

Soc 228: Development of Sociological Thought (aka Social Theory)

Dr. Katherine Giuffre

Block 2, Fall 2018

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1 – 2:30

What is social theory?

Social theory is the body of organized, and in principle, verifiable, ideas which scholars have developed about the workings of society. It includes definitions of just what society is, delimitations of what sorts of issues and observations are important, establishment of methods for validating information, and arguments as to the nature and change of social relationships and patterns of social organization.

In general, social theories are paradigms or analytical frameworks that we can use to examine social phenomena. They help us understand and analyze social change, social behavior, and social structures. Social theory provides a framework for asking and answering questions about the social world – why is inequality growing in America; what is the role of religion in political campaigns; why are racial tensions rising on college campuses? The answers to such questions are vitally important because our social actions are based on our understanding of how society works. It is much more difficult to act strategically – to preserve or change the world – without some sense of how things are and why. Social theory allows us to approach these questions systematically and provides us with tools to better understand and negotiate our world, and in so doing can help us to see things that we did not - or could not - before.

How are we going to study social theory?

This course will attempt to present an overview of social theory in the historical context of its development. Instead of looking at the sayings of famous smart people in the abstract, we will attempt to see what issues in their lives prompted them to develop their theories. In addition to introducing the content of the theories we study, this course has two other objectives. One is to help you learn to think theoretically. This means trying to understand what assumptions you make and what their implications may be, using empirical evidence and logic systematically in order to answer questions of interest, and knowing what makes a question important and how best to ask it. Theoretical thinking is not about some different world from the everyday, practical one in which we live. Rather, it approaches the world in a deeper and more systematic way, giving us a better, and often wider, understanding of how it works, including its effects on us. The other subsidiary objective of this course is to help you improve your ability to read and think critically, and to consider and express abstract ideas. The specific **Goals** of the course are that you will learn:

- To appreciate the importance of theory for making sense of the social world around us
- To gain familiarity with a broad range of classical and contemporary social theories
- To identify and explain the significance of many of the central concepts and arguments in social theory
- To critically investigate and analyze theoretical positions and the assumptions on which they rest
- To practice and improve your ability to discuss and write about challenging and abstract sociological concepts
- To develop your own theoretical creativity by exploring application of theories to everyday life, and by suggesting modifications and extensions of the theories studied
- To enhance your ability to make sense of your social world and your actions in that world

What do you have to do in this course?

The reading for this course is quite dense and it is imperative that you keep up with the class assignments rather than putting them off. Be sure that you understand the material covered as we go along. Try to think of ways in which the theories relate to present day issues -- public or personal. To insure that you follow this sage advice, we will have a series of unannounced in-class quizzes based on the day's reading.

There will also be three short papers over the course of the block. These will ask you to actively use theory to make sense of the social world around you. There will also be a longer final paper due at the end of class that is described more fully on a separate handout. *All assignments handed in late will be marked down one grade per day.*

The extent and quality of your participation in class discussion will be factored into your grade as well. The quality of your participation and engagement will determine the character of your individual experience in the course and affect the class as a whole. Quality of participation and engagement includes such matters as:

- Have you read the assigned articles actively, so that you come to class discussions primed with ideas you want to talk about?
- Do you follow your curiosity by delving into independent reading and research about a subject of interest? Do you connect the readings to other classes you have taken or other readings you have thought about?
- Do you participate in class in a way that enhances the experience for the whole group? Do you listen to others' comments and remember what others have said?
- Are you mindful about the level of your own participation? --You know yourself best, whether you are shy and have to make an effort to speak or tend to dominate and need to hold back. Act accordingly!
- Do you go beyond what is strictly required? Do you follow up on suggestions for further study or exploration that are offered by the faculty and fellow students?

For the written assignments, I consider an "A" to denote work of excellence, rising above the merely sufficient and competent to incorporate new insights as well as creative and critical thinking. It will, of course, be well written and demonstrate depth of thought and clarity of conception. A "B" denotes a mastery of the concepts and issues, competent and well-written work. A "C" is given for work with logical inconsistencies, which fails to adequately explore all the arguments related to the topic, which has errors of fact or which is badly written and poorly organized or conceptualized. A "D" is for work that fails to meet even these minimal standards.

An “NC” is for work of exceedingly poor quality, including work that is plagiarized, unintelligible, and/or handed in extremely late.

The grading breakdown is as follows:

- Quizzes 15%
- Short papers 45% (3 at 15% each)
- Final paper 30%
- Class Participation 10%

How can we get in touch with you?

My office hours are 1:00 to 2:30 on Mondays and Wednesdays. If you cannot meet with me during these hours, please talk to me and we will arrange another time to get together. You can always email me at kgiuffre@coloradocollege.edu or call me at 389-6645.

Who else can help me?

The paraprof for this course is Elam Boockvar-Klein. He can be reached at e_boockvarklein@coloradocollege.edu and holds regular office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. in our classroom.

Readings: There is one required book for this course. It is:

- ***Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*** by Steven Seidman (5th Edition 2013)

It is available in the bookstore. Other readings are on the Canvas site and are marked with a **C** on the reading schedule below.

I expect you to have completed the reading assigned for each day by the beginning of class on that day.

Attendance: Class attendance is required. If you find that you must miss a day of class for some reason, please see me before that day. If you must miss class because of illness, you must bring a note from Boettcher to be excused. Otherwise, you will receive a “0” for any work/quizzes from that day. Three unexcused absences will mean that you will receive an “NC” for the course.

Accessibility: If you require accessibility accommodations for this course, please speak with me privately and bring me your accommodations letter as soon as possible so that your needs may be appropriately met. If you have not already done so, you will need to register with Accessibility Resources (Armstrong 211, 227-8285), the office responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities.

Class Meetings: We will meet Monday through Friday from 9:15 until noon.

Reading Schedule:

Week One

Tue 9/25: Overview

Seidman, Ch. 1 “The Idea of a Science of Society”

C. Wright Mills, “The Sociological Imagination” **C**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, pp. 16-21 and 27-27 from *The Social Contract* **C**

Wed 9/26: Karl Marx

Adam Smith, "The Wages of Labour" from *The Wealth of Nations* C
Bruce Paley, selections from *Jack the Ripper: The Simple Truth* C
Donald Rumbelow, selections from *The Complete Jack the Ripper* C
Seidman, Ch. 2 "The Revolutionary Theory of Karl Marx"
Karl Marx "Alienated Labor" C

Thu 9/27: Marx, continued

Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology" C
Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" C
Karl Marx, "The General Formula for Capital" C
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, selections from *Women and Economics* C

Fri 9/28: Marx, continued

Paper #1 Due

Week Two

Mon 10/1: Emile Durkheim

Seidman, Ch. 3 "The Promise of Sociology: Emile Durkheim"
Emile Durkheim, "What is a Social Fact?" C
Emile Durkheim, "Anomic Suicide" C
Benedict Carey, "Defying Prevention Efforts, Suicide Rates Climbing Across the Nation" C
Gina Kolata, "Death Rates Rising for Middle-Aged White Americans, Study Finds" C
Gina Kolata, "More White People Die From Suicide and Substance Abuse: Why?" C
Chris McGreal, "Financial despair, addiction and the rise of suicide in white America" C

Tue 10/2: Emile Durkheim, continued

Emile Durkheim, "On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity" C
Emile Durkheim, "The Functions of Crime" C
Robert K. Merton, "Manifest and Latent Functions" C
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, selections from *Human Work* C

Wed 10/3: Max Weber

Seidman, Ch. 4 "The Ironic Social Theory of Max Weber"
Max Weber, "The Spirit of Capitalism" C
Max Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority" C

Thu 10/4: Max Weber, continued

Max Weber, "Bureaucracy" C
Max Weber, "Class, Status, Party" C
Marianne Weber, selections from *Reflections on Women and Women's Issues* C

Fri 10/5: Durkheim and Weber, Suicide, Solidarity, Charisma, and Bureaucracy

Paper #2 Due

Week Three

Mon 10/8: Symbolic Interaction

George Herbert Mead, "Mind, Self, and Society" C
Herbert Blumer, "Society as Symbolic Interaction" C
Erving Goffman, "Performances" C
Charles Horton Cooley, "Looking-Glass Self" C

Tue 10/9: Cultural and Postmodern Theory

Seidman, Ch. 10 “The Critical Sociology of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu” and
Ch. 12 “Michel Foucault’s Disciplinary Society”

Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital” C

Michel Foucault, “Panopticism” C

Wed 10/10: Feminist Theory

Seidman, Ch. 14 “Feminist Theory/Masculinity Studies”

Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender” C

Patricia Hill Collins, “Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology” C

Raewyn Connell, “Femininity and Masculinity” C

Thu 10/11: Critical Race Theory

Seidman, Ch. 15 “Critical Race Theory/White Studies”

Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “The Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race” C

Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups” C

W.E.B. DuBois, “The Souls of Black Folk” C

Julian Go, “The Case for Scholarly Reparations” C

Fri 10/12: Intersectionality

Paper #3 Due

Week Four

Mon 10/15: Where is the future of social theory?

Seidman, Ch. 16 “Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Theory/Heterosexual Studies” and Ch. 21
“Theories of ‘the Other’”

Evgenya Shkolnik, “‘Are We Alone in the Universe?’ is the Wrong Question” C

Jeff De Graff, “This is the end of marriage, capitalism and God. Finally!” C

Tue 10/16: No reading, last film discussion

Wed 10/17: No class: Final Paper Due

A Final Thought:

“Those who have the good fortune to be able to devote their lives to the study of the social world cannot stand aside, neutral and indifferent, from the struggles in which the future of the world is at stake.”

– Pierre Bourdieu

FROM OFF THE STREETS OF CLEVELAND COMES: \$2.25

#6

AMERICAN Splendor



IT'S HARD ENOUGH TO CONVINCE PEOPLE THAT SOCIALISM IS A GOOD THING WITHOUT BASING YOUR ARGUMENT ON SOME ABSTRACT THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE. PLATO TRIED AND FAILED, FOURIER TRIED AND FAILED, MARX TRIED AND FAILED, SARTRE TRIED AND FAILED ...

WELL...MAYBE I C'N LEARN FROM THEIR MISTAKES.

ALL STORIES BY HARVEY PEKAR
ART BY GERRY SHAMRAY, GARY DUMM
GREG BUDGETT + MICHAEL GILBERT

SHAMRAY
PEKAR

mycomicshop

