

John Wilson
Room 263, Building 9
Voice Mail: 660-5622
E-Mail: jwils@soc.duke.edu

FALL 2002

Sociology 206
Sociological Theory

"The highest wisdom is to realize that every fact is already a theory" (Goethe *Wisdom and Experience*).

Sociological Theory is an introduction to the development and current state of sociological theory. It focuses on the most influential figures in the development of sociological theory and their legacy in contemporary sociology. Two books have been ordered which you should buy since they are used extensively throughout the course. They are Randall Collins' *Four Sociological Traditions: Selected Readings* and Derek Sayer's *Capitalism and Modernity*. The rest of the readings are either on electronic reserves in Perkins Library and should be printed off from there or available on JSTOR which is accessible at [<http://www.jstor.org/jstor/>]. The readings accessible through JSTOR are marked with an asterisk (*).

I see the classroom as an opportunity for dialogue and exchange. To facilitate this, I ask each of you to make presentations, based on assigned readings. To structure discussion, I ask that you summarize your presentation in writing for distribution by e-mail to the rest of the class (and me) *at least two days ahead of when the presentation is due*. I ask the rest of the class to write a response to the presentation and communicate this response to the class (and me) by e-mail prior to the class in which the presentation is to be made. I will keep copies of your presentations and your responses to the presentations of others. I will grade them and this grade will constitute 10% of your final grade. I will set a mid-term examination, which will count for 30% of your grade, and a final, take home examination, which will count for 60% of your grade.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Phillips provides a brief overview of the debate between positivists and anti-positivists. Is sociology a science, one of the humanities, or a hybrid of the two?

D. C. Phillips: "Hermeneutics and Naturalistic Social Inquiry" Pp. 19-39 in *The Expanded Social Scientist's Bestiary*.

BUILDING AND USING THEORY

Merton states the "received" view of the function of theory in guiding social research, one in which older figures are superseded and best forgotten; Alexander makes the case for "revisiting" the classic figures in the development of sociology and rejects the received view.

Robert Merton: "The Bearing of Sociological Theory on Empirical Research," Pp. 139-155 in Robert Merton *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

Jeffrey Alexander: "The Centrality of the Classics," Pp. 11-57 in Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner (eds) *Social Theory Today*.

THE DURKHEIMIAN TRADITION

Durkheim's criticism of utilitarianism makes plain that the subject matter of sociology should be social structure. Moen and her co-authors use Durkheim's theory of social integration to explain variations in health and well-being. Smith-Lovin and McPherson take us one stage further in the analysis of structure, to the level of networks.

Emile Durkheim: "Pre-contractual Solidarity" (**Collins**)

Phyllis Moen, Donna Dempster-McClain and Robin Williams: "Successful Aging: a Life-Course Perspective on Women's Multiple Roles and Health," *American Journal of Sociology* 1991 97:1612-1638. *

Lynn Smith-Lovin and J. Miller McPherson: "You Are Who You Know: a Network Approach to Gender." Pp. 223-251 in Paula England (editor) *Theory on Gender/Feminism on Theory*.

Durkheim rejected the idea that social institutions could be explained by their origins. Instead, he used functional explanations. Goffman applies Durkheim's functional theory of religion to the contemporary scene, where the individual becomes God. Jankowski uses a subtle form of functionalism to explain the persistence of gangs in poor communities.

Emile Durkheim: "Social Rituals and Sacred Objects" (**Collins**)

Erving Goffman: "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" (**Collins**)

Martin Jankowski: "The Gang and the Community"

Talcott Parsons at first embraced Durkheimian functionalism but later replaced it with his own version of systems theory. In his essay on the social construction of illness he looks at the functions of "the sick role", but a more holistic view of society can be seen emerging. This is described in the Turner reading.

Talcott Parsons and Renee Fox: "Illness, Therapy and the Modern Urban American Family," *Journal of Social Issues* 1952 8:31-45.

Bryan Turner: "Sickness and Social Structure: Parsons' Contribution to Medical Sociology," Pp. 109-141 in Bryan Turner, *Talcott Parsons on Economy and Society*.

THE MARXIAN TRADITION

The Marxian tradition, otherwise known as historical materialism, is distinguished by its emphasis on material conditions, or relations of production, as the bedrock of social formations. The material foundation of ideas is spelled out in Marx's theory of ideology. Later Marxists, such as Antonio Gramsci, are more subtle in their treatment of the relation between material conditions and ideas, as exemplified by Billings's essay on religion and social protest in the Appalachians.

Karl Marx: "Materialism and the Theory of Ideology" (**Collins**)

Dwight Billings: "Religion as Opposition: a Gramscian Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 1990 96:1-31. *

Marx was the first social theorist to deal with the problem of modernity. For him, the distinctive feature of modern societies was the intermediation of social relations by the commodity. Social relations follow the logic of the "commodity form", beginning with wage labor. In Marx's class analysis, there are only two significant groups – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Wright, a contemporary exponent of Marxist class analysis, tried to theorize contemporary social classes without abandoning Marx's conceptual framework altogether.

Derek Sayer: *Capitalism and Modernity* Chapter One, "Mors Immortalis".

Erik Olin Wright: "Foundations of Class Analysis: a Marxist Perspective."

Power in Marxian theory rests on ownership of property. Other forms of power are secondary. Conventional politics, including state formations, must therefore be subject to class analysis.

Karl Marx: "The Class Basis of Politics and Revolution" (**Collins**)

Derek Sayer: *Capitalism and Modernity*, Chapter Two, "Power and the Subject".

Global developments mean that Marx's analysis must be modified to take into account the international division of labor. Chase-Dunn describes the two most important concepts of the world systems theory. Ward offers a feminist critique of this theory while at the same time describing the impact of global capitalism on the division of labor between men and women.

Christopher Chase-Dunn: "Core and Periphery" in *Global Formation*.

Kathryn Ward: "Reconceptualizing World System Theory to Include Women," Pp. 43-69 in Paula England (ed) *Theory on Gender/Feminism on Theory*.

Marx paid little attention to gender. The concept of “intersectionality” has been developed to describe the complex ways class, gender and race intersect in capitalist societies. Brenner provides an overview. Smith is sympathetic to Marxism, but argues the case for a distinctive feminist perspective on sociology, with its own methods, modes of concept formation and means of theory-testing. Bordo, who owes much to Foucault, shows how changes in ideal body shape reflect changes in patriarchal relations.

Heidi Hartmann: "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," Pp. 1-43 in Lydia Sargent (ed) *Women and Revolution*.

Dorothy Smith: "Femininity as Discourse." in *Texts, Facts and Femininity*.

Susan Bordo: "Reading the Slender Body" in *Unbearable Weight*

THE WEBERIAN TRADITION

Weber is said to have engaged in a dialogue with the ghost of Marx. This is most evident in his theory of the origins of capitalism, where his emphasis on the role of ideas (specifically religion) and his willingness to consider a multiplicity of causes sets him apart.

Max Weber: "The Origin of Modern Capitalism" (**Collins**).

Derek Sayer: *Capitalism and Modernity*, Chapter Three, "The Ghost in the Machine".

The most important theoretical concept for Weber was rationalization. It performed for him the same role that the concept of commodification performs for Marx. Rationalization yields new forms of power, and new forms of social inequality, independent of property as Marx would have conceived it. Ritzer's chapter on efficiency is an example of applying the concept of rationalization to explain developments in a number of social spheres.

Derek Sayer: *Capitalism and Modernity*, Chapter Four, "Without Regard for Persons".

George Ritzer: "Efficiency" from *The McDonaldization of Society*

THE AMERICAN TRADITION

American sociology was largely uninfluenced by European thinkers until Parsons' writings in the 1930s. The dominant influence, instead, was pragmatism, clearly seen in the writings of Cooley and Mead, work that was to lead to a distinctive paradigm in sociology, called symbolic interactionism. This perspective favors qualitative methods and assumes that social reality (e.g. homelessness) is a fragile, negotiated thing, an idea far removed from the Durkheimian emphasis on social structure.

Charles Horton Cooley: "Society is in the Mind" (**Collins**).

George Herbert Mead: "Thought as Internalized Conversation" (**Collins**).

David Snow and Leon Anderson: "Identity Work among the Homeless," *American Journal of Sociology* 1987 92:1336-1372. *

Most recently, a contemporary version of utilitarianism has found favor, in which the basic unit of analysis is the rational actor and more complex social structures are accounted for in terms of calculated exchanges. Homans's essay states the basic principles of exchange theory. Olson explains how rational choice theory can account for behavior that seems at first glance to be irrational. Lennon and Rosenfeld use social exchange theory (at the dyadic level) to explain women's perception of how fairly housework is divided.

George Homans: "Social Exchange Among Equals and Unequals" (**Collins**)

Mancur Olson: "Public Goods and the Free Rider Problem". (**Collins**)

Lennon, Mary and Sarah Rosenfeld. "Relative Fairness and the Division of Housework." *American Journal of Sociology* 1994 100:506-531. *