

Sociology 514: Contemporary Social Theory Seminar
Spring, 2009

Office hours:

Wednesdays: 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. in SSCI #1078 phone 277-3945

Plus most afternoons except Wednesdays, by appt via email or at **277-1117**

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SEMINAR ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

Course goals:

This course emphasizes theory as an active part of the working toolbox of social scientists. In studying the ideas of contemporary theorists from Europe, the United States, Latin America, south Asia, Canada, and elsewhere, we will be interested in how those theories help orient social scientific research **and** interpret and analyze the social world for the sake of social action.

The course strives to do several things at once:

- provide an advanced introduction to salient contemporary social theorists (Habermas, Bourdieu, etc.);
- provide an in-depth exposure to one salient field of social theory (democratic theory: e.g. Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, Jeffrey Alexander, Giddens);
- offer initial exposure to other fields (e.g. organizational theory);
- give students experience in systematic theoretical analysis (separating assumptions from theoretical claims; levels and units of analysis; thinking about the real-world, empirical implications of different theories, and how to adjudicate them; etc.);
- help students see how theory can illuminate their own research;
- most vitally, foster students' own critical and appreciative engagement with social theory

More specifically, students should emerge from the course with both more complex theoretical orientation to underlie your work *and* some specific skills:

1. Students will be able to briefly summarize the views of several major figures in recent social theory, and identify some implications or insights of their work, relevant to the student's own interests;
2. Students will be able to explain two research hypotheses that are *associated* with two perspectives in contemporary theory;
3. Students will be able to provide a brief description of a possible research project that investigates these two hypotheses, and to outline a reasonable way to adjudicate between them via empirical research (which may be quantitative, qualitative, historical, experimental, etc.).

Course format and structure:

The course will proceed in a seminar format. Students are expected to prepare the readings carefully each week, and email to me a one-page (no more!), single-spaced précis by 9:00 a.m. the morning of each class. The précis is both a summary and a reaction; that is, it begins with a brief overview of the core ideas presented in the reading, followed by the students appreciative/critical reaction to those ideas. *Following* each class, each student should quickly revisit her/his précis and update it with new insights; these updated notes can be enormously useful later for term paper, comprehensive exams, thesis/dissertation, etc.

Students will be expected to bring your own ideas, understanding of the readings, intellectual interests, and research orientations to bear on the discussion every week. Furthermore, we will routinely strive to “connect” the sometimes abstract ideas of theory to the real world; thinking about such connections as you read will help focus your reading and improve class discussion. The reading load will be significant, and students will be expected to come to class with the readings fully digested and having put real thought into their comments and questions. That is, do not be misled by the informality of the seminar format and the instructor’s style: That informality is to allow each student to bring his/her interests to bear on the learning process, but you are expected to do so within a rigorous process of learning and thinking seriously about social theory, even as you are adapting sociological ideas to your current interests. Note that I will *not* lecture to any significant degree, beyond preparing you a bit for the following week’s readings; rather, we will discuss the concepts, insights, and limitations of contemporary theory together.

Thus, come to class with readings *prepared*, **not** just cursorily read. But “prepared” can include skimming sections of readings — indeed, you’ll be best prepared if you read quickly, skim some, return to important sections, *and then take time to really think through the reading* before writing your précis. Then, come ready to learn from others even as you argue for your own point of view, with me and with other students. Simply lose whatever shyness you have about disagreeing publicly; that’s how we all learn. At the same time, lose whatever inclination toward a one-dimensional, knee-jerk “critical thinking” stance common in academe: simply finding weaknesses in others’ work and trashing it. In place of that cheap-and-easy-and-fashionable stance, let’s all work to develop a more authentically critical tone in the class: appreciative of what an author does well and how it offers partial insight into societal dynamics, critical of what an author does poorly and how it obscures other important societal dynamics.

In the latter half of the semester, each student will help frame and advance the seminar discussion, as follows: by Saturday evening *the weekend before* we discuss the readings for which you are responsible, you should email the whole class (including the instructor) and 1) *suggest themes worth paying attention to in the readings for that week*, and 2) *suggest three or so generative questions* about which students should be thinking while they do the reading. You will then re-present these themes/questions verbally at the beginning of week’s class session, along with *why* you think they are important. This will require a greater level of preparation of the readings several days ahead, including writing some generative questions & themes that will help *deepen the discussion*.

Each class session will emphasize relatively open discussions revolving around what you find interesting, compelling, and/or problematic in the readings. I will moderate class sessions – i.e. facilitate a participative class discussion, including my own thoughts, but focused on engaging your own insights. In addition to thoughts you bring to discussion, and in order to bring some structure into the discussion, I will sometimes focus our attention on themes such as the following:

- What’s the fundamental thing this author is trying to explain?
- For this author, what are the core dynamics of society – the place to pay attention if you want to understand societal life?
- How does this author’s analytic perspective compare and contrast with others you have read (classical theorists, other contemporary writers from this course)?
- At what level of analysis does this author operate – whole societies? Organizational level? Individual-level?

- What implications does this perspective have for empirical research on society?
- More broadly, but importantly: how does this author think about the world? How does his/her mind see the dynamic flow of societal life; how can that help us think about our own world?
- What is of value here for your own interests and research? How would this author's perspective seriously shift your attention in studying things in which you are interested?

After a little more than an hour of discussion, we'll take a short break. When we reconvene, we'll step back and together consider what important matters we have so far missed in our discussion: major themes, important concepts, particular insights, major holes, etc. (in the second half of the course, the student especially responsible for that week's readings will initiate this discussion with her/his insights into "what else matters"). I will moderate some further discussion (including major points I still want to get on the table). Occasionally during the semester, I will also save some time for us all to step back still further and jointly evaluate the flow of the course and seminar discussions. Finally, the last ten minutes of class will be given over to preparing for the following week's readings.

Course requirements include:

1. Reading all required materials and participating actively in class discussions; taking primary responsibility for "framing" readings for one session.
2. Writing a précis each week, and submitting it by 9:00 am on day of class
3. Drafting, revising, and finalizing a five- to six-page discussion [single-spaced, page-numbered, double spacing between paragraphs] that: a) briefly identifies a specific social phenomenon of interest to you; b) summarizes two theoretical perspectives related to that phenomenon; c) outlines two competing research hypotheses, one flowing from *each* theoretical perspective; and d) suggests an empirical research project that would plausibly adjudicate between them. Draft due in 12th week of course (**date**); final version due **May 8**.

Your grade will be based on your performance in three areas:

1. Class participation (one-quarter of grade): instructor's assessment of the *quality* of your intervention in class discussion. Do you bring insight to bear in class discussion? Do you help provoke fruitful disagreement and/or identify areas of emerging clarity in discussion? Do you show respect for others' views, and do you disagree with them frankly and directly and constructively? Does your class participation reflect having done the readings and prepared thoughtfully for class? Do you help draw contrasts between various theoretical approaches, highlight particular strengths/weaknesses of them, show how they might contribute to empirical areas of sociological inquiry? i.e. the quality of participation is much more important than quantity, though of course if you almost never participate, it's hard to call that high quality.
2. Quality of précis work (one-quarter of grade).
3. Theory/research paper (draft and final version each one-half of grade): On any theorizable and researchable social phenomenon of interest to you, and agreed-upon by instructor (see details under "Course requirements" above).

Required books:

Author: Jurgen Habermas
Title: *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*
ISBN: 0807014001
Publisher: Beacon Press

Author: Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato
Title: *Civil society and political theory*
ISBN: 0-262-53121-6
Publisher: MIT Press

Author: Pierre Bourdieu
Title: *Outline of a theory of practice*
Publisher: Cambridge University Press

Additional chapters and articles via Zimmerman eReserves, and/or additional book purchases with prior notice.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS:

Week 1: Wednesday, January 21, 2009:

Introduction: Theory as framework, theory as tool: the uses of social theory:
No readings

Week 2: Wednesday, January 28, 2009: Contemporary critical theory

Jurgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*

Section V: pp. 1-112: "Paradigm Shift in Mead and Durkheim: From Purposive Activity to Communicative Action"

Other recommended readings:

Benhabib, Seyla (1992). "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition and Jurgen Habermas." in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. C. Calhoun. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Calhoun, C. J. (1992). *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

Tucker, K. H., Jr. (1989). "Ideology and Social Movements: The Contributions of Habermas." *Sociological Inquiry* 5(1).

Wuthnow, R., James Davison Hunter, Albert Bergesen and Edith Kurzweil (1984). *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas*. Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Week 3: Wednesday, February 4, 2009: Critical theory, continued

Jurgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*

Read: Section VI. pp. 113-198: Intermediate Reflections: System and Lifeworld
Skim: Section VII pp. 199-300: Talcott Parsons: Problems in Constructing a Theory of Society
Other recommended readings:
Nancy Fraser's 1992 piece on "subaltern public spheres" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. C. Calhoun. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Week 4: Wednesday, February 11, 2009: Critical theory, continued
Jurgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*
Section VIII pp. 300-405: Concluding reflections, including "The tasks of a Critical Theory of Society"

Other recommended readings:

Week 5 Wednesday, February 18, 2009: Democratic theory and power
Michael Mann: *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining ethnic cleansing* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chapter 1: "The Argument" plus Chapters 16 and 17: "Counterfactual Cases: India and Indonesia" and "Combating Ethnic Cleansing in the World Today"

Other recommended readings:

Week 6: Wednesday, February 25, 2009: Theory of practice: the habitus
Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*
pp. 1-71: Objective Limits of Objectivism (Analyses and case study)
pp. 72-95: Structures and the Habitus

Other recommended readings:

Loic Wacquant and Pierre Bourdieu, *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*

Week 7: Wednesday, March 4, 2009: Theory of practice: power
Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*
skim: pp. 96-158: Generative Schemes and Practical Logic: Invention within limits
Read: pp. 159-197: Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power

Week 8: Wednesday, March 11, 2009: Subaltern studies, post-colonial studies
R Guha, "Dominance without Hegemony and Its Historiography," *Subaltern Studies*, 1989
FE Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *The American Historical Review*, 1994**

Other recommended readings:

R. Guha, "Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India"
R. Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 1988
R. Guha, *Imperialism: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, 2001

Week 9: Wednesday, March 18, 2009: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
Spring break: time to get out and play a little, even amidst the work

Week 10: Wednesday, March 25, 2009:

No class: Work session, on own, drafting proposal for theory/research paper: phenomenon and two theoretical perspectives. Start reading Cohen & Arato, please.

Week 11: Wednesday, April 1, 2009: Civil society and democratic theory

Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, MIT Press

Intro: pp. 1-28 plus Sections:

I. Discourse of Civil Society: 29-176

II. Discontents of Civil Society: Arendt, Schmitt/Habermas, Foucault, Luhmann 177-344

Week 12: Wednesday, April 8, 2009: Civil society and democratic theory

Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, MIT Press

Section III. Reconstruction: pp. 345-604

Discourse ethics and civil society

Social Theory and civil society

Social movements and civil society

Civil Disobedience and civil society

Other recommended readings:

Week 13: Wednesday, April 15, 2009: Social theory of liberation in Latin America

Ignacio Ellacuria, SJ: *Philosophy of historical reality* (selection to be announced)

Other recommended readings:

Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Theology of Liberation: History, politics, and salvation*, Orbis Books, 1973

Sobrino, Jon, *Christology at the crossroads: a Latin American approach*, Orbis Books, 1977

Tamez, Elsa, *Through her eyes: women's theology from Latin America*, Orbis Books, 1989

Week 14: Wednesday, April 22, 2009: Some options, the sky is the limit

Castells: *The Informational City*

Taylor: *The Secular Age*

Alexander: *The Civil Sphere*

Selections from organizational theory?

Week 15: Wednesday, April 29, 2009: Critical realism and American pragmatism

Andrew Sayer, 2000, "Introduction" of *Realism and Social Science*, New York: Sage

(Note: read "Introduction" unless I assign something in addition)

Other recommended readings:

Hans Joas, 1993, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*

Andrew Sayer, 2000, *Realism and Social Science*, New York: Sage (rest of it)

Mats Eckstrom et al., 2002, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, New York: Routledge.

Andrew Sayer, 1992, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, New York: Routledge.

Peter Manicas, 2006, *Realist Philosophy of Social Science*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Week 16: Wednesday, May 6, 2009:

Presentations: Final theory/research papers presented and discussed in class: Tight, coherent presentation of phenomenon and why interesting/important; two research perspectives; and proposed research to adjudicate between them. Ungraded.

Final theory/research papers due Friday, May 8. *Two* paper copies to Sociology office *and* a digital copy via email, please.

Students with disabilities:

Any student who, because of a disability, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations. It is the responsibility of the student to request accommodation for individual learning needs. UNM will make every attempt to accommodate all qualified students with disabilities. For further information, contact Student Support Services at (505) 277_3506."

Other recommended readings:

Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age*. Key chapters, with an eye to theory, include Chapter 4 "Modern Social Imaginaries," Chapter 12 "Age of Mobilization," and Chapter 13 "Age of Authenticity"

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

Randall Collins, "The Microfoundations of Macrosociology," American Journal of Sociology 86 (March 1981):984-1014.

Nancy Chodorow, "Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," pp. 3-19 in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (eds.), The Future of Difference (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1985).

John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," pp. 21-44 in Meyer and W.R. Scott, Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983).**

John W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas, and Francisco O. Ramirez, "World Society and the Nation State," American Journal of Sociology 103, No. 1 (July 1997):144-181.

Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," American Sociological Review 48 (April 1983):147-160 (reprinted in Powell and DiMaggio (eds.), The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis, pp. 63-82).

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

REPRODUCTION MODELS

Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977), Chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-95).

"Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," pp. 487-511 in Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey (eds.), Power and Ideology in Education (New York: Oxford, 1977).**

Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Anthony Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Method (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

Giddens, Central Problems in Social Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

Nancy Chodorow, "Oedipal Assymetries and Heterosexual Knots," Social Problems 23 (April 1976):454-68.**

THEORY, PRAGMATISM, AND THE NEW CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Hans Joas, Pragmatism and Social Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993).

Frederick Suppe, "Introduction" and "Afterword," pp. 3-232 and 617-728 in Frederick Suppe (ed.), The Structure of Scientific Theories, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

David Rubinstein, Culture, Structure & Agency: Toward a Truly Multidimensional Society, (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001).