

University of Florida Spring 2019  
**CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY**

Professor: Tamir Sorek

Time: Fridays 10:40 – 1:40

Place: 201D Walker Hall

Office Hours: Wednesday 9:00 – 10:00 or by appointment.

Email: [tsorek@ufl.edu](mailto:tsorek@ufl.edu)

In this course we examine the diversity of major theoretical orientations in sociological thought since the 1950s. These perspectives differ in several dimensions that we will be analyzed: What is the major force that shapes social reality – material conditions or ideas? To what extent are individuals free or constrained by social structures? Is society a sphere of endless conflicts or a site of consensus and harmony? Is there an objective social reality or only various subjective points of view? Various scholars provide different answers to these questions. While analyzing them we will address as well the following questions: What are some of the strengths and weaknesses in each of these positions? How do these theories inform our understanding of contemporary society? Do these perspectives offer valid interpretations of contemporary society? How are particular ways of sociological thinking related to the specific social positions and biographies of the theorists? How have the foundations of each of these views changed over time?

## **Assignments**

### Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory. Legitimate reasons for absence include only documented medical condition or absences pre-approved by the instructor. Frequent unjustified absences will affect negatively the student's grade.

### Class Participation

Students are expected to show up in class after reading the relevant materials for discussion and preparing critical comments they can share with other students (%10).

### Reading commentary

Students are expected to upload to Canvas a brief but thoughtful commentary (approximately 300 words) referring to the weekly reading assignment before class. Remember – a commentary is not a summary. This can be in the form of a narrative, an analytical critique, or an essay illustrating the connection between a theme raised by an author and a corresponding social issue, or a comparison between the assigned text and other texts discussed in the course. Commentary will be graded twice during the semester, once following the 2/15 submission (14%) and once at the end of the semester (16%).

### Facilitating a class discussions

Each student will be responsible for leading discussions of the readings for one session. The facilitation will begin by presenting an introductory critique of the text(s) and raising a few questions to the class. Facilitators should prepare their critique and questions in advance of their session and put together a written critique of the readings in the form of a single paper (maximum 800 words), which should then be submitted in lieu of the individual reading response for that week, but at least 24 hours before class (10%).

### Final Paper.

The final paper will be based on a comparison of a single theme in the work of several authors discussed throughout the course. Other approaches may be acceptable provided that they are approved prior to writing. The subject matter and basic argument of the paper should be submitted in the form of a written abstract consisting of one or two paragraphs, no later than 1/28. The paper itself should not be longer than 3,000 words. A first draft (10% of the final grade) will be submitted by 4/8, and the final version by 4/26 (40% of the final grade).

Grading Policy: Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade point can be found at

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Plagiarism: Using others' ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information is considered plagiarism and is a serious violation of the honor code of the University of Florida (please see <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php> for details). Submitting plagiarized work will automatically result in a failing grade in this course and will be reported to the relevant authorities in the university.

Students with disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

1/11 **Introduction - Defining Sociological Theory**

1/18 **Culture and power – Gramscian perspective**

Anderson, Perry. *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci*. *New Left Review*, 1976. 5-6, 18-26

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Eds. Hoare, Q. and G. N. Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishar, 1971 181-182. 192-193 (par. On 'economism'?)

Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Eds. Marley, D. and K. H. Chen. London: Routledge, 1996. 435-440

### 1/25 **Structural Functionalism**

Merton, Robert K. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*: Free Press (pp. 73-93).

Parsons, Talcott. 2005. *The social system* Routledge.(pp. 64-75 125-137)

Bellah, Robert. 1967. "Civil Religion in America." *Dedalus* (96):1-21

### 2/1 **Understanding totalitarianism**

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973 (305-363).

Baehr, Peter. *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences*. Stanford University Press, 2010 (pp. 10-34)

Marcuse, Herbert. 1968. *One dimensional man: The ideology of industrial society*: Sphere Books (pp. 13-24)

### 2/8 **The Public Sphere**

Habermas, Jurgen. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, MIT Press. (pp. 1-31; 159-195; 237-250).

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

### 2/15 **Micro Sociology**

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday, (pp 1-76)

Collins, Randall. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press, 2014 (pp. 3-46).

James

### 2/22 **Macro-Micro and Agency-structure integration**

Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process : The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* [in English]. Oxford [England] ; Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1994 (181-189; 156-168; 443-456)

“The sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu”, pp. 325-386 from: Calhoun, Craig (ed.) 2012. *Contemporary sociological theory*: John Wiley & Sons

### 3/1 **Poststructuralism**

Debate between Noam Chomsky & Michel Foucault  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfnI2LOGf8#t=467>

Foucault, Michel. Pp. 3-29, 169-187 from Rabinow, Paul (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*, Vintage Books, 2010.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books Edition, 1979 (p. 1-9).

Said, Edward W. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard University Press, 1983 (pp. 243-247)

### 3/15 **Postmodernism**

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press, 1993 (8-15, 29-48).

Latour, Bruno. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225-48.

Against postmodernism: Habermas, Jurgen, “Modernity: An unfinished project”, pp. 444-450 from Calhoun, Craig (ed.) 2012. *Contemporary sociological theory*: John Wiley & Sons.

### 3/22 **Race**

Fenton, Steve. 2010. *Ethnicity*, Polity Press (pp. 88-114, “How real are groups?”)

Fanon, Frantz. 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto (pp. 1-10; 82-91; 168-173)

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2001. "Like one of the family: race, ethnicity, and the paradox of US national identity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24(1):3-28.

### 3/29 **Nations and nationalism**

Smith, Anthony D. 1998. *Nationalism and Modernism*, Routledge, Ch. 6,7,8 (115 – 198)

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2000, p. 1-8.

Anthias, Floya, and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Woman-Nation-State*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989 (p. 1-11).

4/12 **Feminist Theory**

West, Candace, and Don Zimmerman, H. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1(2):125-51.

Smith, Dorothy .E. 1990. *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*: University of Toronto Press. (12-19; 21-27)

Hooks, Bell. 2000. *Feminist theory: From margin to center*: Pluto Press (pp 1-17).

4/19 **Individual presentations**