

**Sociology 241-01**  
**Development of Social Theory**  
**T/Th 12:30-1:45**  
**Stein 217**

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## **The Development of Social Theory**

*"Social theory keeps the discipline of sociology alive. Its principles and notions spark new research endeavors. Theory is used in novel applications to better social structures and institutions and ultimately alleviate social inequality."* Keith Plummer, Midterm Exam, Class of 2017

If you were asked to reflect on the factors that shape the major social issues we face today, what would you ponder? You might ask, what explains the deepening gap between the wealthy and the poor? What explains the various conflicts and acts of violence that frequent the news headlines? How is the internet re-shaping our personal relationships and public identities? How have the roles played by men and women changed in our society? What about race relations? What are the challenges to realizing human rights? The history of the development of social theory is a history of how sociological thinkers have addressed the major social issues and changes through which they have lived. It is a history of the ideas that have come to shape the field of sociology and how we organize our study of society.

In this course, we will discuss the development of social theory from its classical to contemporary composition, from the early theorists who are accredited with developing the field, to the many diverse scholars that now contribute to critical social theorizing. We will talk about the historical and cultural environments in which different theories have developed, the conditions under which theories are applied and tested, and the applicability of these theories to explain today's pressing social problems.

The main focus of this course will be on understanding how sociologists use theory in analysis.

By the course's end you should be able to answer:

- What is a social theory? What are its vital components? And, how is it tested and applied to sociological study?
- What are some of the major paradigmatic theories that have animated the field of sociology? What were the historical factors shaping the development of those ideas?
- What are the uses of social theory both in academia and in public policy? And,
- What theories are relevant to my personal scholastic interests?

### **Course Structure**

This is a mid-level course that requires that you have had some introduction to sociological thinking but which will also provide you with the foundational knowledge of

theory to develop your conceptual and methodological skills as a sociology major. The course will consist of:

**Lectures:** I will provide historical background and cultural context for major theorists and theories and situate these works as they continue to shape sociological research today.

**Discussion:** You will be expected to explore key concepts and general arguments and evidence of assigned readings. In this class both engaged reading and discussion are imperative. That is, many of the readings- especially the dated classics- are challenging in both style and content. To effectively grasp the meaning and relevance of these foundational works, you must dedicate a significant amount of time to reading and reflection in preparation for class discussion. I will provide discussion questions beforehand to guide you through the readings. You will not be graded on answering these questions, but they will be a helpful guide through the readings. I also expect you to bring your own notes and questions on key concepts and difficult passages.

**Application:** We will continually unpack the logical structure of social theories in class discussion and through course assignments. These will include individual reflection exercises and papers, group discussion, and some group work.

### **Assignments and Exams**

**Response Papers:** You will write a series of 5 short response papers which will help you to work through the material and will give me an idea of what you have effectively taken away from each theorist and what remains unclear about different concepts.

You have two ways of approaching these short papers and will do 5 total.

You may either pick a prompted question or two (that I will provide on the Moodle site) and engage with the question in a reflective writing exercise. Or you may provide your own critical overview of the main tenets and problems of the theory and raise and explore your own questions about the readings. As we work through different bodies of theory you will begin to compare and contrast theories with other theories or contemporary and “competing” frameworks.

These reflections will be 2 ½ - 4 pages in length following my formatting guidelines posted on Moodle. You must write one of these memos for each of the major sections we discuss to be turned in on or before the last day of each substantive section. *As we work through questions each class discussion you will have many examples of how to develop these reflective papers.*

**Theory Application Essays:** The second type of paper you will write is a theory application in which you will apply and extend key concepts and theoretical arguments to salient social issues. This is the “so what” part of the theory course that I wish to hit home with you. Generally, you will be asking, how are these

theories relevant to making sense of the world we live in today and its array of social problems? In this second option I will provide a particular issue for you to engage with and will point you to the key texts from which you should draw your application.

You will write 2 essay papers of 7 pages in length (not including a title page) following the formatting guidelines posted on Moodle and due on the specific dates indicated on the syllabus..

**Exams:** You will have two reading exams. Your exams will provide a comprehensive measure of the knowledge you have gained and will query you in both the general comprehension of the structure of each theory and your ability to extend and apply that theory. That is, I expect you to understand and be able to intelligibly explain the main contributions of each theorist and the context in which concepts were developed and applied. *And* I want you to demonstrate your ability to use that theory to explain current social issues.

### **Grading**

Your grade will be comprised of a combination of in-class and out-of class learning:

#### **In-class learning:**

Participation	10%
Small in-class assignments	10%

#### **Out-of-class learning:**

Reflection Papers	10%
Essays	30%
Exams	40% (20% each)

***\*All assignments must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the day they are due. \****

#### **Attendance and Late Assignments:**

Because the topic is dense and \*a lot\* of information is covered in each class session, you are expected to attend all of my classes.

In the event you do miss class, please obtain notes from a classmate first and then come and speak to me to fill in any remaining questions on the material.

One grade increment will be lost for each day an assignment is late, and because reflective papers are graded on a 3 point system- this will be calculated as explained in the Reflective Paper Guidelines. No extensions are granted on assignments- plan ahead!

#### **Grading Criteria and Evaluation:**

When taking off points for incorrect or incomplete answers in any assignment, I will explain what was missing from the assignment and why you received the grade you did.

If you have any further questions about your grades speak to me within one week from the date upon which you received the graded assignment. Before you come I ask that you review the model assignment (posted on Moodle) and come with a sense of where your paper or exam could be improved. I am highly invested in helping you to improve both your analytical and writing skills!

Finally, please observe the college's policies on [Academic Honesty](#). Especially in a theory class, consulting web sources becomes a slippery slope into the territory of plagiarism. If you're not sure- please review these criteria.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

**We will discuss a number of topics that may be politically controversial or personally sensitive issues. I expect all students to engage in a critical discussion that can incorporate your and others' personal perspectives. This is not only crucial to creating a safe space in which as young scholars you may explore the value and meaning of your scholarship to different life experiences; it is a fundamental tenet of social theory to produce knowledge that is understanding of the context in which different actions and beliefs are formed.**

No laptops, iPads, iPhones or personal screen devices of any kind are accepted in the classroom unless accompanied by a note from Disability Services. In a discussion-based course, any organizational benefit of taking electronic notes outweighs the distracting effects. Furthermore, knowledge acquisition studies show that hand-written notes produce much more effective knowledge retention.

### **Special Needs**

If you have special needs during the class or for examinations please bring me a form from the Office of Disability Services **within the first two weeks of class** and I will make arrangements for your accommodations. <http://offices.holycross.edu/disability-services>.

### **Course Texts**

Texts for this course may be purchased at the College bookstore, online new or wherever used copies are available and I will place one copy of each book on reserves at the library. You may check a book out from library course reserves at the front desk for a total of 2 hours at a time. Should you rely on this option, planning ahead will be key. Texts we will read are as follows:

The main text we will use throughout the course will be a reader in Classic and Contemporary theories,

*Social Theory rewired*, by Daniel Winchester and Wesley Longhofer,

Additionally, we will read two contemporary theoretical collections:

*Economic Lives* by Viviana Zelizer,

*Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* by Randall Collins

We will also read a number of articles and chapters which will be posted on the Moodle site.

### Course Schedule

Date/Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments Due
1/20 Tuesday	<b>Introductions/ Course Overview</b>		
1/22 Thursday	<b>The Story of Social Theory</b>	<b>Moodle:</b> “Present at Creation” and “Early Traditions of African American Social Thought”	➤ <b>Whose ideas established the discipline of sociology? How should we approach that story?</b>
1/27 Tuesday	<b>The Uses of Social Theory</b>	<b>Moodle:</b> Excerpts from <i>Constructing Social Theories</i> , “Sociological Perspective-Man in Society,” 66-92.	➤ <b>What is a Theory? What are the Uses of Theory?</b>
1/29 Thursday	<b>Emergence through Convergence: The Puzzles of Social Order</b>	<b>STR:</b> Section 1: Introduction (1-6), Division of Labor (14-37)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How do social structures shape the individual?</li> <li>➤ How is deviance contextual?</li> <li>➤ How do ideas shape social institutions?</li> </ul>
2/3 Tuesday		<b>STR:</b> Suicide (38-49), <b>Moodle:</b> “Eating your Friends is the Hardest”	
2/5 Thursday		<b>STR:</b> Elementary Forms (50-65)	
2/10 Tuesday		<b>Moodle:</b> “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial”	

		(excerpts)	
2/12 Thursday		<b>STR:</b> The Social Construction of Reality (93-105)	<b>-Response Paper #1 Due</b>
2/17 Tuesday	<b>Networks of Capital: Dimensions of Global Capitalism</b>	<b>STR:</b> Section II Intro (107-114), The German Ideology (115-119), The Communist Manifesto (120-128)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is the political basis of inequality?</li> <li>➤ How does the economy shape the lives of individuals? Global society?</li> </ul>
2/19 Thursday		<b>STR:</b> Capital (129-135), Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (136-142)	
2/24 Tuesday		<b>STR:</b> The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System (143-152)	
2/26 Thursday		<b>Moodle:</b> “The Globalization of Fresh Food”	
3/3 Tuesday			<b>Spring Break!</b>
3/5 Thursday			<b>Spring Break!</b>
3/10 Tuesday		<b>Moodle:</b> “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State” (excerpts), excerpts from <i>Global Women</i>	- <b>Response Paper #2 Due</b>
3/12 Thursday			<b>Midterm Exam</b>
3/17 Tuesday	<b>Pathway to Meltdown: Theorizing the Dark Side of Modernity</b>	<b>STR:</b> Section III Intro (201-207), The Protestant Ethic (209-236)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How does culture direct social change?</li> <li>➤ How does culture drive power? Authority?</li> </ul>

<b>3/19</b> Thursday		<b>STR:</b> Types of Legitimate Domination (250-266)	
<b>3/24</b> Tuesday		<b>STR:</b> Discipline and Punish (299-309) <b>Moodle:</b> “But I’m Not Gay: What Straight teachers Need to Know about Queer Theory”	- <b>Essay #1 Due 11 PM Moodle</b>
<b>3/26</b> Thursday		<i>Economic Lives</i> , <b>Intro plus one chapter your choice from 1, 2 and 3</b>	
<b>3/31</b> Tuesday		<i>Economic Lives</i> , <b>two chapters, your choice, from 4, 5, and 6</b>	- <b>Response Paper #3 Due</b>
<b>4/2</b> Thursday			<b>Easter Break!</b>
<b>4/7</b> Tuesday	<b>Shifting the Paradigm: Excluded Standpoints, Alternative Knowledges</b>	<b>STR:</b> The Conceptual Practices of Power (388-394), Black Feminist Thought (395-414)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How is knowledge a social phenomenon?</li> <li>➤ How does social location and experience shape the production and analysis of knowledge?</li> <li>➤ What is the value of diverse perspectives to science?</li> </ul>
<b>4/9</b> Thursday		<b>STR:</b> Section IV Intro (323-329), Racial Formation in the United States (348-353)	
<b>4/14</b> Tuesday		<b>STR:</b> The Souls of Black Folk (331-336) <b>Moodle:</b> Black Places, Black Spaces	

<b>4/16</b> Thursday		<b>Moodle:</b> Learning to be Illegal	- <b>Response Paper #4 Due</b>
<b>4/21</b> Tuesday	<b>Rise of the Avatar: The Self and Society</b>	<b>STR:</b> Section IV Intro (415-422), The Self (423-438)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is unique about the individual in modern society?</li> <li>➤ How do individuals navigate social structures in their day-to-day interactions?</li> </ul>
<b>4/23</b> Thursday		<b>STR:</b> The Metropolis and Mental Life (439-447), The Stranger (448-451)	
<b>4/28</b> Tuesday		<b>STR:</b> The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (452-463), <b>Moodle:</b> “On Deference and Demeanor”	
<b>4/30</b> Thursday		<b>Violence:</b> Selections TBA	- <b>Response Paper #5 Due</b>
<b>5/5</b> Tuesday		<b>Study Period</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Essay #2 Due Thursday May 7 11PM</b></li> <li>- <b>Final Exam TBA</b></li> </ul>

\*Note\* If during the semester there arise scheduling conflicts the syllabus may be changed, but I will not add to your reading or work load should this be necessary.