

Sociology 482: Sociological Theory

Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00-1:50, 298 Upham Hall

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Course Description and Objectives

Social theory offers explanations for the ways the social world works and the ways that humans experience it. Engaging such a topic can be a challenging task, and together we can meet this challenge and have fun doing so. Theoretical endeavors such as understanding consciousness, the development of sweeping phenomenon such as the spread of capitalism or the persistence of inequality, and defining “reality” can seem like daunting tasks, but at one point or another in your life, you have most likely attempted to “do” sociological theory. We all practice social theory. In this course we will continue to do so. Through readings, writing, and class discussion, we will learn what other theorists have had to say about the social world, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these ideas. In addition to this, we will learn to actively engage in *constructing theories* of the social world. I hope that this course will not only allow you to become more reflective and self-conscious theorists, but also introduce to you new ways of thinking about the world.

The major objectives of this course are as follows:

I) To introduce you to major sociological theories and theorists.

There are some concepts and people with whom any sociology major must be familiar. This course is a formal introduction to these people and ideas. In addition to this practical reason, understanding the transformations sociological thought has undergone throughout its history will provide you with an important foundation for understanding the nature of the discipline and the development of modern human thought. Over the course of the semester, we will explore four broad questions that sociological theorists have grappled with over the past two centuries: 1) What ties people together and makes a group of people a society? 2) What is power and how do people exercise it over others? 3) What were the sources of the rapid and major social changes that characterized the “modern” era, and what effect did they have on individuals and society? 4) What forces govern small scale social interaction?

In answering these questions, we will work towards accomplishing the following specific goals:

1. To understand and apply the various definitions of theory.
2. To demonstrate how theory contributes to sociological understanding.
3. To highlight the connection between theory and research.
4. To contrast the issues involved in pure and applied sociological theory.
5. To document how theorists’ ideas are closely connected with the social, economic, and political climate of their times.
6. To explain the major contributions of the major classical theorists.
7. To explain the major contributions of the major contemporary theorists.
8. To decipher the thread of sociological understanding that runs through all the theorists.
9. To link the contributions of a particular theorist with those of other theorists.
10. To come to your own personal understanding of theory and to be able to apply theory to your own life.

II) To build upon your reading, writing, and speaking skills.

These skills are crucial to your development as students and individuals, and an important part of any college course. Through class discussions and assignments, you will exercise and develop your academic skills.

III) To think critically about the world in which we live through theory construction.

This goal flows directly out of the previous two. Good theory can provide you with a toolkit with which to carefully examine the social world. Thinking hard about taken-for-granted assumptions and challenging conventional wisdom is one of the most important skills to gain from your time at Miami. This course will be one step in the learning process.

IV) In addition, this course contributes directly to the accomplishment of many goals of the Sociology Program at Miami, as indicated by an asterisk(*) below:

- *1. To understand the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social reality.
- *2. To understand the role of theory in sociology.
- 3. To understand the roles of quantitative and qualitative methods in sociology.
- *4. To understand basic concepts in sociology and their theoretical connections.
- *5. To understand the roles of culture and social structure.
- *6. To understand the reciprocal relationships between individual and society.
- *7. To understand both macro sociology and micro sociology.
- *8. To think critically.
- 9. To understand the effects of social inequality.

Requirements and Responsibilities

Your final grade will be determined by the following:

Reading questions: You are required to answer a few questions about each assigned reading. Many of these readings are difficult, and having questions and guidelines in mind before you set out to read them will undoubtedly help you pick them apart and comprehend them. In addition, taking notes will help you remember what you read, which will be of invaluable assistance when it comes time to write papers and study for your final. These assignments are *due in class, and may not be made up*. You can miss up to three of these assignments before you lose points. **Don't be afraid to read with a dictionary at your side. If you don't understand a word, skipping over it won't help you understand the reading or expand your vocabulary!**

Theory construction papers: At the conclusion of each unit, you will be required to construct a theory that will help to explain some part of the social world. I will provide a list of questions or puzzles that you can propose a theoretical explanation of, but I encourage you to come up with your own topic. These papers are designed to allow you to review and integrate the theories we will be reading, but more importantly they will provide you with ample opportunities for constructing sound sociological theories. There are 4 major units, and you are required to hand in a total of 3 papers during the semester (you can skip whichever one you choose). We will talk about these papers in more detail in class.

Sample paper topics:

Unit 1:

- 1) Describe two widespread reactions to the September 11 attacks in the U.S. Why did these reactions occur?
- 2) During the 1960s and early 1970s the hippie movement was a small but sustained subculture in the U.S. What sustained such a coherent group of people and why did the movement dissipate in the 1970s?
- 3) Are people who participate in voluntary associations more connected to society than those who do not? Why or why not? Why might civil society be on the decline?

Final exam: There will a final exam on Friday, December 15 7:30 AM. The exam will consist of a few short answer questions and a longer essay in which you will demonstrate the theoretical expertise you will have undoubtedly gained throughout the semester.

Reading questions: 15%
Three theory construction papers: 20% each
Final exam: 25%

Course Guidelines

Arrive to class on time, and I won't keep you late. Deal?
Turn off your cell phones!
Read the newspaper and sleep before you come to class.
Hand in assignments on time.
Treat your classmates with respect
Familiarize yourself with the new course withdrawal policy
(www.miami.muohio.edu/documents_and_policies/handbook/)

Readings: There are two books required for the course. I have placed orders for these books at the Miami Bookstore and others on High Street. The books are:

Lemert, Charles. 2004. *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Ritzer, George and Douglas J. Goodman. 2004. *Sociological Theory*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw Hill.

Other readings are available on electronic reserve via Blackboard, and are indicated with an "ER" on the syllabus.

Grading: Personal emergencies, mechanical failures, and illnesses affect us all, often at the worst possible times. However, I must hold everyone in the class to the same standards. Late work loses 2 points per calendar day (regardless of the reason for lateness). Missed exams and work not submitted by semester's end receives a grade of zero. I do not offer extra credit assignments; every student will be graded on the same basis for the same work. Therefore, be sure to plan ahead and begin your assignment well before their due dates. If you begin to fall behind in any of the course requirements, you should take action early on to remedy the situation rather than during the last week of classes when it's too late! Both Miami University and I take academic honesty very seriously. Cheating and plagiarism are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any plagiarism can result in a final grade of "F" for the course, with no exceptions. Please be familiar with Part V, Sections 01.501-502 of the Miami University Student handbook regarding academic integrity. Plagiarism can range from inadequate citations in papers, to borrowing your friends' work, to copying papers or parts of papers from the web. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, err on the safe side and please see me!!

A	92-100
A-	90-91
B+	88-89
B	82-87
B-	80-81
C+	78-79
C	72-77
C-	70-71
D+	68-69
D	62-67
D-	60-61
F	59 and below

Contact: The best way to contact me is via email. My address is lippmas@muohio.edu, and I check this frequently throughout the day. Also, feel free to call me in my office.

I can also be reached during my office hours. If these times are not convenient, I am happy to set up another time that works better for you. I encourage you to make use of my office hours to raise specific questions or concerns you have about the class as they arise. Don't wait until it's too late!!! Feel free to stop by and chat about anything that's on your mind.

We will be conducting a lot of course business via Blackboard. Please familiarize yourself with this resource and check it out regularly.

Course Schedule

Monday, January 8

Course Introduction

Wednesday, January 10—Introduction to sociological theory

Charles Lemert. "Social Theory: Its Uses and Pleasures" **Lemert pages 1-20**

-What is sociological theory?

Monday, January 15—NO CLASS, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Wednesday, January 17— Introduction to theory construction

Arthur Stinchcombe. "The Logic of Scientific Inference." Chapter 2 in *Constructing Social Theories*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1968. **(ER)**

-What is theorizing and how do we do it?

Monday, January 22—Modernity and the origins of sociological theory

Plato. "The Allegory of the Cave." From book VII of *The Republic*. **(BB)**

Immanuel Kant. "What is Enlightenment?" **(BB)**

Marshall Berman. "Introduction: Modernity—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." Pp. 15-36 in *All that is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Penguin. 1988. **(ER)**

Ritzer, pp. 4-13. "Social Forces and the Rise of Sociological Theory" and "Intellectual Forces and the Rise of Sociological Theory."

-So, what is enlightenment?

-What is modernity?

-Why do you think sociological theory emerged when it did (review the introduction to Lemert for a reminder)?

UNIT ONE: SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

Wednesday, January 24

Emile Durkheim. "Anomie and the Modern Division of Labor" and "The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations." Pp. 71-72, 90-99 in **Lemert**.

Ritzer, pp. 71-86. "Introduction," "Social Facts," and "The Division of Labor in Society."

-What makes a group of people a society?

-What function does religion serve in society? Are there any other institutions that serve similar functions?

Monday, January 29

Talcott Parsons. "The Unit of Action Systems" and "Action Systems and Social Systems" Pp. 209-211, 297-299 in **Lemert**.

Ritzer, pp. 226-249. "Structural Functionalism."

-What is "social action?" What forces structure it?

Wednesday, January 31

Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith. "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies." *Theory and Society*. 22:2 (April 1993) 151-207. **(ER)**

Ritzer, pp. 250-254. "Neofunctionalism."

What is culture? How does it integrate a society?

Monday, February 5

Robert Merton. "Social Structure and Anomie." Pp. 225-238 in **Lemert**.

What is "anomie?" What features of social structure are likely to foster it? Who is likely to experience it?

Wednesday, February 7

Emile Durkheim. "Suicide and Modernity." Pp. 75-83 in Charles **Lemert**.

Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 6, No. 1: 65-78 **(ER)**

Ritzer, pp. 86-91. "Suicide."

-Is suicide more than an individual action? What factors might explain differences in suicide rates between countries and between social groups?

-What is social capital? Is society becoming fragmented, and, if so, is this a problem?

Monday, February 12

Unit Review

Unit one papers due

UNIT TWO: POWER AND CONFLICT

Wednesday, February 14

Karl Marx. "Estranged Labour" and "Labour-Power and Capital." Pp. 30-36, 60-65 in **Lemert**.

Ritzer, pp. 46-61. "Alienation" and "The Structures of Capitalist Society."

-What is alienation?

-Why do some people experience it more than others?

Tuesday, February 20

Karl Marx. "Class Struggle" and "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." Pp 37-48 in **Lemert**.

Ritzer, pp. 61-70. "Materialist Conception of History" and "Criticisms."

-What is class according to Marx? Do you agree?
-Are there classes in the U.S.?

Wednesday, February 21

Michel Foucault. "Power as Knowledge" Pp. 465-471 in **Lemert**.

Michel Foucault. "Discipline and Punish." Pp. 211-218 in Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds.)
Contemporary Sociological Theory. Oxford: Blackwell. **(ER)**.

Ritzer, pp. 585-594. "The Ideas of Michel Foucault."

-What is power?

-How has the exercise of power changed over time, and how is it exercised now?

Monday, February 26

Pierre Bourdieu. "Structures, *Habitus*, and Practices." Pp. 435-440 in
Lemert.

Michele Lamont. 1992. Selections from *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Cultures of the French and American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ritzer, pp. 517-528. "Habitus and Field."

-Earlier, we discussed the ways in which culture can integrate members of a society. Can it also divide them? How?

Wednesday, February 28

Peter M. Blau. 1964. pp. 88-115 in *Exchange and Power in Social Life* **(ER)**

Ritzer, pp. 410-414. "Peter Blau's Exchange Theory."

-What are we exchanging when we interact?

Monday, March 4

Unit Review

Unit 2 papers due!

UNIT 3: MODERN AND OTHER "IZATIONS"

Wednesday, March 6

Max Weber. "The Spirit of Capitalism and the Iron Cage." Pp. 100-104 in **Lemert**.

George Ritzer. "The Revolution of Consumption and the Larger Society," and "Social Theory and the New Means of Consumption." In *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge **(ER)**

-What is the Protestant ethic and how did it help lay the groundwork for the spread of capitalism?

-How has it changed and why?

Monday, March 11—No Class, Spring Break

Wednesday, March 13—No Class, Spring Break

Monday, March 18

Max Weber. "The Types of Legitimate Domination," and "The Bureaucratic Machine." Pp. 112-115 and 104-110 in **Lemert**.

Ritzer, pp. 120-142. "Substantive Sociology."

-How is power legitimated?

- How did the rise of bureaucracy change this?

Wednesday, March 20

Georg Simmel. "The Stranger," Pp. 181-185 in **Lemert**.

David Riesman. "Character and Society: The Other Directed Personality." Pp. 323-328 in **Lemert**.

-What makes "the stranger" unique?

-What social arrangements are necessary (or likely) to allow strangers be a part of a social group?

Monday, March 25

George Ritzer. 2000. "An Introduction to McDonaldization" and "McDonaldization and its Precursors." Pp. 1-39 in *The McDonaldization of Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. **(ER)**

Jonathan Dee. "Reverend Billy's Unholy War." *The New York Times Magazine*. 8/22/04. **(ER)**

-Is McDonaldization like bureaucratization? How is it different?

-How has another (non-consumer) area of social life become McDonaldized?

Wednesday, March 27

Unit Review

Unit 3 papers due

UNIT 4: MICRO-SOCIOLOGY/SOCIAL INTERACTION

Monday, April 2

George Herbert Mead. "The Self, the I, and the Me." Pp. 220-225 in **Lemert**.

Sigmund Freud. "Civilization and the Individual." Pp. 145-148 in **Lemert**.

Ritzer, pp. 340-351. "The Ideas of George Herbert Mead."

-What is the self?

-As Mead asks (Lemert p. 221), "how can an individual get outside himself [or herself] (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself [herself]?"

-Why is this process crucial to the development of the self?

Wednesday, April 4

Erving Goffman. "On Face Work." Pp. 332-336 in **Lemert**.

Katherine Walker. "'It's Difficult to Hide It': The Presentation of Self on Internet Home Pages" *Qualitative Sociology*. 23: 99-120. **(ER)**

-How is social interaction like a dramatic performance?

-Must we believe in our performances for them to be effective?

Monday, April 9

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. "Society as Human Product." Pp 384-388 in **Lemert**.

*-What is an institution, according to Berger and Luckmann?
-How do they develop out of ordinary human action and interaction?*

Wednesday, April 11

Dorothy E. Smith “Knowing a Society from Within: A Woman’s Standpoint.” Pp. 388-390 in **Lemert.**

Patricia Hill Collins. “Black Feminist Thought and the Matrix of Domination.” Pp. 536-546 in **Lemert.**

Ritzer, pp. 468-480. “Feminist Sociological Theory” and “Toward and Integrative Theory.”

-How does who we are influence the ways we produce and consume sociological theory?

Monday, April 16

Unit Review

Unit 4 papers due

Wednesday, April 18

Paul De Man. 1986. Selections from *Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. **(ER)**

Stephen Seidman. 1991. “The End of Sociological Theory: The Postmodern Hope.” *Sociological Theory*. 9: 131-146. **(ER)**

-What does Seidman mean by the “end” of sociological theory?

-To what ends do you think sociological theory should be used?

Monday, April 23

Reading TBA

Wednesday, April 25—

Review and Wrap up.

Monday, April 30—Final Exam, 9:45 AM