

Social Theory

SOCI 250

Summer Session II, 2017

Syllabus, Updated 6/26/17

Instructor: Akram Al-Turk

Email: alturkaa@live.unc.edu

Time and Location: MoTuWeTh 3:00-5:00, Greenlaw 222

Office Hours: Friday 3:00-4:00, Hamilton 218

Course Overview and Learning Objectives

What explains inequality? Why do people make the decisions that they do? How do values, norms, and culture shape individual and group choices? Why do individuals ascribe very different meanings to the same set of facts? These are some of the questions we will explore in this course. You amass a lot of information everyday – whether in class, online, or from family and friends – and the goal of theory is to provide you with explanations about all of that information. Specifically, this course is an introduction to sociological theory, which helps us understand the social world. We will read both classical theorists – many who grappled with understanding changes caused by modernity – and contemporary thinkers who’ve revised and expanded on those older theories.

I have three broad objectives for this course, and I have tried to structure the course, including assignments, in a way that will allow each of you to achieve these goals. These goals are a reflection of two things. The first is based on what I find exciting *and* challenging about “doing” social science. In short, we observe the social world (through everyday experiences, data, historical cases, etc.), and we often have multiple ideas (theories) about how or why we observe these phenomena. The challenge, then, is figuring out how these multiple explanations complement or contradict each other and making a judgment about their strengths and weaknesses. The second is that, in a world where we’re inundated with information, most of which is increasingly at everyone’s fingertips, being able to *effectively* make an argument is an important skill to have. The three goals are to:

1. Understand the key concepts and ideas made by social theorists.
2. Analyze current events, historical cases, personal experiences, and other contexts using multiple sociological theories.
3. Write (and argue) effectively and provide constructive feedback to peers.

Requirements

Attendance and Lateness

Doing well in this class requires consistent daily attendance. If you have to miss a class, please let me know ahead of time. Also, if a family emergency comes up,

please let me know.

I will not take attendance, but note that we will have a lot of in-class assignments.

We will start and end class on time, so please don't be late. If you have to leave a little early, please let me know in advance.

Readings

Required texts:

- Rojas, Fabio. 2017. *Theory for the Working Sociologist*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- All other material will be available on Sakai. They are mostly drawn from the following books:
 - Calhoun, Craig, Joseph Gerteis, James W. Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk, eds. 2012. *Classical Sociological Theory*. Third Edition. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.
 - Kivisto, Peter, ed. 2012. *Social Theory: Roots and Branches*. Fifth Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
 - Lemert, Charles, ed. 2017. *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings*. Sixth edition. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

This is a reading and writing intensive course. Please read all assigned material *before* coming to class. Our discussions and assignments in class will require you to have read and at least tried to process the readings. Some of the readings are pretty short, but even then, a lot of them are hard to process. You are expected not just to do the readings but to think about them before class. You may want to look at a sociological theory textbook or encyclopedia to help you with some of the readings.

Assignments

Your grade will be based on memos, contributions to the Sakai wiki, papers, in-class quizzes, peer feedback, and a final exam. The latter is required in all undergraduate courses. Ours will be short.

1. Memos (4) - 28%
2. Contributions to the Sakai wiki - 15%
3. Papers (2) - 30%
4. In-class quizzes - 15%
5. Peer feedback (2) - 8%
6. Final Exam - 4%

Respect

The readings in this course will, I hope, show you that there are many ways to interpret the topics we will discuss. Because of that, I hope that we will be able to have fruitful debates that will challenge all of us to compare different

theoretical viewpoints. Please keep in mind that our goal should be to debate ideas, not each other as individuals.

Grading Scale

Student performance will be graded on a 100-point scale. A grade of 93 and above will qualify for an A, 90 and above A-, 86 2/3 and above B+, 83 1/3 and above B, 80 and above B-, and so on. I do, however, reserve the right to maintain some flexibility in this scale.

Important Dates and Assignments:

(Subject to change. Percent of final grade in parentheses.)

- Friday, 6/30 - Memo #1 due at 8:00 am (7%)
- Tuesday, 7/4: No class!
- Friday, 7/7: Memo #2 due at 8:00 am (7%)
- Friday, 7/7: Paper 1, version 1 due at 11:59 pm (5%)
- Thursday, 7/13: Peer review of Paper 1, version 1 due at 12:00 pm (4%)
- Friday, 7/14: Memo #3 due at 8:00 am (7%)
- Friday, 7/14: Paper 2 problem statement due at 11:59 pm (5%)
- Wednesday, 7/19: Peer review of Paper 2 problem statement due at 12:00 pm (4%)
- Friday, 7/21: Memo #4 due at 8:00 am (7%)
- Monday, 7/24: Paper 1, final version due at 11:59 pm (10%)
- Thursday, 7/27: Paper 2, final version due at 11:59 pm (10%)
- Tuesday, 8/1: Final Exam at 3:00 pm (4%)

Administrative Issues

Academic Honesty

All assignments are subject to the university's Honor Code. Do not claim other people's work as your own and give credit for words and ideas that you quote or paraphrase. UNC-Chapel Hill has had a student-led honor system for over 100 years. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student, is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance.

Student Accommodations

UNC-Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability, or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are

coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. Please visit their website, call them at 919-962-8300, or email them. A student is welcome to initiate the registration process at any time. The process can, however, take time. ARS is particularly busy in the run-up to Finals and during Finals. Students submitting Self-ID forms at that time are unlikely to have accommodations set until the following semester. Please contact ARS as early in the semester as possible.

Electronic Device Policy

Please turn off your cell phone and store it during class. If you need to take a call for some reason, put your phone on vibrate and step out quietly. Please also store your laptop during class. Research shows that using a laptop during class hinders your learning and the learning of students around you. There may be times when we'll need either your phone or laptop, but I will let you know in advance if that is the case.

If for any reason you feel you need to use a laptop to take notes, please talk with me after the first class.

Office Hours

My office hours for this semester will be Fridays, 3:00-4:00 pm. Another good time to talk will be right after class. To make the best use of our time, try to come prepared with specific questions. But please feel free to come to my office hours just to chat!

Email Policy

I try to avoid checking emails after 6 pm and on weekends, and in that spirit, I will not email you (or reply to an email) during those times. My goal is to respond to all emails within one working day during the week or, if you email on Friday or the weekend, the following Monday. Please take this email policy into account when thinking about assignments. If you wait until the last minute and realize you have a question about an assignment, I may not get back to you in time.

Course Outline

Monday, 6/26: Introduction and Precursors – Why Sociological Theory?

First Half: Why do we need social theory?

- Rojas. Preface, p. ix-xi, xvii-xx.
- Rojas. Chapter 1, p. 1-10, 13-17.
- Comte, Auguste. 1854. *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, freely translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton & Company), excerpts.

Second Half: How “society” became a thing.

- Calhoun et al. “Introduction,” p. 6-11.

- Optional: Calhoun et al. "Part 1," p. 21-25.

Tuesday, 6/27: Early Epistemological Debates and Social Scientific Methods

First Half: Epistemology

- Kant, Immanuel. 1784. "What is Enlightenment?" in Calhoun et al.
- Marx, Karl. 1845. *The German Ideology, Part One*, in Calhoun et al., only p. 142 - top of 144.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1912. *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, in Calhoun et al.

Second Half: Methods

- Durkheim, Emile. 1895. "Sociology and Social Facts," in Lemert.
- Weber, Max. 1904. "'Objectivity' in Social Science," in Calhoun et al., only middle of p. 278 (starting with "We are now at the end. . .") - 279. - Weber, Max. 1914. "Basic Sociological Terms," in Calhoun et al., only p. 287 (starting with "(B) Social Action") - 290.

Wednesday, 6/28: Modernity, Part I

First Half: Division of labor

- Smith, Adam. 1776. *The Wealth of Nations*, in Calhoun et al., only p. 55-63.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1893. "On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity," in Kivisto.

Second Half: The "spirit" of capitalism

- Weber, Max. 1905. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in Kivisto.
- Re-read Rojas, p. 9-10.

Thursday, 6/29: Modernity, Part II

First Half: Consequences of modernity

- Marx, Karl. 1844. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Calhoun et al.
- Weber, Max. 1914. "Types of Legitimate Domination," in Lemert.

Friday, 6/30: Memo #1 due at 1:00 pm

Monday, 7/3: Power and Inequality, Part I

First Half: Power and inequality, introduction

- Mill, John Stuart. 1859. "Of Society and the Individual," in Lemert.
- Marx, Karl. 1848. "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Lemert.
- Marx, Karl. 1867. "Labor-Power and Capital," in Lemert.

Second Half: Extensions to class analysis - Rojas, p. 20-25.

- Weber, Max. 1914. "Class, Status, and Party," in Lemert.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction*, excerpts.

Tuesday, 7/4: No class! Happy Fourth of July

Wednesday, 7/5: Power and Inequality, Part II

First Half: Conflict theories

- Coser, Lewis. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*, in Kivisto.
- Collins, Randall. 1995. "The Basics of Conflict Theory," in Kivisto.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1959. "Culture and Politics," in Kivisto.

Second Half: Race

- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1935. *Black Reconstruction and the Racial Wage*, in Lemert.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 2002. "The Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race," in Kivisto.

Thursday, 7/6: Power and Inequality, Part III

First Half: Race, continued.

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2014. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic*, June. Retrieved (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>).

Second Half: Gender

- de Beauvoir, Simone. 1949. "Woman as Other," in Lemert.
- MacKinnon, Catharine. 1987. "Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination," in Kivisto.
- Connell, Raewyn. 1995. "Femininity and Masculinity," in Kivisto.

Friday, 7/7: Memo #2 due at 8:00 am and Paper 1, version 1 due at 11:59 pm

Monday, 7/10: Social Construction, Part I

First Half: Self and society

- Mead, George Herbert. 1929. *Mind, Self, and Society*, in Lemert.
- Blumer, Herber. 1962. "Society as Symbolic Interaction," in Kivisto.

Second Half: Performance and ritual

- Rojas, p. 116-125.
- Goffman, Erving. 1973. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in Kivisto.
- Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*, in Kivisto.

Tuesday, 7/11: Social Construction, Part II

First Half: Identity

- Cooper, Julia. 1892. "The Colored Woman's Office," in Lemert.
- Said, Edward. 1994. "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals," in Lemert.
- Sen, Amartya. 2006. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, excerpts.

Second Half: Knowledge

- Rojas, p. 125-129.
- Berger, Peter, and Thomas Luckman. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*, in Lemert.
- Mannheim, Karl. 1929, 1936. *Ideology and Utopia*, in Lemert.

Wednesday, 7/12: Synthesis of Inequality and Social Construction, Part I

Knowledge and Power

- Rojas, p. 25-35, 47-57.
- Foucault, Michel. 1976. "Power as Knowledge," in Lemert.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1990. "Knowing a Society from Within: A Woman's Standpoint," in Lemert.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought*, in Kivisto.

Thursday, 7/13: Synthesis of Inequality and Social Construction, Part II. Peer review of Paper 1, version 1 due at 12:00 pm

Inequality and social construction

- Rojas, p. 35-47.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. "Structures, Habitus, Practices" in *The Logic of Practice*.
- Lareau, Annette. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, excerpts.

Friday, 7/14: Memo #3 due at 8:00 am and Paper 2 problem statement due at 11:59 pm

Monday, 7/17: Strategic Action, Introduction

Group and exchange theories

- Rojas, p. 58-69.
- Simmel, Georg. 1908. "Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality," in Calhoun et al.
- Emerson, Richard. 1962. "Power-Dependence Relations," in Kivisto.
- Blau, Peter. 1994. "Formulation of Exchange Theory," in Kivisto.

Tuesday, 7/18: Rational Choice and Critiques

Rational choice and critiques

- Rojas, p. 69-90.
- Granovetter, Mark. 1985. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3):481-510.
- Coleman, James. 1990. "Human Capital and Social Capital," in Kivisto.
- Simon, Herbert. TBD.

Wednesday, 7/19: Values and Structure, Introduction. Peer review of Paper 2 problem statement due at 12:00 pm

First Half: Maintaining Order

- Hobbes, Thomas. 1651. "Of the Natural Condition and the Commonwealth," in Calhoun et al.
- Review Durkheim
- Parsons, Talcott. 1971. "The System of Modern Societies," in Lemert.

Second Half: Institutions

- Rojas, p. 91-105.
- Wolf, Naomi. 1991. *The Beauty Myth*, excerpts.

Thursday, 7/20: Culture and Habits

First Half: Culture

- Rojas, p. 106-112.
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies."
- Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action," excerpts.

Second Half: Habits

- Dewey, John. 1922. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, excerpts.
- Joas, Hans. 1996. *The Creativity of Action*, excerpts.

Friday, 7/21: Memo #4 due at 8:00 am

Monday, 7/24: Check-in session. Paper 1, final version due at 11:59 pm

Tuesday, 7/25: Option #1

Wednesday, 7/26: Option #2

Thursday, 7/27: Wrap-up. Paper 2, final version due at 11:59 pm

Tuesday, 8/1: Final Exam at 3:00 pm

Acknowledgements

I've drawn on the syllabi of the following people's courses for help in constructing my own: Lisa Brush, Dan Hirschman, Karam Hwang, Becky Hsu, Ahsan Kamal, Charlie Kurzman, Andy Perrin, Wesley Shrum, and Katie Tait.