and globalization today

9/15 Interlude: Comte and positivist theory
Lechner, "Auguste Comte" [with Comte text excerpt]

Unit 2 Karl Marx and historical-materialist theory

9/20 What are the driving forces in history?
Lechner, "Karl Marx"; Marx, *The German Ideology*, other short texts

- 9/22 What makes social classes agents of change?
Marx (Engels), *The Communist Manifesto*, *Capital* Vol. 1, other short texts
- 9/27** Is it really true that class drives social conflict and capitalism is bound to fail?
Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*; mini-assignment 2
Can Marxian theory explain global change?
Pranav Jani, "Karl Marx, Eurocentrism, and the 1857 Revolt in British India"
Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Modern World-System as a Capitalist World Economy"
- 9/29 Is capitalism becoming more unequal and exploitative?
Essay 2: Accumulation and exploitation in the gig economy [Critics vs. defenders]
- 10/4 Does Marxian theory account for racial inequality?
W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, "Marxism and the Negro"
- 10/6 **First reflective essay due**
- Unit 3 Emile Durkheim and social-realist theory
- 10/6 How do social forces shape religious life, and many other things?
Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
Lechner, "Ritual"
- 10/13 How can a complex society create solidarity, and remedy its "pathologies"?
Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, "Individualism and the Intellectuals"
- 10/18** Is it really true that lack of integration increases suicide (rates)?
Durkheim, *Suicide*; mini-assignment 3
How does interaction produce commitment and solidarity?
Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*
- 10/20 Does new technology bring us together or drive us apart?
Joseph Simpson et al., "Virtual Rituals: Community, Emotion, and Ritual in Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games"
Essay 3: Technology, ritual, and cohesion [Debate pro and con]
- Unit 4 Georg Simmel, George H. Mead, Erving Goffman and interactionist theory
- 10/25 How do forms of interaction work in general and change in modern cities?
Simmel, *Sociology*; "The Metropolis and Mental Life"
- 10/27 How does the self emerge in interaction and change in modern society?
Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*; "The Problem of Society"

- 11/1 How does the interaction order work?
Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, "The Interaction Order"
- 11/3** Is it really true that we develop a self by taking the attitudes of others?
Mead; mini-assignment 4
How does interaction shape racial identities?
Anne W. Rawls, "'Race' as an Interaction Order Phenomenon"
- 11/8 How does gender get constructed?
Theresa Wobbe, "Elective Affinities: Georg Simmel and Marianne Weber on Gender and Modernity"
Barbara L. Marshall, *Engendering Modernity: Feminism, Social Theory and Social Change*
Candace West/Don Zimmerman, "Doing Gender"
- 11/10 Are we forming different selves/selves differently in (post-)modern society?
Essay 4: Simmel, Mead, Goffman, and social selves today
- Unit 5 Max Weber and historical-interpretive theory
- 11/15 How can we best understand human action?
Weber, *Economy and Society*, "Origins of Industrial Capitalism"
- 11/17 What caused the "rise of the West," and was it a good thing?
Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, "Science as a Vocation"
- 11/22 Is it really true that social science can point the way to the good life/a better society?
Weber, "Science as a Vocation"; mini-assignment 5
Michael Burawoy et al., *Public Sociology*
- 11/29 Is the "color line" a form of class or status inequality?
Weber, "Class, Status, and Party"
Oliver C. Cox, "Race and Caste"
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*
Lechner, "Status"
- 12/1 Why not China? Or: Is theory Eurocentric?
R. Bin Wong, "The Chinese State, Social Order and Economic Change"
Dingxin Zhao, "Max Weber and Patterns of Chinese History"
Jack Barbalet, "The Religion of China and the Prospects of Chinese Capitalism"
Jack Barbalet, *Confucianism and the Chinese Self: Re-Examining Max Weber's China*

12/6 What does rationalization mean today?

John W. Meyer and Patricia Bromley, "The Worldwide Expansion of "Organization""

George Ritzer, "Credit Cards, Fast Food Restaurants, and Rationalization"

Essay 5: Examining how one sector is becoming "McDonaldized" [Debate]

12/13 **Second reflective essay**