

**Contemporary Sociological Theory**  
(Mondays 9 a.m.-noon, McNeil 409)

This course is structured around the main theoretical debates of contemporary sociology—such as rationality vs. emotion, agency vs. structure, the origins of power, and the nature of modernity. In considering alternative positions on these debates, we will encounter the major theorists of the past fifty years, including Parsons, Merton, Goffman, Homans, Schutz, Coleman, Bourdieu, Luhmann, Habermas, Collins, and Giddens. We also be concerned, though secondarily, with the relationship between theory and research.

**Instructor: David Gibson**  
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584 McNeil  
Office hours: Wed. 1:30-3:00  
or by appointment  
(recommended in any event)

Texts available at the Penn Bookstore which we'll be using:

Blau, Peter M. 1986. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New Brunswick: Transaction.  
Bourdieu, Pierre. 2002. *Distinction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.  
Coleman, James C. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.  
Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton.  
Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage.  
Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity.  
Luhmann, Niklas. 1995. *Social Systems*. Stanford: Stanford U.

Other texts at the Bookstore which we're not using but which you should own:

Schutz, Alfred. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern U.  
Stinchcombe, Arthur. 1987. *Constructing Social Theories*. Chicago: U. of Chicago.

And here some books you should acquire though I neglected to order them:

Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual*. New York: Pantheon.  
Goffman, Erving. 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*: Touchstone.

There will also be a course webpage containing most of the readings (the exception being those in the texts listed above). This may or may not be the Blackboard page. Email me if any of the online readings is inaccessible.

**Requirements:**

Your grade will be based on (a) attendance and participation in class (20%), (b) weekly memos submitted by 5:00 a.m. the morning of class (30%), (c) one or two appearances as discussant (10%), and (d) a final paper (40%).

*Memos:* By 5:00 a.m. the morning of class (starting on Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>), email me a brief memo summarizing the readings as they bear upon the dichotomy or debate under which they appear,

and providing your *one best idea* about those readings—such as a incisive criticism of one (or more of them), some idea as to how the positions might be synthesized, or some empirical application for one or more of the readings. The subject line must consist of: “SOC 601 MEMO”. (This will make it easier for me to assemble the memos and print them before heading for the train.) The memo should be in the body of the email, not an attached document, and should not be longer than one single-spaced page (were you to copy and paste it into a word processing package with 1 inch margins and 12 point font). Then bring a copy of your memo to class, so that you can give it to me should email somehow have failed us.

*Discussant:* For each class, one or two students will serve as discussant(s). He/she/they should provide background on any theorists we’re newly encountering (based on online sources or theory texts—focus on theorists whose names are in **boldface**), summarize the readings, and provide some questions for discussion. How many students serve as discussants on a given week, and how many times each student has to serve, will be determined by the size of the class.

*Paper:* You are to write an approximately 20-25 page, double-spaced paper, due at the end of the semester. You can take one of several approaches to this paper. One possibility is to apply one or more of the theoretical perspectives to some historical or contemporary phenomenon, such as the (so far) failed attempt at nation-building in Iraq. Another possibility is to write a paper on theorist we overlooked or otherwise shortchanged, explaining how they would address some (not necessarily all) of the theoretical debates we’re discussing; examples include Foucault, Elias, Latour, and Alexander, as well as the entirety of post-modernist theory and formal-mathematical theorizing. There are probably other possibilities still, but you are *not* to merely write a literature review of some existing subfield of sociology. I recommend that you okay your topic with me in advance of writing the paper. This will be due on May 1.

## Schedule

### January 8: Introduction

Camic, Charles and Neil Gross. 1998. "Contemporary Developments in Sociological Theory: Current Projects and Conditions of Possibility." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:453-76

### January 15: University holiday

### January 22: Function and conflict

**Parsons**, Talcott. 1964. "Evolutionary Universals in Society." *American Sociological Review* 29:339-57—online (You should also be familiar with Parsons’ AGIL scheme. If you’re not, research it online or in some secondary text.)

**Merton**, Robert. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press. Pp. 60-69 (manifest and latent functions)—online

Merton, Robert K. 1957. "The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory." *The British Journal of Sociology* 8:106-120—online

Coser, Lewis A. 1966. "Some Social Functions of Violence." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 364:8-18—online

Propositions from Coser, *Functions of Social Conflict*—online

Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1958. "Toward a Theory of Social Conflict." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2:170-83—online

Wright, Erik Olin. 2005. *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 1—online

### **January 29: Meaning and behavior**

**Homans**, George Caspar. 1961. *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. Ch. 4—online

Chomsky, Noam 1971. "The Case Against B.F. Skinner." *New York Review of Books*, December 30—online

**Schütz**, Alfred. 1951. "Choosing Among Projects of Action." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12:161-84—online

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basic Blackwell. §271, 272, 273, 274, 288, 293, 304, 305, 306, 307—online

Leifer, Eric M. 1988. "Interaction Preludes to Role Setting: Exploratory Local Action." *American Sociological Review* 53:865-78—online

Recommended:

Rizzolatti, Giacomo, Leonard Fogassi, and Vittorio Gallese. 2006. "Mirrors in the Mind." *Scientific American*, November, pp. 54-61. – for the neurology behind Schütz.

### **February 5: Social order and cooperation**

Parsons, Talcott. 1951. *The Social System*. New York: Free Press. Ch. 6—online

Wrong, Dennis H. 1961. "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 26:183-93—online

Luhmann, *Social Systems*. Ch. 8.

Nowak, Martin A. 2006. "Five Rules for the Evolution of Cooperation." *Science* 314:1560-63—online

**Goffman**, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual*. New York: Pantheon. Pp. 5-45 (“On Face-Work”)—online

**Habermas**, Jürgen. 1976. "Some Distinctions in Universal Pragmatics: A Working Paper." *Theory and Society* 3:155-67—online

## **February 12: Rationality and emotion**

**Coleman**, Foundations of Social Theory, chs. 1, 2, 4, 10, 11, 19

Hirschman, Albert O. 1984. "Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse." *American Economic Review* 74:89-96—online

**Collins**, Randall. 1993. "Emotional Energy as the Common Denominator of Rational Action." *Rationality and Society* 5:203-30—online—or selections from *Interaction Ritual Chains* (TBA).

## **February 19: Power—pervasive but elusive**

Lukes, Steven. *Power: A Radical View*. Pp. 14-38

Mann, Michael. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 1—online

**Blau**, Peter. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. Ch. 5

Collins, Randall. 2000. "Situational Stratification: A Micro-Macro Theory of Inequality." *Sociological Theory* 18:17-43—online

Collins, Patricia Hill, *Black Feminist Thought*—selection online.

**Foucault**, *History of Sexuality*. Pp. 92-102

## **February 26: Micro and macro**

Homans, George C. 1964. "Bringing Men Back In." *American Sociological Review* 29:809-818—online

Coleman, James S. 1986. "Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 91:1309-35

Collins, Randall. 1981. "On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 86:984-1014—online

**Luhmann**, *Social Systems*. Chs. 6, 10.

Rauch, Jonathan 2002. "Seeing Around Corners." *The Atlantic Monthly*, April, pp. 35-48—online

### **March 5: Spring break**

### **March 12: Identity: Constructed vs. imposed**

Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*--(very short) selection online

**Du Bois**, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk*—selection online

**Giddens**, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Ch. 3

Goffman, Erving. 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*: Touchstone. Pp. TBA

Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity. Ch. 5

White, Harrison C. 1992. *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 3-12—online

Also recommended: Abbott, Andrew. 1994. "Review of *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action*." *Social Forces* 72:895-901—online

### **March 19: Position and perception**

**Bourdieu**, Pierre. 1991. "Social Space and Symbolic Space." *Poetics Today* 12:627-38—online, or selections from *Distinction* (TBA)

Martin, John Levi. 2003. "What is Field Theory?" *American Journal of Sociology* 109:1-49—online

Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 103:281-317—online

Recommended:

Fligstein, Neil. 2001. "Social Skill and the Theory of Fields." *Sociological Theory* 19:105-25

### **March 26: Structure and agency**

Collins, Randall. 1992. "The Romanticism of Agency/Structure versus the Analysis of Micro/Macro." *Current Sociology* 40:77-97—online

**Sewell, William H.** 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98:1-29—online

Emirbayer, Mustafa and Ann Mische. 1998. "What is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103:962-1023—online

Gibson, David. 2000. "Seizing the Moment: The Problem of Conversational Agency." *Sociological Theory* 18:369-82—online

Recommended:

Meyer, John W. and Ronald L. Jepperson. 2000. "The 'Actors' of Modern Society: The Cultural Construction of Social Agency." *Sociological Theory* 18

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1997. "Social Science at the Quest for a Just Society." *American Journal of Sociology* 102:1241-57

Gibson, David R. 2005. "Opportunistic Interruptions: Interactional Vulnerabilities Deriving from Linearization." *Social Psychological Quarterly* 68:316-37

### **April 2: Contingency**

David, Paul A. 1985. "Clio and the Economics of QWERTY." *American Economic Review* 75:332-37—online

**Abbott, Andrew.** 1997. "On the Concept of Turning Point." *Comparative Social Research* 16:89-109 (reprinted in Abbott, Andrew. 2001. *Time Matters: On Theory and Method*. Chicago: U. of Chicago)

Luhmann, *Social Systems*. Ch. 3

Sewell, William H. 1996. "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille." *Theory and Society* 25:841-881—online

Bearman, Peter, James Moody, and Robert Faris. 2002. "Networks and History." *Complexity* 7:59-74—online

### **April 9: Modernity: globalization, risk, and terrorism**

Ritzer, George. 1996. "The McDonaldization Thesis: Is Expansion Inevitable?" *International Sociology* 11:291-308—online

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *The Consequences of Modernity*: Stanford University Press. Pp. TBA

**Tilly, Charles.** "Terror as Strategy and Relational Process." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46:11-32—online

Black, Donald. 2004. "The Geometry of Terrorism." *Sociological Theory* 22:14-25—online

Habermas, Jürgen. 1987 [1981]. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Pp. TBA—online

### **April 16: Progress in sociology**

Donald Black, "The Purification of Sociology," *Contemporary Sociology* 29:5 (2000): 704-709—online

Collins, Randall. 1994. "Why the Social Sciences Won't Become High-Consensus, Rapid-Discovery Science." *Sociological Forum* 9:155-77.

Davis, James A. 1994. "What's Wrong with Sociology?" *Sociological Forum* 9:179-97.

Bois, W.E.B. Du. 2000. "Sociology Hesitant." *Boundary* 2:37-44