Overview:
This class provides a foundation in the classical ideas of social theory for academic sociologists. Social theory is broad, and we unfortunately haven't the time to cover all aspects and approaches. Instead, I focus the class substantively on the problem of order, which looms large behind the works of the founding theorists in our discipline (and much current work), and methodologically on theory construction and evaluation.

The problem of order relates to how society as a whole is held-together. Why, in the face of innumerable pressures to the contrary, doesn't society descend into anarchy? Theorists' solution to the problem of order (necessarily?) sets limits to human action and knowledge, which forms the corollary “problem of action.” At the end of the course, I hope that you can articulate a solution to the problem of order and understand the implications for action that this implies, such that you can apply the resulting principles to your own work.

Each theorist also used different theory construction and evaluation principles, ranging from philosophical deduction resting on divine right to statistical methods. At the end of this course, you should be able to identify and defend different methods for evaluating and constructing social theory and weigh the benefits of such approaches.

Theory in science, including social science, must primarily be useful empirically; science only moves forward by letting go of useless ideas and embracing solutions to new problems that old theory cannot solve. We will treat this as a “live” theory course – focusing not just on what theorists said but how empirical social scientists make use of what they said by actively linking theory to current research.

Scope
The goal of this course is not to complete your theoretical education, but to whet your appetite for further reading. Over the course of your career, you will continuously read (and contribute to) social theory. The purpose of empirical sociology -- all the stuff we as professional sociologists spend most of our time doing -- is to build a solid understanding of the principles that shape social life – theory. Here we focus on “classical” social theory, the 2nd semester will focus on contemporary theory.

A note on reading
The reading for this class is highly variable: many meetings contains more than you can likely finish, other days we only read 30 pages in a week. This is normal and expected. Throughout your career, you will find that you have more to read than you can complete. You will be forced to budget your time, and develop the ability to read selectively to
grasp the meaning of an argument quickly. Develop a strategy. For example, it is oftentimes better to read a little carefully than a lot poorly, and once you get the main idea of an author's work, your reading should speed considerably. Because this class is a prelude to your own independent work as theorists, it is more important that you learn how to use social theory in empirical analyses and how to critically evaluate theory, instead of blithely memorizing parts of theorist's arguments. To this end, I encourage you to use secondary sources to help guide your understanding.

As a general rule, the heavy days are “broad” days – all of the precursors, for example, while the smaller reading days are “deep” days – we’re going to dig into the depths & use of a single bit. So pick-and-choose on the broad days; pay close attention on the deep days.

A note on writing
While the majority of your Ph.D. training will focus on methods and particular substantive issues, you cannot succeed as a sociologist unless you can write clearly and forcefully in English. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that you develop strong writing skills. Never turn in a draft that is not copy-edited, and always give yourself time to re-write. I should never see a first draft of your work. If you have trouble with writing, you may also want to purchase and read one of a number of writing style guides, such as:


A note on class participation
This course is a seminar, not a lecture series. Unlike undergraduate courses, where the purpose might be to master a definitive set of facts, the purpose of this course is to develop your thinking skills in preparation for a career as a social scientist. As such, I will lecture as little as possible, hoping instead to moderate a lively discussion centered on key questions from the readings and contemporary applications. This format mimics in miniature what you will be doing as professional sociologists, actively engaging in theoretical debates with colleagues. I expect discussion to be professional and polite (no personal attacks, please), but engaged. Do not shy away from points. Do push arguments. Do not accept two logically inconsistent points as "equally valid perspectives." Do seek to integrate alternative perspectives and understand the basic assumptions that drive different conclusions. We seek to develop a deeper understanding of social theory by confronting alternative positions. I will push you on your arguments, and I trust you will do the same for each other. For this format to work, you must be active participants. If
discussion does not emerge spontaneously, I'll ask you to answer questions directly and push for your point of view.

Class structure: Each day, at least two students will be “in charge” of a part of the reading for that day. These discussion leaders will have the primary responsibility for raising questions and pushing along discussion. We will space out this responsibility such that everyone takes the lead multiple times over the semester.

I have assigned each of you to be a leader as outlined in the attached memo. This is a random assignment, and you can trade with others if you’d prefer. Just let me know.

Each class is divided between explication and evaluating a contemporary application of the work. Unless otherwise noted, as a class leader, you must identify one contemporary work (published since 1990 in a peer reviewed sociology journal) that makes substantive use of the theory (by substantive use, I mean more than a passing nod in the introduction).

A note on notes. I don’t recommend taking notes in class. It’s difficult to be engaged with the discussion if you’re spending your time writing. I’ll make any notes I have available for you after class, and you will likely want to take notes on the readings as you read.

Course Requirements:
Grade Breakdown (roughly, graduate classes have a very narrow grade range):
Primary theory briefs: 3 @ 10% each (total: 30%)
Contemporary Application summary & Critique: 3 at 10% each (30%)
Take Home Final: 25%
Class Participation (discussion leadership): 15%

Theory briefs
Theory ‘briefs’ of roughly 5 to 7 pages summarize and critique the reading for that day. Styled after a legal brief, a person should be able to read your brief and get the central argument of the reading you are writing about. The brief should have 6 parts:

(1) Proper bibliographic citation, including original date of publication.
(2) An indication of how this work fits into the overall intellectual career of its author, and the social-historical context of its creation.
(3) A statement of the key problem addressed by the work.
(4) A summary of its essential argument.
(5) An account of the kind of support given for that argument.
(6) A critical response, including a statement of what you found most interesting.

Briefs should be turned in at the beginning of the day we cover the material. At least one of your briefs must be on the substantive theories of Marx, Weber or Durkheim (you can, of course, write on each). No briefs are allowed for the first two days (precursors & theory methods).
Contemporary application reports are exactly similar in structure to the primary theory briefs, but applied to a contemporary use of the work in question. That is, you must find a piece of current sociological work in a peer reviewed sociology journal -- preferably from one of the major journals such as *ASR*, *AJS* or *Social Forces*, that cites the theorist we are reading. This should summarize the paper's main argument, but pay particular attention to how the classical theory is being used in the paper. The best way to find relatively current work that draws on the theory would be at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)

There is no set due dates. But it is obviously efficient for you to turn in a brief on the day you are preparing to lead discussion for the class. **Note you cannot turn in a primary theory brief and a contemporary application report on the same topic** (yes, I know that would be more efficient; I’m pushing you to breadth here not efficiency, this means you’ll likely prepare either a brief or a contemporary application for a topic you do not officially lead discussion for).

Final exam
The final exam will consist of one or 2 questions that ask you to critique, integrate and apply work across multiple theorists we have read. This should result in a roughly 4000 word paper that answers the question(s) posed.

Texts:
The main texts for the course will be the first of the 2-volume readers edited by Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, Schmidt, and Virk: *Classical Sociological Theory*, 3rd Ed. (Referred to as "CIST" below). The books are available online

In addition, we will be reading *The Human Condition* by Hannah Arendt.

Suggested Extensions, Background & Secondary Texts:
A good general background book on modern philosophy wouldn’t hurt, if you want an authoritative resource, see Copleston’s work.

Online resources
Class web page is a great place to find updates & notes. All online resources are listed from there as well (such as links to Jstor papers).

This page will include:
- An up-to-date copy of the syllabus, that will reflect any changes in the course as we progress (if, for example, we discover we need to spend more time on a particular subject or to move on to another topic). Links from the syllabus will take you to my notes on the reading (posted after the class).
- Links to alternative sources for the reading, background, etc.
Class Schedule.

**CALENDAR NOTE**
- We may have to reschedule some meetings as I have an as-yet unscheduled research trip to Saudi Arabia…we’re a small group so we’ll find makeup time, but to be sure, just plan on meeting the week after graduate classes end (at Duke, graduate classes typically end about 3 weeks before the semester is done).
- We will not meet on:
  - August 26 (many at ASA)
  - Oct 14 (Fall Break)

Meeting 1

*Introductory session:* Introduction to the course and each other. What is the goal of social theory & why read the classics? What are the philosophical roots of social theory? *Note no briefs/contemporary applications are allowed for this session.*

**Reading:**
- Introduction: The Sociological Theory Reader, Vol. 1 (*CIST*)
- Part I: Precursors (*CIST*)
  - Hobbes: Of the Natural Condition and the Commonwealth (*Leviathan*)
  - Rousseau: Of the Social Contract
  - Kant: “What is Enlightenment”
  - Tocqueville: *Democracy in America* (*CIST*)
  - Smith “Wealth of Nations” (skim)
- Locke: Of the State of Nature (*provided*, abridged)
- Hegel “*Dialectic of Master & Servant*”

**Background:**
We assume a general working knowledge of the social thought / philosophical background of the key thinkers of basic “modern philosophy” (17th – 19th century western Europe), leading up to the advent of our classic sociological thinkers, including the initial push toward rationality, empiricism and so forth. If you’ve not had such a background, do some catch up reading on the high points. If you really want to understand the roots of these debates, consider a class in modern social philosophy. Some good bits include:
- Heilbroner, Robert L. *The Worldly Philosophers*
- Andrew Abbott, *Chaos of Disciplines*
- Ritzer *Sociological Theory* Chapter 1. "A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory"
- Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, chapter 1
- Alexander, *Twenty Lectures*, chapter 1
Meeting 2

*Methods of Social Theory.* How do we evaluate a social theory? What is a critique? What are the valid grounds for critiquing a theory? How do we link ideas from theory to empirical work? Here we are going to read all the “classic” meta-theory pieces from the cannon to try and glean some insight into how we should think about doing social theory. It is at this point that you should be clear that theory is both a tool to help in empirical investigation, as well as an end-in-itself, complete with strong philosophical commitments.

*Note no briefs/contemporary applications are allowed for this session.*

**Reading:**

- Durkheim: *The Rules of Sociological Method* (*CIST*)
- Weber: "Objectivity' in Social Science" & “Basic Terms” (*CIST*)
- Marx: “Theses on Feuerbach”
- Parsons: “The Position of Sociological Theory”(*CIST*)

**Background:**

Meta theory discussions abound, here I list a mix of good theory, good critique and basic stuff you should (or should have) read.

- Hollis, Martin *The Philosophy of Social Science*
- Kant, I. (1929 [1781]) *The Critique of Pure Reason.* London: Macmillan
- Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Lieberson, S. and Freda B. Lynn. "Barking up the wrong branch: Scientific alternatives to the current model of sociological science." (Jstor)
Meeting 3

*Durkheim: Problems of Social Integration*. What factors hold society together? What are the interaction bases for social cohesion? Where does Law come from? What function does law have? What role for religion? Is industrialization bad for social cohesion?

**Reading:**
- CST: Introduction to Part II
- *The Division of Labor in Society (CIST).*
- *Suicide (if time)*

**Background:**
- Social Evolution perspectives, such as
  - Comte: *The System of Positive Philosophy*
  - Spencer: *The principles of sociology.*
  - Social Statics
- There are many treatments of aspects of Durkheim's work in the major sociology journals, refer to these for particular sources and aspects of ED's work.

Meeting 4

Continue on Durkheim:
- *Suicide: (Book II)*
- *The Elementary Forms of Religions Life (CST)*

Meeting 5

*Marx*. What are the forces that drive modern industrial capitalism? How stable are these forces? What implications do they have for long-term economic stability? For inequality?

**Reading:**
- *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts (CIST)*
- *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (CIST – skim, we won’t discuss)
- *Wage Labor and Capital (CIST)*
- *Classes (CIST)*

**Background:**
- Tucker, Robert C. The Marx Engles Reader (introduction)
- Heilbroner, Robert L. The Worldly Philosophers (chap 6)

Meeting 6

*Title: Weber: Social Action, Economy & Society, Bureaucracy and Politics*. How is domination organized? What is Power? What distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate power? What are the basic theoretical elements for social theory? What are the dimensions that determine social standing? Does religious organization create capitalism?
Reading:
- Weber intro from CIST (Part V)
- The Protestant Ethic (Clst, or better, get the book. It’s short!)
- Class, Status, Party (CIST)

Background:
- Roth, Guenther. Introduction to the Roth and Wittich translation of Economy and Society
- Gerth & Mills, From Max Weber Introduction
- Swedberg, R. Max Weber and the Idea of Economic Sociology
- Kalberg, Stephen. Introduction to his new (2002) version of The Protestant Ethic

Meeting 7
Continue Weber
Reading:
- Type of Legitimate Domination (CIST)
- Bureaucracy (CIST)

Meeting 8
Simmel. Simmel forms a bridge between formal structure and micro social processes/embedding Here we take a turn to micro-sociology with some of the classic literature on the relation between individual and group. Raises key questions about identity, the self, and audience.

Reading:
- Intro to part VI (CIST)
- Simmel “The Stranger” (CIST)
- Simmel “Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality” (CIST)
- Simmel “The Dyad and the Triad” (CIST)

Background:
Many treatments exist, see the general background readings listed above. Also consider:

Meeting 9
Self in Social Settings, Difference. How do we make sense of social identities, particularly as embedded in multiple conflicting social settings?

Reading
- Intro to part VI (CIST)
- Mead “The Self” (CIST)
- Du Bois “The Souls of Black Folk” (CIST)
• WI Thomas “The regulation of the Wishes” (ClST)

Background:
On WI Thomas: https://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Thomas/Thomas_1923/Thomas_1923_toc.html

Meeting 10
Title: Critical Theory. The 2nd round of Marxian inspired social thought, here focusing on the role of critique as a method applied broadly.

Reading:
• Intro to Part VII
• “Traditional and Critical Theory” (CLST)
• “The Culture Industry” (ClST)
• “One-Dimensional Man” (ClST)

Background:

Meeting 11
Structural Functionalists. Is there a guiding purpose underlying social structure? Is social organization functional? How does social organization affect individuals? Are there fundamental domains that comprise a social system?

Reading:
• Intro to Part VIII (ClST)
• Parsons “The Position of Sociological Theory” (Re-read, we read this in the methods section too with a slightly different focus) (ClST)
• Parsons “Outline of the Social System” (ClST)
• Merton “Manifest and Latent Functions “(ClST)

Background:
Functionalism was the dominant theoretical perspective in the post WWII era, and many commentaries on it are out there. Some of the following are nice:
• Alexander, Twenty Lectures is excellent


**Meeting 12**

*The Human Condition*. We’re ending the term on a bit of an odd note, reading Arendt’s *Human Condition* in its entirety. This is not traditionally part of “classical social theory” and is a bit late in the publication timeline (published in 1958). The idea for this is that Arendt thinks like a classical social theorist (not necessarily a sociologist!), but applies it to more contemporary issues, so is a nice bridge from classical to contemporary thinking. Her breadth also ties together a lot of different pieces we’ve addressed individually thus far.

Reading:

Hanah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Read it all, but focus on chapters 1, 2, 5 & 6.

Background:

Long secondary literature on Arendt…most of it pretty good…her work on Evil, Violence & Revolution is also well worth reading.
## Class Leadership Assignments

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