

Sociological Theories Part 1
2023-2024

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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 humans 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 society 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.

The course will be taught remotely on Zoom.

Requirements:

Participation in classes is mandatory. One can miss two meetings without consequences. Absence in three 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 four meetings and more 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.

General suggestions regarding literature:

This course is based on a lecture and does not involve a substantial discussion of reading texts. However, it contains several suggestions regarding readings. The recommended readings can be divided into “Textbooks” (the most general presentations of classical social theories), “Reference Library” (the older books from 1960s and 1970s to give students a sense of change in approaching social theory), literature given at the end of each unit of the course (containing important texts used by the lecturer to prepare the lecture), and literature assigned to particular meetings. Important: students do not have to read anything for

particular classes. Instead, the lecturer may arrange a discussion of some selected fragments sent out before the class or presented during the class in the PowerPoint presentation.

“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.

Plan of the course:

The course will be divided into seven meetings, the first will be two hour long, the rest – three hour long (1 hour = 60 minutes).

Meeting 1 (October 7, 10:00-12:00)

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

Suggested literature:

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.

Meeting 2 (October 14, 10:00-13:00)

Ancient Greece: crisis and discovery of the changing human world. Ideal polis as the unification of diversity. An excursion into present: Plato’s closed society in the interpretation of Karl R. Popper.

Suggested literature:

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

Meeting 3 (November 4, 10:00-13:00)

A. Thomas Hobbes: crisis and discovery of the difference between “the social” and “the political.” Political unity as representation of social diversity. An excursion into present” Michel Foucault’s theory of power as rationality.

Suggested literature:

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.

B. Enlightenment. Crisis and discovery of society. Diversity as the coexistence of different stages of progress of the unitary humanity. A dissenting opinion: Jan-Jacques Rousseau. An excursion into present: from Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to Bauman’s critique of Modernity.

Suggested literature:

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 4 (November 18, 10:00-13:00)

Social theory in the 19th century. The Grandfathers. Crisis and the beginnings of modern society and modern social theory.

- **The Priest: Auguste Comte. Social unification through secular religion.**
- **The Scientist: Herbert Spencer. Unity as functional cooperation of different organs of social organism.**
- **The Rebel: Karl Marx. Unity as deception; deconstruction of “society”.**

Suggested literature:

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.

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

Meeting 5 (December 2, 10:00-13:00)

Founding fathers (1): Emile Durkheim. In search of the elementary particles of society: “social facts”. “Organic” solidarity and the concept of “social fact” as the solutions to the unity – diversity problem. Integration and regulation. Religion as theology of society.

Suggested literature:

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. Chapter 23: The Sociology of Religion II.

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.

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

Meeting 6 (December 16, 10:00-13:00)

Founding fathers (2): Max Weber. In search of the elementary particles of society: social action. Society as probability. Rationalization and modernity. The role of religion.

Suggested literature:

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.

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 7 (January 13, 10:00-13:00)

Social theory after Weber. Interactionist perspective of the early American social theory and its post-Weberian continuations. From interaction to system: structural functionalism in search of paradigmatic sociology. Criticism of functionalism and the beginnings of contemporary theory.

Suggested literature:

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.

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.