

**Sociology 97:**  
**Tutorial on Sociological Theory**  
<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/5079>  
Spring 2014

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**Course Goals:**

Sociologists are a diverse group but they are all bound by one common goal: a desire to understand how society works. Although sociologists adopt a multitude of approaches to understand the social world, they all ask a similar basic question: How and why are patterns of social organization created, maintained, and changed? In their quest to explain why events in the social world occur and why social forms should exist, sociologists develop theories—attempts to understand those properties of, and processes involved in, creating, maintaining, and changing patterns of social organization.

This course introduces you to the thinkers, ideas, concepts, and concerns that together comprise the fields of classical and contemporary sociological theory. Although it can seem as though there is a great distance between empirical research on contemporary societies and the more abstract claims of classical sociological theorists, no good sociology is atheoretical, and any engagement with the history of the discipline will show that its best empirical studies address, borrow from, build upon, or are otherwise in dialogue with themes first laid out in the texts we will read this semester. Because this is so, learning about theory—and classical theory, in particular—is a means to better understand sociology more generally. The theorists we will be grappling with had radically different conceptions of what sociology is and of the purposes to which it should be put, and thought about the social world in original and influential ways.

Specifically, we aim to:

1. Map the central theoretical traditions within sociology.
2. Apply, analyze, and evaluate the key concepts from these traditions.
3. Confront original theoretical and empirical texts.
4. Connect theoretical argument and empirical research.
5. Understand sociological theory as a critical style of thought.
6. Develop specific skills in theoretical discourse.
7. Engage sociological theory in writing.
8. Advance understanding of what sociology is fundamentally *about*.

**Required Readings:**

We privilege original texts, along with short selections from original texts in edited readers. All required books are on reserve at the Lamont Library, and are available for purchase from the COOP and from many

on- and off-line booksellers. Readings not in one of the required texts will be posted to the course website, which can be accessed by entering your Harvard ID and PIN.

1. Calhoun, Craig, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk, eds. 2012. *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
2. Durkheim, Emile. [1957] 1979. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. New York: Free Press.
3. Gerth, H. H. and C. Wright Mills, eds. 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
4. Giddens, Anthony, ed. 1972. *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Tucker, Robert C., ed. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Norton.
6. Weber, Max, and Talcott Parsons. 2003. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications. **(Please buy the correct edition of this book ISBN: 048642703X)**

### **Academic Integrity and Collaboration:**

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

### **Late Policy for Assignments:**

One partial grade will be deducted from papers that are turned in late (for example, an A- paper would be given a B+). Another partial grade will be taken off for each additional day that the paper is late. Extensions can be given in the case of medical emergency or religious observance. **All requests for extensions should go directly to Professor Lamont and must be made in advance of the relevant deadline.**

### **Grading:**

In evaluating written work, we look for:

1. Focus; cogency of argumentation
2. Use of appropriate logic and evidence
3. Clarity and organization
4. Writing style and format
5. Originality and depth of engagement

In assigning grades, we apply the following criteria:

- Work in the **A range** exhibits strikingly thoughtful, logical, and coherent engagement, expressed in a clear, cogent, and error-free way. Only work that makes excellent use of evidence and offers insightful and accurate analysis will be considered for an A grade.
- Work in the **A- range** exhibits mastery of the material and offers a good analysis expressed in a clear, cogent, and error-free way.
- Work in the **B range** exhibits solid effort, with some minor errors of logic or argumentation, or some minor stylistic weaknesses. Such work indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a

good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement.

- Work in the **C range** exhibits inadequate understanding of the material and inadequate analysis, or deficient, error-plagued writing.
- See the Registrar's online information regarding other grades.

Your final course grade will be calculated by converting each of your assignment letter grades according to Harvard's standardized numeric scale (A = 4.00, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.00, B- = 2.67, C+ = 2.33, C = 2.00, C- = 1.67, D+ = 1.33, D = 1.00, D- = 0.67) and weighting. The weights are below.

1. Discussion section participation (25% of your grade)
2. Three short papers, the first two are 3 pages and the last is 4 pages (5% each)
3. One classical theory essay, 10-12 pages (30% of your grade)
4. One contemporary theory essay, 10-12 pages (30% of your grade)

### **Assignments:**

The aim of the written assignments is to develop comfort with writing about theory, and to apply theory to contemporary social issues and problems. Each of the short papers and essays you write must make a clearly stated argument, supported with appropriate evidence. The short papers will build on each other in a progressive way, beginning with summary and moving on to comparison and critique. The two longer essays will incorporate all of these skills. Needless to say, your papers must be free of grammatical and typographical errors. They will be graded on both content and style. The citations and bibliographies should conform to the American Sociological Association standard. See the ASA Style Guide, available in the Lamont Library Reference Room Ready Reference HM 73 .A54. On writing, we recommend Howard Becker's *Writing for Social Scientists*. All assignments must be *double spaced*, in 12 point font, with 1 inch margins all around. Your bibliography does not count as part of your page limits. An unfortunate but necessary note on plagiarism: In accord with Harvard University policy, plagiarism results in an automatic F in the course and will be subject to disciplinary action by the College. Know that it is our responsibility to be vigilant in this regard. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism (including issues of collaboration), please ask. Indeed, if you have any questions at all about the course or the assignments, please ask.

#### Short Papers (5 percent each of your final grade)

You are responsible for submitting three short papers throughout the first several weeks of the semester. Each short paper will focus on one of the three classical theorists (Marx, Weber, Durkheim) and is due shortly after the final class discussion of the theorist.

#### Short Paper 1: Marx - Summary (maximum 3 pages)

Your goal in this paper is to demonstrate that you understand Marx by summarizing the readings. What are the most important things Marx says about society? What does Marx say sociologists should investigate, and how should we go about this investigation? What key concepts does Marx use in answering sociological questions?

In a three page paper you cannot cover everything a theorist says, so the main challenge here is *selection and synthesis*. You should support your main points with grounded analysis that includes *effective summaries*,

*paraphrasing, and short, direct quotations from the appropriate texts.* A good paper will reflect a close and grounded analysis of the readings rather than offering general or vague observations such as “Marx was an important thinker,” “According to Marxism, society is complex,” etc.

You will address, specifically, Marx’s idea of historical materialism and his analysis of capitalism (origin, qualities, or consequences). In doing so you could address the following concepts: mode of production, exploitation/surplus value extraction, class conflict, and the internal contradictions of capitalism.

### Short Paper 2: Weber – Summary and Comparison (maximum 3-4 pages)

In this paper you will demonstrate that you understand Weber by summarizing the readings. What are the most important things Weber says about society? What does Weber say sociologists should investigate, and how should we go about this investigation? What key concepts does Weber use in answering sociological questions? As with the first paper, a challenge of the assignment is selection and synthesis.

You should carefully reflect on what you want to emphasize and why. Avoid a bland list-like, concept-by-concept comparison. Instead, *focus on the theorists’ overall approach. Connect and relate concepts to each other in a continuous way* so that your paper holds together as a single coherent statement.

You should consider addressing the following concepts: verstehen approach and social action, ideal types, rationality, capitalism (origin, qualities, and consequences), power and social stratification (class, status, party), social closure, domination, legitimacy, bureaucracy.

In addition to summarizing Weber, you will compare his account of the development of capitalism and modern social institutions to that of Marx. Imagine Weber and Marx having an actual conversation or written correspondence about their differing perspectives and approaches. How is their thinking different or similar concerning the origins and social consequences of capitalism? How did each see power being established and expressed within modern society? Does Weber’s understanding of social closure and forms of domination contribute to a more complex model of power and authority than we find in Marx? How or how not? What might Marx say about Weber’s understanding of the Protestant ethic? How does Weber’s concept of *Verstehen* compare to Marx’s materialist method?

A good paper will build upon the type of close analysis and summary demonstrated in the first paper, while effectively incorporating a nuanced comparative perspective.

### Short Paper 3: Durkheim – Summary and Critique (maximum 4 pages)

The final short paper gives you the opportunity to explore the ideas of Durkheim at the same time as you develop a more critical, argumentative stance. This paper is a precursor to the upcoming Classical Theory Essay where you will choose the one classical theorist that you find the most persuasive and explore their ideas in more depth.

The first task of this paper is to demonstrate that you understand Durkheim by summarizing the readings. As with the first two papers your aim is to synthesize: What are the most important things Durkheim says about society? What does Durkheim say sociologists should investigate, and how should we go about this investigation? What key concepts does Durkheim use in answering sociological questions?

You should consider addressing the following concepts: social facts, institutions, religion and moral community, collective representations, division of labor, social solidarity, anomie.

The second component of the paper asks you to critically explore Durkheim's most salient ideas and to argue which ideas hold more water – and why. You should demonstrate your ability to *think critically* about the material. What are the limitations of the readings, and how could these limitations be improved? What are its strengths, and why are these strengths important? The objective is to provide a purposeful and reflective judgment/evaluation of the readings.

As you formulate this critique you can use your comparative skills honed in the second paper. (Paper 3 is slightly longer than the others, but your comparative analysis will have to be direct and concise.) As with Paper 2, imagine Durkheim, Weber, and Marx conversing together about their major ideas. Comparative questions to consider as you formulate your critique include: How would Marx understand and possibly critique Durkheim's emphasis on social solidarity? How would Weber assess Durkheim's understanding of power and social influence? How might Marx and Weber each understand Durkheim's characterization of the division of labor? How does Durkheim's exploration of religion differentiate him from Marx and Weber?

A good paper will draw from the skills in summarizing and comparison that you demonstrated in the first two papers while incorporating your own critical voice.

#### Classical Theory Essay (30 percent of your final grade)

For this assignment, you will write a 10-12 page essay in which you (1) apply the ideas of one classical theorist to an important sociological phenomenon, problem, or issue; (2) contrast your theorist of choice to the others (i.e. other classical theorists we have considered in the course); and (3) present an argument for why your theorist offers the best understanding. Your argument should be supported with evidence from the writings of the theorist you have chosen. You might use Marx to analyze the rise of the Occupy Movement in the US, or Weber to explain Obama's election, or Durkheim to shed light on student experiences at Harvard. You can write about what the classical theorists would say about a reading from another course that interests you. The topic is up to you—but you must get your TF's approval of your topic (and sources) two weeks in advance of the due date. The goals of this assignment are to deepen the connections between theory and social issues, to sharpen the contrasts among the classical theoretical approaches, and to develop your own argumentative voice. You must explore the limitations of your chosen theorist but also show how your preferred theorist offers a theoretical vantage point superior to those of the other classical theorists.

Draw from the skills that you have developed through writing the short papers: selection and synthesis of key ideas; effective summary; comparative analysis; critique supported with evidence.

#### Contemporary Theory Essay (30 percent of your final grade)

Follow the prompt for the Classical Theory Essay above, but, this time, engage a sociological topic from the perspective of your favorite contemporary theorist. You may choose to write about the same topic you selected for the classical theory essay, or you can pick a new one. As before, compare your favorite theorist to two others—but these should be selected from the contemporary theorists. It is important that you select theorists from three different weeks, as this will enable you to compare and contrast their roots in different theoretical traditions. Please get the TF's approval of your topic (and sources) at least one week in advance of the due date; and this essay should also be 10-12 pages in length.

## Reading Assignments:

### Week of February 3: Introduction

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. 1987. "What is Theory?" Pp. 1-21 in *Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory Since World War II*, Columbia University Press, 1-21. [Online]
- Connell, R. W. 1997. "Rise of the Social Sciences" *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6):1511–57. Pp. 1537-1557. [Online]
- Collins, Randall. 1994. "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" Pp. 3-4 in *Four Sociological Traditions*. New York City: Oxford University Press. [Online]

### Week of February 10: Karl Marx I (page numbers refer to *The Marx-Engels Reader*)

- Ritzer, George. 2007. "The Roots and nature of the Theories of Karl Marx." Pp. 21-24 in *Modern Sociological Theory*. New York City: McGraw-Hill Education. [Online]
- Singer, Peter. 2000. "The Young Hegelian." Pp.16-27 in *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*. New York City: Oxford University Press. [Online]
- Tucker, Robert C. 1978. "Marx on the History of His Opinions." Pp. 3-6 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York City: Norton Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1978. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844." Pp. 70 -93 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York City: Norton Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1978. "Theses on Feuerbach," Pp. 143-145 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York City: Norton Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1978. "The German Ideology: Part I," Pp. 149-163, 172-175, 186-188 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York City: Norton Press.

### Week of February 17: Karl Marx II (page numbers refer to *The Marx-Engels Reader*, unless noted otherwise)

- Marx, Karl. 1978. "Manifesto of the Communist Party." Pp. 469-500 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York City: Norton Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1978. "Capital, Volume One." Pp. 294-308, 319-384, 419-438 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York City: Norton Press.

### **(Marx Short Papers due to TFs by 5pm on Sunday, February 23)**

### Week of February 24: Max Weber I

- Weber, Max. 1978. "Basic Sociological Terms" Pp. 3-26 in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. University of California Press. [Online]
- Weber, Max. 1946. "Politics as a Vocation." Pp. 77-87 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. W. Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max. 1946. "Class, Status, Party." Pp. 180-195 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. W. Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max. 1946. "Bureaucracy." Pp.196-216 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. W. Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.

### Week of March 3: Max Weber II

- Weber, Max, and Talcott Parsons. 2003. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications. Pp. 35-92, 155-183.
- Khurana, Rakesh. 2011. *Searching for a Corporate Savior: The Irrational Quest for Charismatic CEOs*. Princeton University Press. Pp. 48-50, 204-206. [Online]

### **(Weber Short Papers due to TFs by 5pm on Sunday, March 9)**

### Week of March 10: Emile Durkheim I

- Durkheim, Emile. 1972. "The Field of Sociology." Pp. 51-68 in *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, edited by A. Giddens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1972. "Methods of Explanation and Analysis." Pp. 69-88 in *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, edited by A. Giddens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1972. "Forms of Social Solidarity." Pp. 123-140 in *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, edited by A. Giddens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1972. "The Division of Labour and Social Differentiation." Pp. 141-154 in *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, edited by A. Giddens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **-----Spring Break-----**

### Week of March 24: Emile Durkheim II

- Durkheim, Emile. [1951] 1979. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. New York City: Free Press. Pp. 41-53, 145-276, 297-325
- Durkheim, Emile. 1995. *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: Newly Translated By Karen E. Fields*. New York City: Free Press. Pp. 7-17 [Online]
- Durkheim, Emile. 1972. "Religion and Ritual." Pp. 219-238 in *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, edited by A. Giddens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **(Durkheim Short Papers due to TFs by 5pm on Sunday March 30)**

### Week of March 31: Rational Choice and Exchange

- Elster, Jon. 1989. "Rational Choice." Pp. 22-29 in *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Online]
- Friedman, Milton. 1953. "The Methodology of Positive Economics." Pp.16-23 in *Essays in Positive Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Online]
- Becker, Gary S. 1992. "The Economic Way of Looking at Life", Nobel Lecture, Presented at Chicago University, December 9, Chicago, IL. [Online]
- March, James G. and Herbert A. Simon. 1994. "Bounded Rationality and Satisficing." Pp. 145-151 in *Four Sociological Traditions*, edited by R. Collins. New York City: Oxford University Press. [Online]
- Olson, Mancur. 2012. "The Logic of Collective Action." Pp.124-28 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Peter M. Blau. 2012. "Exchange and Power in Social Life." Pp. 112-124 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

#### Week of April 7: Institutions, Networks and Embeddedness

- Craig Calhoun. 2012. "Introduction to Part III." Pp.159-164 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Polanyi, Karl. 1944. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Pp. 1-22. [Online]
- DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell. 2012. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Organizational Fields." Pp. 175-185 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Granovetter, Mark. 2012. "Economic Embeddedness." Pp. 165-174 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Simmel, Georg. 2012. "The Triad." Pp. 145-169 in *The Sociology of George Simmel*, edited by K. Wolff. Berkely, CA: Ulan Press. [Online]
- Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (6):1361-1366, 1371-1373, and 1378-1380. [Online]

#### **(Classical Theory Essays due to TFs by 5pm on Sunday, April 13)**

#### Week of April 14: Constructivism and Interactionism

- Calhoun, Craig. 2012. "Introduction to Part I," pp. 27-35 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Mead, George Herbert Mead. 2006. "Mind, Self and Society." Pp.152-158, 173-178 in *Pragmatism Old & New: Selected Writings*, edited by S. Haack, and R. Lane. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books [Online]
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 2011. "The Social Construction of Reality." Pp. 43-51 in *Classical Sociological Theory*, edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. [Online]
- Goffman, Erving. 2011. "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life." Pp. 46-62 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, edited by C. Calhoun, et al. NJ: Wiley. [Online]
- Goffman, Erving. 2005. "On Face-Work." Pp 5-45 in *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior*. Chicago: Aldine Transaction. [Online]
- Garfinkel, Harold. 1991. "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities." Pp 35-53 in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. [Online]

#### Week of April 21: Power

- Calhoun, Craig. 2012. "Introduction to Part IV." Pp. 223-228 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Lukes, Steven. 2012. "Power: A Radical View." Pp. 266-275 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Domhoff, G. William. 2006. "Who Rules America?" Pp 290-295 in *Who Rules America? Power and Politics, and Social Change*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. [Online]
- Foucault, Michel. 2012. "The History of Sexuality." Pp. 295-305 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Michel Foucault. 2012. "Discipline and Punish." Pp. 314-323 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.



Week of April 28: Structure and Agency

- Calhoun, Craig. 2012. "Introduction to Part VI." Pp. 325-335 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2012. "Social Space and Symbolic Space." Pp. 335-345 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2012. "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices." Pp. 345-359 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by C. Calhoun, et al. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Pp. 241-258 in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press. [Online]
- Brubaker, Rogers. 1985. "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu." *Theory and Society* 14:745-75. Pp 745-749 [Online]

**(Contemporary Theory Essays due to TFs by 5pm on Thursday, May 8)**