

## PROSEMINAR IN SOCIAL THEORY

HTS 6001  
Fall 2009  
Wednesdays 6-9 pm  
104 Old CE Building

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Mon. 12-1 and by appointment

### Overview

This course provides an intensive introduction to classical and contemporary social theory, with an emphasis on theories central to the discipline of sociology. Its aims are twofold: first, to familiarize students with major theoretical concepts, works, and traditions, and second, to provide tools and encouragement for reflexive inquiry, critical interpretation, and rigorous explanation of the social world. We begin with classical theory: Durkheim, Marx, and Weber share a concern with the modern social order brought about by industrial, political, and scientific revolution, while Simmel, Mead, and Elias focus on the formation and experiences of the self in society. We then survey contemporary theory, beginning with analytical works including Parsons' structural-functional synthesis and three very different responses to it: methodological individualism, network theory, and symbolic interactionism. Turning to critical theory, we examine the early Frankfurt School and other Western Marxist thought, living inheritors of this tradition such as Habermas, and feminist, postcolonial, and critical race theory. We conclude by examining "post-" and "late-" modern theorists, including Foucault, Bourdieu, and Giddens. In an effort to align the material with the concerns of less-sociological HTS students, I have selected readings with an eye to emphasizing two thematic areas: theories of social change and theories of knowledge. For a schematic outline of other problems and issues we will explore in the course, please see the "Central Questions in Social Theory" listed on the last page of the syllabus.

### Course Requirements

Readings and Participation (10%): Read all of the selections listed for each week prior to class (in the order listed) and come prepared to discuss them.

Written Responses (20%): During the course of the semester you will turn in ten written responses to the weekly readings. There are fourteen weeks of readings; this allows you four "misses." Responses should be typed, double-spaced, and approximately two pages. A digital copy should be posted to the course T-Square site (Forums: Written Responses) prior to class (the earlier the better), and a hard copy should be handed in during class. There are three types of responses you will need to complete:

*General responses*: complete eight throughout the term, you choose the weeks.

*Research review response*: complete one, scheduled via sign-up on the first day.

*Research proposal response*: complete one, you choose the week.

Please see the separate written response assignment sheet for additional details.

Midterm Exam (35%): The midterm will be an open-book, take-home, essay exam covering material through and including the week on Structural Functionalism. It may include comprehensive and/or short essays; you will be able to choose the questions you answer from a list. The midterm will be distributed on Wednesday, September 23 and handed in on Friday, October 9.

Final Exam or Paper (35%): Students may opt to a) take a final take-home exam similar to the midterm but covering the latter part of the term, or b) write a final paper of approximately 15-20 pages on a \*theoretical\* topic of your choosing. Students interested in the paper option should submit a paper proposal (a brief description of your thesis or question and a preliminary reference list) by November 4. The exam will be distributed on November 18; papers and exams are due on Monday, December 7.

## **Policies**

1. Late exams will be docked the equivalent of one letter grade per week; late written responses will receive partial credit. No work will be accepted after 4:30 pm on Wednesday, December 9.
2. You are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code; if you are uncertain about how the code applies to this course, ask. The honor code can be found at:  
<http://www.honor.gatech.edu/plugins/content/index.php?id=9>
3. I am happy to work with the ADAPTS office to accommodate students requiring consideration due to a disability. Information about the ADAPTS office can be found at:  
<http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>

## Readings

All readings not marked “*purchase*” are available for downloading from the course T-Square site (under “Resources”). Books for purchase at Engineer’s include:

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Karen Fields, translator.

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons, translator.

Please Note:

1. Please read each week’s selections in the order listed on the syllabus, as some build on others. Also, be aware of the syllabus subheads; not all readings for a given week are by the same author or reflect the same school of thought.
2. You should be able to succeed in this course without reading any materials beyond those listed on the syllabus. If you do consult secondary sources, beware: not all are equally accurate or useful. In writing exams you must cite all sources consulted.
3. I have tried to keep the weekly readings at or below 200 pages, but not always successfully. Please pay attention to the page counts listed for each week in the schedule below so you can plan ahead. Keep in mind that this material is not easily comprehended by “skimming”; I will try to make you aware of particularly difficult works as we approach them in class.

## Schedule

### 8/19 **Introduction**

- 8/26 **The Problem of Order I: Early Formulations** 152 pp.  
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Chs. 13 and 17  
Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, excerpts  
John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Chs. 1, 3, 4  
Ferdinand Toennies, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, excerpts  
Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, excerpts

## CLASSICAL THEORY

- 9/2 **Emile Durkheim** 217 pp.  
Suicide, excerpts.  
The Division of Labor in Society, excerpts.  
The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, pp. 1-18, 33-39, 44 (last paragraph), 99-157, 207-241, 418-448. **\*\*purchase\*\***  
The Rules of the Sociological Method, excerpts from Preface, Chs. 1, 5.
- 9/9 **Karl Marx** 153 pp.  
*Works by Marx from the Marx-Engels Reader, **\*\*purchase\*\***:*  
*Capital* Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, Sec. 4 (division of labor), pp. 392-397.  
“Wage Labour and Capital,” pp. 203-217.  
“Estranged Labour,” *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 70-81.  
“German Ideology,” pp. 149 bottom-165 mid, 172 top-174 bottom, 193-200.  
*Capital* Vol. 1, Chs. 31 & 32 (genesis/tendency), pp. 435-438.  
“Manifesto of the Communist Party,” pp. 473-491.  
“The Eighteenth Brumaire,” pp. 594-617.  
*Appropriations and Alternatives:*  
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics, excerpts.  
Heidi Hartmann, “Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex.”  
W.E.B. Dubois, “Marxism and the Negro Problem.”  
W.E.B. Dubois, “The Souls of White Folk.”
- 9/16 **Max Weber** 231 pp.  
*Works by Weber:*  
Economy and Society, excerpts on Social Action, Types of Legitimate Domination.  
“Bureaucracy,” excerpts.  
The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, pp. xxviii-xlii (author’s intro), 13-80, 102-125. **\*\*purchase\*\***  
“Class, Status, Party,” excerpts.  
“‘Objectivity’ in Social Science,” excerpts.  
“Science as a Vocation”  
*Appropriations and Alternatives:*  
Marianne Weber, “Authority and Autonomy in Marriage,” excerpt.  
W.E.B. Dubois, “Of the Sons of Master and Man”

- 9/23 **Self and Society: Simmel, Mead, and Elias** 190 pp.  
*Works by Georg Simmel:*  
 “The Field of Sociology,” excerpts.  
 “The Web of Group Affiliations,” excerpts.  
 “The Metropolis and Mental Life”  
*Work by George Herbert Mead:*  
 “Self,” excerpts.  
*Work by Norbert Elias:*  
The Civilizing Process, excerpts.  
*Appropriations and Alternatives*  
 W.E.B. DuBois, “Forethought” and “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”  
 Simone De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, Introduction  
 \*\*Take-home Midterm distributed\*\*

## CONTEMPORARY THEORY

### Analytical Perspectives

- 9/30 **Structural Functionalism and Critiques** 182 pp.  
*Works by Talcott Parsons:*  
The Structure of Social Action, excerpts  
Toward a General Theory of Action, excerpts  
 “An Outline of the Social System,” excerpts  
 “Evolutionary Universals in Society”  
*Work by Robert Merton:*  
 “Manifest and Latent Functions,” excerpts  
*Critiques:*  
 David Lockwood, “Some Remarks on ‘The Social System’”  
 Dennis Wrong, “The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology”  
 Alvin Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, excerpts
- 10/7 **Methodological Individualism & American Structuralism** 167 pp.  
*Methodological Individualism, Rational Choice, and Social Exchange Theory:*  
 George Homans, “Bringing Men Back In”  
 George Homans, “Social Behavior as Exchange”  
 Peter Blau, “The Structure of Social Associations”  
 James Coleman, Foundations of Social Theory, Chs. 1 & 2  
*American Structuralism: Network Theory*  
 Mark Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness”  
 Ronald Burt, *The Social Structure of Competition*, Ch. 1  
*A Feminist Critique of Rational Choice*  
 Paula England and Barbara Kilbourne, “Feminist Critiques of the Separative Model of Self:  
 Implications for Rational Choice Theory”

**Friday 10/9 Midterm Exam Due** in my mailbox in 108 Old CE by 4:30 pm.

- 10/14 **Symbolic Interactionism & Affiliated Traditions** approx. 165 pp.  
*Phenomenology*  
 Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The Social Construction of Reality, excerpts  
*Dramaturgy*  
 Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Intro & Conclusion.  
*Symbolic Interactionism*  
 Herbert Blumer, “Society as Symbolic Interaction”  
 Randall Collins, “Interaction Ritual Chains, Power, and Property: The Micro-Macro Connection as an Empirically Based Theoretical Problem”  
*Ethnomethodology*  
 Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology, excerpts: Preface, Chs. 1 & 2

### Critical Theory

- 10/21 **Western Marxism: The Frankfurt School and Beyond** approx 147 pp.  
*The Frankfurt School*  
 Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” excerpt  
 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Concept of Enlightenment”  
*Other Western Marxists*  
 Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, excerpt  
 Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci”  
 Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”
- 10/28 **Postcolonial and Feminist Theories of Knowledge** approx 158 pp.  
*Postcolonial Theory*  
 Franz Fanon, “On National Culture”  
 Edward Said, Orientalism, Ch. 1  
*Feminist Theory*  
 Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, Chs. 2 (excerpt) and 10  
 Sandra Harding, Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?, Ch. 2  
 Sandra Harding, “After the Neutrality Ideal: Science, Politics, and ‘Strong Objectivity’”
- 11/4 **Critical Theory Today** approx 141 pp.  
*Works by Jurgen Habermas*  
 “Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective”  
 “The Rationalization of the Lifeworld”  
 “The Uncoupling of System and Lifeworld”  
 “Social Analysis and Communicative Competence”  
 “The Public Sphere”  
*A Critique*  
 Nancy Fraser, “What’s So Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender”  
 \*\*Final Paper Option: Proposals Due\*\*

## Late Modern and Postmodern Theory

- 11/11 **Michel Foucault** approx 163 pp.  
*Works by Foucault*  
Discipline and Punish, “Docile Bodies” and “Panopticism”  
The History of Sexuality Vol. 1, excerpt  
The Archaeology of Knowledge, Intro and “Discourse on Language”  
“Truth and Power,” excerpts  
*Controversy*  
Nancy Hartsock, “Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?”  
Jana Sawicki, “Foucault and Feminism: A Critical Reappraisal”
- 11/18 **Structure and Agency Revisited** 151 pp.  
Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”  
Pierre Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, excerpts  
Pierre Bourdieu, “The Scholastic Point of View”  
Anthony Giddens, “Agency, Structure”  
William H. Sewell, Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation”  
\*\*Take-home Final distributed\*\*
- 11/25 **Happy Thanksgiving**
- 12/2 **Postmodernism and Poststructuralism** 113 pp.+  
*The Condition of Postmodernity*  
David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity. Blackwell, 1990. Chapter 2, “Modernity and Modernism,” and Ch. 3, “Postmodernism”  
*Postmodern and Poststructural Theory*  
Jacques Derrida, “The Decentering Event in Social Thought”  
Jean-Francois Lyotard, “The Postmodern Condition”  
Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations: Disneyland”  
Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s”  
*Optional: More Foucault* (about 7 pp.)  
Foucault, “Genealogy and Social Criticism”

Monday 12/7 **Final Exam or Paper Due** in my mailbox in 108 Old CE by 4:30 pm.

All week **Course/Instructor Opinion Survey (CIOS)**: Go to <http://www.cetl.gatech.edu/cios/>  
The site opens on Monday 11/23 and closes midnight on Sunday 12/13.

## Central Questions in Social Theory

**Order:** What is the glue that keeps people living and working together in groups and societies rather than splintering apart? How are social stability and order created and maintained (or not)? Is social order voluntary or imposed, formal or informal, hierarchical or egalitarian, rational or irrational? Can different ordering mechanisms coexist in the same society?

**Change:** Is society best seen as a static entity or as an ever-changing process? What explains small- and large-scale social transitions: does history have a single decisive motor, or is change usually a multi-causal phenomenon? Does long-term change generally reflect progress, such that societies grow more complex, rational, just, or liberating, or does history reflect regress or move in no single direction?

**Agency and Structure:** Are individual and collective actions driven by will, purpose, or some other form of human agency, or are they shaped by larger social structures such as class divisions, group relations, or cultural formations? Is action voluntary or determined?

**Structure and Culture:** Are our actions and ideas shaped mostly by the larger beliefs and values of our surrounding cultural environment, or do they reflect social structure and our positions within it? How are cultural and structural forces related?

**Difference and Inequality:** What are the most salient differences among individuals and groups (e.g. class, status, gender, race, nation, other)? Are these differences natural or social in origin? If social, how do they come about? Is there a single, universal human nature that transcends all individual and group differences? How is difference related to distributions of wealth, power, prestige, and other “goods,” and hence to inequality? How do such relationships shift over time?

**Power:** What is power? How is it exercised? Is it a property of persons or of social structures? If a property of persons, how is it allocated? Is power usually repressive (power over) or can it be productive (power to)? What role does it play in everyday life and in larger social orders?

**Knowledge:** What are the origins of knowledge? Are there different forms of knowledge? How does knowledge differ from belief, interpretation, or opinion? What makes knowledge true—and what does “true” mean? How is knowledge acquired and distributed? How is it linked to other dimensions of social life such as power, difference, and order?

**Raison d’Etre:** What is the purpose of social theory and of empirical social or historical research? What constitutes valid social theory? Valid empirical explanation? Should social theory be value-neutral, and can it be? What role should social science play in social life?