

Contemporary Sociological Theory

SOCI3223 — Fall 2022

Prof. Mark COHEN

Wednesdays 4:30 pm - 6:15 pm, FYB LT4

Link to this outline: bit.ly/3c2kMhC

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Course Description

Sociology is a discipline of fragments. Social researchers specialize in the study of particular facets of social life — for instance, education or work or families. Sociologists in each specialty propose and argue over theories to explain the puzzling phenomena they discover in the facet they are investigating. Accordingly, a course on the sociology of education would introduce students to the theories that are influential and fruitful for contemporary sociological research on education. However, *this course is different*. Here, you will learn not about theories of some specific sociological specialty, but instead contemporary sociological theories — period, full stop.

The rationale for a course on sociological theory is the recognition that there are perspectives on society that link together the different facets of social life. These perspectives claim that the same insights can illuminate not just, say, education *but also* work and the family. They represent lenses that can be used to view and understand these various social spheres, or they identify common trends that affect them.

Lectures

The lectures will elaborate on the major themes and arguments of the theories sampled in the required readings. They will provide the wider context in debates in sociology and beyond that the authors are engaging in. Attendance and participation are expected.

The lectures for this course will be held in-person, but arrangements for electronic access and recordings will be made if any students require them. Please contact the TA if you need such arrangements.

PDFs of the lecture slides will be posted on Blackboard under Course Content before each class meeting.

Tutorials

In addition to lectures, the course includes a required tutorial, managed by the TA. The

purpose of the tutorials is for you to engage with the readings and topics covered in lecture in a more hands-on way.

The signup link will be posted in the Course Outline section on Blackboard. Please fill it out as soon as possible, so that tutorial groups can be formed. The first tutorial meetings will be during the second week of classes.

Each student is required to make a presentation on one of the course readings during one of the tutorial sessions. The presentations should define key terms, summarize the argument, and identify some possible objections or counter-arguments. Each presentation should end with a question or prompt for discussion.

Essays

The due dates for the essays will be:

- First essay: **Friday 16 November**
- Second essay: **Wednesday 21 December**

The essays should be submitted before the end of the calendar day to VeriGuide (bit.ly/2Mrt6Zh) in Microsoft Word (.docx) or OpenOffice (.odt) format under, respectively, Assignment 2 and Assignment 2 for the lecture. Late submissions, unless with prior permission, will be penalized one fraction of a letter grade (e.g. B+ → B) per day. However, good work (original grade of B or higher) will always receive a minimum grade of C-, satisfactory work (C+ or higher) a minimum of D+, and passable work a minimum of D. In other words, if you complete the work, you will always have a route to passing the course. Regardless of the reason, if you cannot meet the deadline, please inform the TA.

Please format the essays as follows:

- A4 size, 2.5 cm margins, body text in 12 pt, Times New Roman or Cambria font, double spaced, with no extra space between paragraphs. To confirm the formatting is correct, see the sample posted here: bit.ly/2Q8oKUY.
- Name at the top of the first page, with page numbers on subsequent pages.
- Citations in parenthetical format with a works cited list at the end, following the ASA style guide (bit.ly/2KTAvB9). You do not need to include URLs or access dates for readings downloaded from the course website.

Grading

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|----------------------------|-----|
| • Participation | 10% |
| • Presentation in tutorial | 20% |
| • First essay | 35% |
| • Second essay | 35% |

Please keep in mind the university's policy on academic honesty (bit.ly/2vRlSyb). Plagiarism in the essay and exams will not be tolerated. The ideas and language should be your own, and

any outside sources must be clearly and properly cited.

Specific rubrics for the grading of each component will be made available on Blackboard during the semester. The grade descriptors for the course as a whole are as follows:

- A: Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
- A-: Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
- B: Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.
- C: Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.
- D: Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.
- F: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirement.

Questions

I will always leave time in my lectures for questions. It is a good rule of thumb that if there was something you found difficult to follow in the readings or lecture, there will be other students who will benefit from hearing the answer to your question. You can also bring your questions to tutorial, or feel free to email me with questions or come to my office hours — refer to the first page of the course outline for office hours time and location.

Schedule of Readings

The schedule below lists the required readings for each week. They should be completed *before* that week's lecture. All of the readings will be made available online as PDFs, either through the links provided or on Blackboard. Note that for many of the links, it is necessary to be on the university network to access the full text. If you are off campus or using eduroam wifi, you will need to sign into the CUHK VPN (see here: bit.ly/2DEuXb1).

You will be reading theory texts, not textbook summaries of them. However, for those who want to refer to a secondary source in addition to — NOT in place of — the primary texts, I would suggest: George Ritzer, *Modern Sociological Theory*. A copy will be on reserve at the Chung Chi College Library. Chapters 1 and 2 offer a useful narrative summary of the development of sociological theory (and refresher on the classical social theorists).

The readings are chosen to be accessible and manageable, but nonetheless, theory can sometimes be challenging to read, in both style and content. With that in mind, here are a few suggestions on how to manage the reading:

- Give yourself time to focus on each specific reading — do not try to get it all done the

day before lecture every week.

- Don't sweat the references. Some theorists love to name-drop other theorists, but it is still possible to follow the argument if you are not familiar with the other authors referenced. Use the context around the reference to figure out: "What is *this* author using the referenced author *to represent*?"
- Keep a running list of terms and concepts that you do not recognize or find confusing. Often their meaning will become clear later on, but if not, ask about them during lecture or tutorial.
- If a particular passage is stubbornly opaque, make a note of it and keep reading. After you have finished going through the text once, go back and reread the part you noted. If it is still confusing, ask about it! You probably are not the only one who found it unclear.

7 September Introduction

Part I: Theories of Modern Society

14 September Defining Modernity

1. Parsons, Talcott. 1971. *The System of Modern Societies*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. **Chapter 6.**

21 September Capitalism

1. Wright, Erik Olin. 2013. "Transforming Capitalism through Real Utopias." *American Sociological Review* 78 (1): 1–25.
doi.org/10.1177/0003122412468882.
2. Fraser, Nancy. 2014. "Can Society Be Commodities All the Way down? Post-Polanyian Reflections on Capitalist Crisis." *Economy and Society* 43 (4): 541–58.
doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2014.898822.

28 September Imperialism

1. Go, Julian. 2017. "Postcolonial Thought as Social Theory." In *Social Theory Now*, by Claudio E. Benzecry, Monika Krause, and Isaac Reed, 130–61. Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press.

5 October Political Power

1. Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power: A Radical View*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

12 October Education and Stratification

1. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press. **Chapters 1 and 2.**
2. Bowles, Samuel. 1977. "Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labor." In *Power and Ideology in*

Education, edited by Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey, 137–53.
New York: Oxford University Press.

- 19 October Gender
1. West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. “Doing Gender.” *Gender & Society* 1 (2): 125–51.
doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002.
- 26 October Expert Knowledge
1. Foucault, Michel, selections from *Power/Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish* (pp. 289-294, 305-322 in *Contemporary Social Theory Third Edition*, ed. Craig Calhoun et al, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)
 2. Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 2 November Science and Technology
1. Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage Publications. **Pages 9-34 and 80-84.**
 2. Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. **Chapters 1 and 5.**
- Part II: How to Theorize Society*
- 9 November Problems of Order
1. Davis, Kingsley, and Wilbert E. Moore. 1945. “Some Principles of Stratification.” *American Sociological Review* 10 (2): 242–49.
doi.org/10.2307/2085643.
 2. Review the readings by Bowles and Bourdieu
- 16 November Structures and Agents
1. Goldthorpe, John H. 1996. “Class Analysis and the Reorientation of Class Theory: The Case of Persisting Differentials in Educational Attainment.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 47 (3): 481–505.
doi.org/10.2307/591365.
 2. Hedström, Peter, and Peter Bearman. 2011. “What Is Analytical Sociology All About? An Introductory Essay,” January.
doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199215362.013.1.
- 23 November Interactions and Institutions
1. Benzecry, Claudio E., and Daniel Winchester. 2017. “Varieties of Microsociology.” In *Social Theory Now*, edited by Claudio E.

Benzecry, Monika Krause, and Isaac Ariail Reed, 42–74. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

30 November Modes of Analysis

1. Review the readings by Wright, Foucault, and Hedström and Bearman