

Sociological Theories: the tradition and current notions part 1
2021-2022

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The course presents the fundamental changes of the main perspectives (paradigms) of the social and (to some extent) political thought and offers a broad picture of the history of ideas which significantly influenced contemporary sociology. The material is organized chronologically and presents the history of the discovery of the fact that human beings exist in the social reality they have created. The course will reconstruct the process of narrowing down the concept of social reality as developing through the series of socio-cultural crises to which social theory provides a response consoling existential anxieties. The particular periods to be analyzed are: the conceptual separation of the socio-political order from the world perceived as a whole (ancient Greece), the separation of the social and the political orders in the 17th century, the emergence of sociology as a distinct field of inquiry (the Enlightenment), the attempt to make the reflection on society on the one hand a systematic and science-like project and, on the other hand, the attempt to deconstruct the concept of society as an ideological illusion (19th century), and finally the beginnings of the academic sociology (20th century). Special attention will be given to Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, two “giants” of classical social theory. Their thought will be analyzed as an attempt to find the elementary units of sociological analysis (“social facts” in Durkheim’s sociology and “social action” in the approach of Weber). Their approaches will illustrate two contradictory tendencies in social theory: the one that regards society as a dominant reality, which regulates and controls individuals, and the one that interprets society as a kind of more or less ephemeral reality that emerges out of the multitude of individual actions. Eventually, the relation between “action” and “society” will be presented in two post-Weberian perspectives in social theory: structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism.

The genealogy of the most important sociological categories will be analyzed, together with the changing problem agenda of social theory, particularly regarding the “multitude” vs. “unity” problem as well as the attempts to incorporate change in the vision of the social world. When possible, an attempt will be made to link classical social theory with contemporary sociological approaches. For example, the study of the beginnings of social theory in the ancient Greece will be accompanied by a discussion of Karl R. Popper’s idea of closed/open society, Hobbes’ idea of rationalized power will be paired with Foucault’s concept of power-knowledge, social theory of the Enlightenment will be discussed in the context of critique of modernity by Horkheimer, Adorno and Bauman, Critical Theory will be mentioned in the context of Karl Marx’s approach to social theory, Durkheim’s views will form a springboard to the Cultural Turn in social theory and Max Weber’s idea of modernization will be approached with the help of Habermas’ defense of modernity.

Requirements:

Participation in classes is mandatory. One can miss one meeting without consequences. Absence in two meetings will lead to writing a “penalty essay” of 1,500 words on a topic given by the lecturer, to be delivered together with course essay. Absence in three meetings means that the absentee is not allowed to complete the course.

Course essay of 3,000 words, to be delivered at the end of the first teaching period, on a topic selected from the list provided by the lecturer in one of the first meetings.

Please consult the MA Handbook regarding the submission of the course essay and any other questions you may be interested in.

General suggestions regarding literature:

“Textbooks”

Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Structure and Meaning: Relinking Classical Sociology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Fin de Siecle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason*, London-New York: Verso, 1995.

Gerard Delanty, *Social Theory in a Changing World. Conceptions of Modernity*, Cambridge, UK—Oxford, UK—Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Larry J. Ray, *Theorizing Classical Sociology*, Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999.

Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1998.

Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000.

“Reference Library”

Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, 2 volumes, London: Penguin, 1965-67.

Tom Bottomore, Robert A. Nisbet (eds.), *A History of Sociological Analysis*, London: Heinemann, 1979.

Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought. Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, New York 1977.

Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, London 1967.

Jerzy Szacki, *History of Sociological Thought*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1979.

Literature suggested for particular classes will be given below in the plan of the course. In addition, some more literature will be suggested during the course at the end of particular sections.

Plan of the course:

The course will be divided into six meetings, two of them four hour long, the rest – 3 hour long (1 hour = 60 minutes).

Meeting 1 (4 hrs.)

Introduction to the Course. What is social theory and why do we need it: an existential perspective.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology* Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 1: Dimensions of the social: an introduction.

Delanty, G. 2000. The Foundations of Social Theory: Origins and Trajectories. In: B. S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Berger, P.L. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology. A Humanistic Perspective*. Chapter 6.

Ancient Greece: crisis and the origins of social theory. The “spell of Plato” and the problem of change in social theory.

Popper, K.R. 1966. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I: *The Spell of Plato*. London: Routledge. Chapter 4: Change and Rest.

Meeting 2 (3 hrs.)

The separation of “the social” from “the political” in the work of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes and Foucault on rationalization of power.

Schochet, G.J. 1990. Intending (Political) Obligation: Hobbes and the Voluntary Basis of Society. In: M.G. Dietz (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

The Enlightenment Project. Reason, Progress, Society. Contemporary criticism of the Enlightenment and modernity.

Bauman, Z. 1991. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 1: The Scandal of Ambivalence.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 2: Enlightenment, Reason and Science.

Meeting 3 (3hrs.)

In search for the science of society: August Comte and Herbert Spencer.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 3: Comtean Positivism and Sociology.

Seidman, S. 1998. *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell. Chapter 1: Grand Visions: August Comte and Karl Marx.

Karl Marx: deconstruction of “society” and beginnings of Critical Theory.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 4: Reason’s Revolt Thunders.

Meeting 4 (3 hrs.)

In search of the elementary unit of sociological analysis. Emile Durkheim and “social facts.” Durkheim and the “Cultural Turn” in contemporary theory.

Lukes, S. 1975. *Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work. A Historical and Critical Study*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Chapter 10: The Method and Subject-Matter of Sociology.

Alexander J.C. 1989. Rethinking Durkheim’s Intellectual Development: On the Complex Origins of a Cultural Sociology. In: J. C. Alexander, *Structure and Meaning: Relinking Classical Sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press.

The Society in Us: Emile Durkheim on integration, religion, and identity.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 5: Durkheim, Differentiation and Morality.

Durkheim, E. 1972. *Selected Writings*. A. Giddens (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1: Religion and Ritual; Chapter 12: Secularization and Rationality.

Lukes, S. 1975. *Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work. A Historical and Critical Study*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Chapter 23: The Sociology of Religion II.

Meeting 5 (3 hrs.)

In search of the elementary unit of sociological analysis: Max Weber and “social action.”

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 8: Max Weber: The Triumph of Reason?

Seidman, S. 1998. *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell. Chapter 2: The Promise of Sociology: Emile Durkheim and Max Weber.

Weber, M. 1949. "Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy. In: M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. E.A. Shils, H.A. Finch (eds.). New York: The Free Press.

Society as probability. Max Weber on society, rationalization and modernity. Contemporary context: Habermas' defense of modernity.

Alexander, J.C. 1989. The Dialectic of Individuation and Domination: Weber's Rationalization Theory and Beyond. In: J. C. Alexander, *Structure and Meaning: Relinking Classical Sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ingram, D. 1987. *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Chapter 4: Weber's Theory of Rationalization.

Meeting 6 (4 hrs.)

Social theory after Weber. Interactionist perspective of the early American social theory and its post-Weberian continuations.

K. Plummer, Symbolic Interactionism in the Twentieth Century. In: B .S. Turner (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000.

From action to system: structural functionalism in search of paradigmatic sociology.

Seidman, S. 1998. *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell. Chapter 3: From European Social Theory to American Sociological Theory: Talcott Parsons and the Autonomy of Theory.