

Winter 2015, Sociology 105B: **CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY**

CLASS HOURS	Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00am–11:45am in Humanities Lecture Hall
INSTRUCTOR	Joseph Klett (jklett@ucsc.edu ; always include “SOC105B” in subject line)
OFFICE HOURS	Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3:30pm in College Eight, room 325
TEACHING ASSISTANTS	Mario Diaz-Perez (mdiazper@ucsc.edu) Jared Gampel (jgampel@ucsc.edu) Natalia Koulinka (nkoulink@ucsc.edu) Justin Obcena (jobcena@ucsc.edu) Stephan Sepaniak (ssepania@ucsc.edu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this class we explore contemporary *social theory* as if to answer the question “what is society, and how does it work?” In specific, we will discuss social theory as it appears in debates between sociologists. Sociologists try to improve our understanding of what society is by first understanding the way society is organized. While most theorists agree that an understanding of how society works is necessary to understand how to change society for the better,¹ most also agree that the wrong assessment of how society works can lead to devastating consequences. Hence the debates about theory which have driven sociology since the World War period. Hence, too, the desire for us (as a class) to learn what we have come to learn about ourselves (as a society).

To capture these debates and desires as they unfold through time, the design of the class is *dialectical*. In any dialectical process, a *synthesis* is made between a thesis and its antithesis. Each week, we will read a thesis (or two) advancing a particular theory: this is a central argument which states a theory. Understanding this argument - what it consists of, how it is made, and by whom - is your central task as a student. However, when read alone, many arguments can be very convincing. For this reason, each thesis will be complicated by an opposing argument – the “anti-thesis.” If you plant one foot in the thesis, and the other in the antithesis, you quickly appreciate the distance between. In the gap between thesis and antithesis is where we fit in. Through different sets of opposing perspectives we will *synthesize* an understanding of social theory from multiple perspectives.

You may note a historical sequence to the readings. In part, this is a necessity of the model -- you can't respond to a thesis that hasn't yet been written! But it is also a way to avoid telling “great man” stories. “Great man” stories restrict ideas to single authors, rather than intellectual movements which are distributed across people, places, and things. Theories are sometimes vague, and sometimes so forceful that they seem surely to be hiding something.

Slow to die, “great man” stories have outlasted the period of “grand theory” which characterize *classical social theory*. Grand theories are ways in which thinkers try to conceive of a single theory for all of society. This totalizing urge ended with World War Two, after which theorists began to focus on theories of

¹ Few theorists truly wish to see the world burn; those that do generally go into more influential professions than college professor.

smaller-scale. Theorists determined that specialized theories might allow us to better recognize variations across societies (discussed in Part II of class). Considered either “macro-“ or “micro-“ theories, these arguments focus not on the reach or impact of theory, but the scale at which theory could say anything of importance. In this new state of affairs, sociologists no longer try to formulate a single theory for all of society; instead, they create a theory for one social dimension or another. In this case, the “turf” of social theory is imagined as either “in the air” (working at more abstract levels like census data and other population statistics), or “on the ground” (focused more on ethnographic studies of interaction and content analysis of objects).

Among the readings, you may also recognize a certain “Western” bias. Most of our readings come from American and European sociologists. This, too, is a product of history. After many years of imperialism in the physical and metaphysical world, thinkers and theories from outside the global west have been left out of the conversation. Through contemporary social theory, efforts have been made to correct for this and to include more perspectives from outside the west (Part III of class); however, this inclusion only happens to the point it makes sense to existing theories, and thus a truly *global* social theory has yet to appear. Further still are those who argue a global theory to be impossible, or even dangerous. We will not attempt to deduce such a theory ourselves. However, when contemplating the boundaries of society, we must always be asking, who or what is included, who or what is excluded, and how do these inclusions and exclusions change how we think about society?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (% of final grade)

- A) *Participation* (10%): Think of this class as a brainy conversation. You are expected to attend lecture and discussion section well-read. Your undivided attention is expected. Computers may only be used for taking notes and sharing work. Active participation in section is mandatory. Any additional assignments from section will count toward your participation grade.
- B) *Memos* (20%): Let theory be bigger than this class alone. You will complete five memos documenting theory as you find it in everyday life. These are due to your TA in weeks 5, 6, 7, 9 & 10. Complete instructions will be provided in week 2.
- C) *Section Leaders* (15%): Try leading the conversation. You will join a group of five to create a program for one section. This program will meet a set of benchmarks to guide discussion of that week’s material. Complete instructions will be provided in week 2.
- D) *Midterm exams* (10% & 20%): Baby steps, my friend. You will complete two midterm exams consisting of short answers and essays. You will be provided a study guide for each. Midterms will be completed during class hours on 1/21 and 2/18.
- E) *Final exam* (25%): So, what did you learn? You will complete a cumulative final exam consisting of short answers and essays. A study guide with the essay questions will be distributed in week 10. The final will be held in the lecture hall on March 14 from 12-3pm.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

You are expected to follow the University guidelines for academic honesty. Violations include cheating and plagiarism, as well as self-plagiarism (submitting your own work from a different assignment). Attribution and proper citations are expected for all ideas that are not your own. If you have any doubts, please speak

to me *before* the assignment is due. For more information on penalties for plagiarism, see *The Navigator* (<http://reg.ucsc.edu/navigator/>) and the *UCSC Student Policies and Regulations Handbook* (<http://www2.ucsc.edu/judicial/handbook.shtml>).

SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCOMODATIONS

All students should be able to participate in this course. Please address any special needs you may have with me at the beginning of the quarter, or when a challenge arises. If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me during my office hours, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter or at least two week prior to an exam. Contact DRC at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

COURSE OUTLINE (All readings can be found in the 'Resources' folder on eCommons)

1.1 Tuesday 1/5: Introductions and course overview

1.2 Thursday 1/7: *General Theory*

- a. Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl. 2009. "What is theory?"

Part I: After Grand Theory

2.1-2.2 Tuesday 1/12 & Thursday 1/14: *Functionalism*

- a. Talcott Parsons. 1946. "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States."
- b. Robert Merton. 1949. "Manifest and Latent Functions."
- c. C. Wright Mills. 1956. "The Power Elite."

3.1 Tuesday 1/19: *Critical Theory*

- a. Max Horkheimer. 1947. "Eclipse of Reason."
- b. Herbert Marcuse. 1964. "One Dimensional Man."

3.2 Thursday 1/21: **MIDTERM EXAM 1**

Part II: Theory in Micro and Macro

4.1-4.2 Tuesday 1/26 & Thursday 1/28: *Phenomenology*

- a. Alfred Schutz. 1932. "The Phenomenology of the Social World."
- b. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. "The Foundations of Knowledge in Everyday Life."
- c. Harold Garfinkel. 1964. "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities."

5.1-5.2 Tuesday 2/2 & Thursday 2/4: *Symbolic Interactionism*

- a. Erving Goffman. 1959. "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life."
- b. Herbert Blumer. 1969. "Symbolic Interactionism."

- c. Jeffrey Alexander. 1987. "Symbolic Interactionism (2)."

6.1-6.2 Tuesday 2/9 & Thursday 2/11: *Rational Choice Theory*

- a. Mancur Olson. 1965. "The Logic of Collective Action."
- b. James S. Coleman. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital."
- c. Viviana Zelizer. 1989. "The Social Meaning of Money."

7.1 Tuesday 2/16: *Field Theory*

- a. Pierre Bourdieu. 1994. "Social Space and Symbolic Space."
- b. Pierre Bourdieu. 1994. "Structures, Habitus, Practices."
- c. Pierre Bourdieu. 1993. "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed."

7.2 Thursday 2/18: **MIDTERM EXAM 2**

Part III: Redoing Theory

8.1-8.2 Tuesday 2/23 & Thursday 2/25: *Post-structuralism*

- a. Michel Foucault. 1976. "The History of Sexuality."
- b. Michel Foucault. 1977. "Truth and Power."
- c. Michel Foucault. 1975. "Discipline and Punish."
- d. Michelle Lamont. 1987. "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher."

9.1-9.2 Tuesday 3/1 & Thursday 3/3: *Feminist Theory*

- a. Dorothy Smith. 1990. "The Conceptual Practices of Power."
- b. Patricia Hill Collins. 1990. "Black Feminist Epistemology."
- c. Kathy Davis. 1993. "Cultural Dopes and She-Devils."

10.1-10.2 Tuesday 3/8 & Thursday 3/10: *Post-humanism*

- a. Bruno Latour. 1993. "We Have Never Been Modern."
- b. Annemarie Mol. 1999. "Ontological Politics."
- c. Pierre Bourdieu. 2001. "A Well-kept Open Secret."

Monday 3/14: **FINAL EXAM**