

**SOC6101HS: GRADUATE SEMINAR
CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY
Professor Vanina Leschziner
Department of Sociology
University of Toronto
Winter 2019**

Location and Time: Sociology Department, Room 240, Tuesday 12-2pm

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Course Description and Objectives

This is a course on contemporary sociological theory. What this actually entails, however, is less clear than it might appear at first glance. For some, contemporary sociological theory is simply the theory that begins just where classical sociological theory ends. When did the transition happen? It is thought to fall anywhere from what came after Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel, to the new path that began with Parsons. For others, contemporary sociological theory is the kind of theory that is most relevant to today's sociological scholarship, whether it is work that was published seventy years ago, or yesterday. Still for others, contemporary sociological theory refers strictly to what is being produced at the present moment. Just as there is no consensus on what is "contemporary," neither is there consensus on what is distinctly sociological about social theory, or even on what "theory" really is.

The professorial complaint that no course can do justice to a whole sub-discipline in one semester is not uncommon, but it is acutely true in the case of contemporary sociological theory. In this way, syllabi in this area all too frequently lead to the plaintive "how is it possible that x is not in the reading list?" This syllabus will surely be no exception. It takes a necessarily partial stab at the wide and messy world of contemporary sociological theory. It does so by combining an overview of the major perspectives developed after 1920, and the theoretically inclined scholarship that is most influential on current sociological research (whether the influence is positive or negative, explicit or implicit, well-informed or misguided). This is the kind of literature that will best prepare you to engage in your own sociological research and develop your research agenda as you move forward in the graduate program.

This course has several goals. First, to acquaint you with a wide range of knowledge that is foundational to current sociological research. This means leaving aside -- for the most part -- theoretical work specific to sub-disciplines (i.e., theories that are fundamental to political sociology, gender, or the sociology of culture). It is understood that you will learn the theories relevant to your area(s) of specialization in the courses specific to such area(s). Reading literature that is at the foundation of current sociological research will enable you to think about your dissertation project more broadly and creatively, regardless of your area of interest and empirical approach. Even the most purely empirical research requires a theoretical contribution (at least for publication in the better sociology journals), so all of you, including the least theoretically inclined, will benefit from gaining knowledge of the important theoretical debates that have shaped sociology in the past century. Thus, an important goal of this course is to

provide you with theoretical and analytical tools that you will be able to use as you engage in your own research.

Expectations

As a graduate seminar, I assume you are invested in learning, and eager to participate in class discussion. This means that I take it as a given that you will attend every class meeting, do all the required readings thoroughly and deeply in advance of every class, and come to class well prepared to actively participate in discussions. My role will be to provide background (when needed), try to clarify and explain issues that are unclear, and help to make connections among readings. Each class will be largely devoted to critical discussion and assessment of the material. I expect you to come with an open mind (i.e., not letting your prior theoretical and substantive preferences color your assessment of readings), and provide constructive contributions to the discussion.

Course Requirements and Grading

- 1. class participation 10%
- 2. class presentation on assigned date 20%
- 3. six (6) short memos 30%
- 4. paper 40%

1. Given that you are expected to do all the readings before the class for which they are assigned, and to participate actively in class, you will be evaluated not on the quantity of your participation, but on quality. Your goal is to engage the main arguments of the readings, and demonstrate critical thinking in your comments. Original thinking is even better. Important questions and concerns are more than welcome.

2. You are expected to present the required readings and lead discussion on an assigned date. Plan on about 30 minutes for your presentation, and be prepared to jumpstart and lead discussion after your presentation. Your presentation should have an analytical focus on the main arguments presented in the readings, and critical assessments of those arguments. You will be evaluated mostly on your ability to critically engage with the readings, and on your ability to facilitate discussion and respond to your classmates comments. You are expected to circulate a handout with a summary of the readings, and a few questions to jumpstart discussion, by 5pm on the Monday prior to the day on which you are scheduled to present. This is a hard deadline; late submission will incur a late penalty.

3. You are responsible for submitting six (6) short memos (2 pp., single-spaced, 12 point type, maximum) on a class' readings at the beginning of the class that deals with those readings. View these as "reaction papers," neither a summary of the texts, nor final masterpieces. Your reaction papers should identify important themes, draw connections, and/or point to analytical problems. The papers should raise issues that should be part of the seminar discussion. These memos need not be perfectly polished essays, but a critical response to the key points and implications of the readings. Importantly, they should engage more than one point, and more than one of the class' readings. You should consider them as a platform from where to improve your argument-

building skills, and gradually develop your own positions. Each memo is worth 5% of the final grade.

4. You are required to submit a paper at the end of the term. The ideal choice would be for you to write a paper that can serve as the theoretical foundation for your dissertation project, the theoretical component of your research practicum project, or a possible publication. Think of the paper as a chance for you to take stock of what you have learned so far and lay the groundwork for an original theoretical contribution to your area of specialization, whether in your dissertation or a publication. The paper should be about 20 pages double-spaced. We will discuss more details about the paper during the semester.

Readings

Book selections will be available on the Quercus course website, under “Modules.” Journal articles are available through the University of Toronto Libraries website.

Class Schedule

Week 1

January 8

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY?

And Why Should We Care?

Readings

Joas, Hans and Wolfgang Knöbl (2009). “What is Theory?,” in *Social Theory: Twenty Introductory Lectures (ST)*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press (pp. 1-19).

Martin, John Levi (2015). “On Theory in Sociology,” in *Thinking Through Theory*. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (pp. 1-44).

Supplemental

Abend, Gabriel (2008). “The Meaning of ‘Theory’.” *Sociological Theory* 26: 173-199.

Levine, Donald D. (2015). *Social Theory as a Vocation: Genres of Theory Work in Sociology*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Swedberg, Richard (2012). “Theorizing in Sociology and Social Science: Turning to the Context of Discovery.” *Theory and Society* 41: 1-40.

Swedberg, Richard (2014). *The Art of Social Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 2

January 15

THE BIRTH OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: ACTION THEORY

Sociology's Most Popular Straw Man

Readings

Parsons, Talcott (1935). "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory." *International Journal of Ethics* 45: 282-316.

Parsons, Talcott (1937). "The Theory of Action." *The Structure of Social Action*. Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press (pp. 43-86).

Parsons, Talcott (1938). "The Role of Ideas in Social Action." *American Sociological Review* 3: 652-664.

Joas, Hans, and Wolfgang Knöbl (2009). "The Classical Attempt at Synthesis." *ST* (pp. 20-42).

Supplemental

Parsons, Talcott (1937). *The Structure of Social Action*. Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press (pp. 3-15; 87-125; 727-775).

Alexander, Jeffrey C. (1987). "Parsons' First Synthesis," "The Revolt against the Parsonian Synthesis." *Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory Since World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press (pp. 22-35; 111-126).

Camic, Charles (1987). "The Making of a Method: A Historical Reinterpretation of the Early Parsons." *American Sociological Review* 52: 421-439.

Week 3

January 22

NEO-UTILITARIANISM AND RATIONAL CHOICE

Sociology's Most Popular Straw Man has Good Company

Readings

Becker, Gary (1976). "The Economic Approach to Human Behavior." *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 3-14).

Olson, Mancur Jr. (1965). "A Theory of Groups and Organizations." *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press (pp. 5-52).

Blau, Peter (1964). "Social Exchange." *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: J. Wiley (pp. 88-115).

Schelling, Thomas (1978). "Micromotives and Macrobehavior." *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*. New York: Norton (pp. 9-44).

Coleman, James S. (1988). "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: S95-S120.

Supplemental

Joas, Hans, and Wolfgang Knöbl (2009). "Neo-Utilitarianism." *ST* (pp. 94-122).

Coleman, James S. (1990). *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Sen, Amartya (1977). "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6: 317-344.

Somers, Margaret R. (1998). "'We're No Angels': Realism, Rational Choice, and Relationality in Social Science." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 722-784.

Week 4

January 29

PRAGMATISM

The First Introduction of Creativity into Habitual Action

Readings

Dewey, John ([1922] 2002). "The Place of Habit in Conduct." *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books (pp. 14-88).

Whitford, Josh (2002). "Pragmatism and the Untenable Dualism of Means and Ends: Why Rational Choice Theory does not Deserve Paradigmatic Privilege." *Theory and Society* 31: 325-363.

Joas, Hans (1996). "Situation-Corporeality-Sociality: The Fundamentals of a Theory of the Creativity of Action." *The Creativity of Action*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (pp. 145-195).

Supplemental

Dewey, John ([1922] 2002). "The Place of Impulse in Conduct." *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books (pp. 89-171).

Dewey, John (1939). *Theory of Valuation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Gross, Neil (2009). "A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms." *American Sociological Review* 74: 358-379.

Joas, Hans (1993). "Pragmatism in American Sociology." *Pragmatism and Social Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 14-51).

Week 5

February 5

INTERACTIONISM, SYMBOLIC AND OTHERWISE

Life's a Theater

Readings

Blumer, Herbert (1969). "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism." *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press (pp. 1-60).

Goffman, Erving (1959). "Introduction," "Performances," "Regions and Region Behavior, and "Conclusion." *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books (pp 1-76, 106-140, 238-255).

Goffman, Erving (1967). "Introduction." *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. New York: Pantheon Books (pp.1-3).

Goffman, Erving (1974). "Introduction" and selections from "The Anchoring of Activity." *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper Colophon Books (pp. 1-16, 247-257).

Goffman, Erving (1983). "The Interaction Order. American Sociological Association 1982 Presidential Address." *American Sociological Review* 48: 1-17.

Supplemental

Howard Becker (1953). "Becoming a Marijuana User." *American Journal of Sociology* 59: 235-242.

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Erving Goffman (1967). "Embarrassment and Social Organization." *Interaction Ritual Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. New York: Pantheon Books (pp. 97-112).

Hochschild, Arlie R. (1979). "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure." *American Journal of Sociology* 85: 551-575.

Week 6

February 12

ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Life's a Theater, and a Comedy Club

Readings

Garfinkel, Harold (1967). "Preface," "What is Ethnomethodology?," and "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activity." *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press (pp. vii-xi, 1-34, 35-75).

Garfinkel, Harold (1974). "On the Origins of the Term Ethnomethodology." *Ethnomethodology: Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Education (pp. 15-18).

Heritage, John (1984). "The Phenomenological Input." *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge UK, New York: Polity Press (pp. 37-74).

Hilbert, Richard A. (1990). "Ethnomethodology and the Micro-Macro Order." *American Sociological Review* 55: 794-808.

Supplemental

Maynard, Douglas W. (2012). "Memorial Essay: Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011): A Sociologist for the Ages." *Symbolic Interaction* 35: 88-96.

Kessler, Suzanne J, and Wendy McKenna (1978). *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

West, Candace, and Don Zimmerman H. (1987). "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1: 125-151.

Week 7

February 19

HAPPY READING WEEK!

Week 8

February 26

STRUCTURALISM

The Appeal and Perils of Reified Structures

Readings

Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred R. (1940). "On Social Structure." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 70: 1-12.

Nadel, Siegfried F. (1957). "Preliminaries." *The Theory of Social Structure*. London: Cohen & West (pp. 1-19).

Porpora, Douglas V. (1989). "Four Concepts of Social Structure." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 19: 195-211.

Maryanski, Alexandra, and Jonathan H. Turner (1991). "The Offspring of Functionalism: French and British Structuralism." *Sociological Theory* 9: 106-115.

Joas, Hans and Wolfgang Knöbl (2009). "Structuralism and Poststructuralism." *Social Theory: Twenty Introductory Lectures*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press (pp. 339-370).

Supplemental

de Saussure, Ferdinand (1966). Selections from "Introduction," and "General Principles." *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill (pp.7-17, 65-70, 81-87).

Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1966). "Social Structure." *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books (pp. 277-323).

Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1966). "The Science of the Concrete," and "Categories, Elements, Species, Numbers." *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 1-33, 135-160).

Foucault, Michel (1970). "Preface," selections from "Classifying," and "The Limits of Representation." *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books (pp. xv-xxiv, 128-138, 157-162, 226-232).

Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Paul Rabinow ([1982] 2016). "Introduction." *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. New York: Routledge (pp. xiii-xxiv).

Giddens, Anthony (1987). "Structuralism, Post-structuralism, and the Production of Culture." *Social Theory Today*, edited by Anthony Giddens and Jonathan H. Turner. Stanford: Stanford University Press (pp. 195-223).

Week 9

March 5

AGENCY, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, POWER

Masterful Syntheses or Further Confusion?

Readings

Mann, Michael (2012). "Societies as Organized Power Networks (vol. 1)," "Introduction," "Economic and Ideological Power Relations," and "Theoretical Conclusions: Classes, States, Nations, and the Sources of Social Power (vol. 2)," *The Sources of Social Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press (v.1 pp. 1-33; v.2 pp.1-43, 123-139).

Giddens, Anthony (1984). "Introduction," and "Elements of the Theory of Structuration," *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press (pp. xiii-xxxiii, 1-40).

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

Supplemental

Giddens, Anthony (1979). "Structuralism and the Theory of the Subject," and "Agency, Structure." *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press (pp. 9-48, 49-95).

Thompson, John B. (1989). "The Theory of Structuration." *Social Theory of Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and his Critics*, edited by David Held and John B. Thompson. Cambridge UK, New York: Cambridge University Press (pp. 56-76).

Joas, Hans (1993). "A Sociological Transformation of the Philosophy of Praxis: Anthony Giddens's Theory of Structuration." *Pragmatism and Social Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 172-187).

Lizardo, Omar (2010). "Beyond the Antinomies of Structure: Levi-Strauss, Giddens, Bourdieu, and Sewell." *Theory and Society* 39: 651-688.

Week 10

March 12

FIELD THEORY

The Epitome of a Masterful Synthesis (or Confusion), French Style

Readings

Bourdieu, Pierre (1993). "Some Properties of Fields." *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage (pp. 72-77).

Bourdieu, Pierre (1986). "The Forms of Capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press (pp. 241-258).

Wacquant, Loïc J. D. (1993). "From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on La Noblesse d'État." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 10: 19-44.

Bourdieu Pierre (1984). "Introduction," selections from "The Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles," and "Conclusion: Classes and Classifications." *Distinction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press (pp. 1-7, 169-177, 466-484).

Bourdieu, Pierre (1993). "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed." *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press (pp. 29-73).

Bourdieu, Pierre (1990). "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices." *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (pp. 52-65).

Supplemental

Bourdieu Pierre (1984). "The Sense of Distinction," "Cultural Goodwill," and "The Choice of the Necessary." *Distinction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press (pp. 260-396).

Bourdieu, Pierre (1988). "Types of Capital and Forms of Power." *Homo Academicus*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (pp. 73-127).

Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc J. D. Wacquant (1992). "Toward a Social Praxeology: The Structure and Logic of Bourdieu's Sociology." *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 1-60).

Week 11

March 19

STRUCTURES, NETWORKS, INSTITUTIONS

The Last Theoretical Developments of the 20th Century

Readings

Breiger, Ronald L. (1974). "The Duality of Persons and Groups." *Social Forces* 53: 181-190.

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

Meyer, John W. and Brian Rowan (1977). "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 340-363.

DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell (1983). "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48: 147-160.

DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell (1991). "Introduction." *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 1-38).

Supplemental

Granovetter, Mark (1985). "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91: 481-510.

Emirbayer, Mustafa (1997). "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 281-317.

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

Friedland, Roger and Robert Alford (1991). "Bringing Society Back in: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions." *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 232-263).

Week 12

March 26

CONTEMPORARY CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

The Current State of Affairs: Where has all this theory led us?

Readings

Camic, Charles and Neil Gross. "Contemporary Developments in Sociological Theory: Current Projects and Conditions of Possibility." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 453-476.

Selections from recent issues of social theory journals and books. Suggestions welcome.

Week 13

April 2

CONTEMPORARY CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

The Current State of Affairs: Enlightenment or Confusion?

Readings

Selections from recent issues of social theory journals and books. Suggestions welcome.