

University of Georgia  
Department of Sociology  
**Soci 6410 Current Social Theory**  
Baldwin 114A  
Fall 2005, Tues & Thursday 9:30-10:45  
[Office hours: M 1-2:15pm, Tu 10:45-12noon]  
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It's interesting, if you think about it, that there exists a domain of knowledge referred to as "sociological theory"—most academic sociology programs have required classes in it, the American Sociological Association even has a section devoted to it. Isn't all sociological writing guided by theory either implicitly or explicitly? Doesn't all social theory make ample use of empirical examples? So what is the difference? Indeed, there is little difference. Many classic works in social theory were considered empirical treatments in their day. They became "classic" because they contain foundational treatments of basic sociological issues and portray perspectives still used today.

Classic and contemporary theory are somewhat different in the following sense. While classical theory has withstood the test of time, it is usually considered "classic" because it has been surpassed in certain aspects. Contemporary theory has, by definition, not yet withstood the test of time, but is the object of contemporary debate and animates current research. Of course there is no hard and fast distinction between classic and contemporary theory. Are 1950s theorists like Talcott Parsons and Alfred Schutz classic or contemporary? What about theorists like Georg Simmel whose relational sociology is now more appreciated and used than ever before?

The goal of a course such as this is to give you a primer on the concepts, discourses, and dilemmas that animate contemporary sociological debate. Such knowledge will not only facilitate your ability to analyze social problems and assimilate sociological research, but also guide you as you formulate questions for your own research agendas. One result of this being a contemporary theory class is that the candidates for discussion are limitless. Thus to adequately survey the terrain, we will need to admire the flowers while we walk, only stopping briefly for a quick smell. This survey will be successful if it gives you a sense of what it means to work with some contemporary approaches, and where you can go for more if you want to continue to read on your own.

### ***Class participation***

I will only occasionally engage in anything similar to a lecture. The substance of most classes will be provided by you, the students. Without student participation in discussion, individual classes will be nasty, brutish and short. My emphasis on discussion might be disappointing for those who hope to be told what to think. It is not our goal here to construct a mental catalogue of ideas which can then be used to deduce reality. It is our goal to develop habits and abilities in analyzing social issues. Put differently, when you think about Sociology 6410, think not of filling your basket with berries to be consumed at a later date. Think rather in terms of basketball practice. In our discussions we will, in effect, be running drills, repeating plays, and playing endless games of pick-up in order to learn by doing. The goal will be for you to develop your sociological “imagine-ation,” your ability to construct concepts that render social phenomena intelligible, to the point that it feels like a second nature.

Graduate students will *lead class* except for when we initiate a new section. When you lead a class that means you are responsible for putting together a mix of summary and questions. You should circulate a one page sheet of questions by e-mail at least a day before the class meets. You will be graded on the overall success of this class. If the class peters out into a sea of yawns after 30 minutes and I have to take over, you will not a good grade. If class discussion rages, spills into the hall afterwards and ends with people angrily storming off in all directions, you will definitely get a good grade. When two people are assigned to the same class, you will still need to provide one (not two) page of questions the day before our session, and I will give you the same grade to each. So it is in your best self-interest to make sure your partner is doing her work.

*Responses* are meant to be your articulation of a challenge to something you hear in class. If we all do our jobs, at least some of our discussions will leave you frustrated, brooding and full of regrets about what you “should have said.” A response is a way for you to get this out on paper. Make reference to the discussion, articulate your response, document your sources, and hand it in. A good response will be two pages in which you are able to express four or five pages of ideas—in other words, give me two solid pages with no wheel spinning.

Your *final paper* should be between ten and fifteen pages. I will provide no limitations or guidelines other than reminding you that your paper should demonstrate to me that you have a good grasp of the issues we have covered and can competently work with the concepts. A good way to do this is to use several of the authors we have discussed.

### **Evaluation**

3 Classes led	30pts (10 pts each)
3 2 page responses	30pts (10 pts each)
Final paper	<u>40pts</u>
	100pts

## **Texts**

\*Alexander, Jeffrey C. 1987. *Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory since World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press.

\*Craig Calhoun et al. 2003. *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Blackwell Publishers.

\*Manuel Castells. *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Blackwell Publishers.

\*Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. Paul Rabinow (ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.

1. Syllabus, logistics, questions.

## **I. Starting Points**

2. \*Alexander, pp.1-88, Parsons [Smilde]

3. \*Alexander, pp.89-126  
\*Calhoun, pp.1-21

## **II. Exchange and Rational Choice**

4. \*Alexander, pp.127-194 [Smilde]  
\*Calhoun, pp.80-87.

5. \*Ch.5, pp. 81-98; George C. Homans, "Social Behavior as Exchange"  
. \*Ch. 6, pp. 99-109; Peter M. Blau, "Exchange and Power in Social Life"

6. \*Ch. 7, pp.110-116; James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital"  
\*Ch. 8, pp.117-125; James S. Coleman "Foundations for a Theory of Collective Decisions."  
\*Ch. 9, pp. 126-130; Mancur Olsen "The Logic of Collective Action"

## **III. Microsociology**

7. \*Alexander, pp.195-237  
\*Calhoun, Introduction to Part I, pp.25-31; Calhoun et al [Smilde]
8. \*Ch. 1, pp.32-41; Alfred Schutz "The Phenomenology of the Social World"  
\*Ch.2, pp.42-50; Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, "The Social Construction of Reality"
9. \*Ch. 3, pp.51-65; Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life"  
\*Ch.4, pp. 66-77; Herber Blumer, "Symbolic Interactionism"

#### **IV. Institutional Analysis**

10. \*Introduction to Part III, pp.131-132, Calhoun et al Dimaggio and Powell introduction [Smilde]
11. \*Ch.10, pp. 133-152; Niklas Luhmann, “Limits of Steering”
12. \*Ch. 11, pp.153-166; Charles Tilly, “Coercion, Capital, and European States”  
\*12, pp. 167-182; Paul J. Dimaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields”

#### **V. Foucault**

13. \*Introduction to Part IV. Pp.183-184, Calhoun et al. Rabinow, Intro. [Smilde]
14. \*Ch.13, pp.185-202; Michel Foucault, “The Birth of the Clinic”  
\*Ch. 14, 203-210; Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power”  
\*Ch. 15, pp. 211-218; Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish”
15. \*Madness and Civilization in Rabinow.
16. \*Sex and Truth.

#### **VI. Giddens and Bourdieu**

17. \*Introduction to Part V. pp.221-225, Calhoun et al.  
\*Introduction to Part VI, pp.259-266; 374-380. [Smilde]
18. \*Ch.16, pp.226-231; Anthony Giddens, “Some New Rules of Sociological Method”
19. \*Ch. 17, pp.232-243; Anthony Giddens, “Agency, Structure”  
\*Ch. 18, pp. 232-256; Anthony Giddens, “The Consequences of Modernity”
20. \*Ch.19, pp. 267-275; Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Space”
21. \*Ch. 20, pp. 276-288; Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures, Habitus, Practices”  
\*Ch. 21, pp. 289-304; Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed.”

## **VII. Race, Gender & Difference**

22. Alexander 127-155; Calhoun, Introduction to Part VII, pp.307-314, Calhoun et al [Smilde]
23. \*Ch.22, pp. 314-322, Dorothy E. Smith “The Conceptual Practices of Power”  
\*Ch. 23, pp.323-331, Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Epistemology”
24. \*Ch.24, pp.332-339, Frantz Fanon, “Black Skin, White Masks”  
\*Ch.25, pp.340-347, Orlando Patterson, “The Paradoxes of Integration”

## **VIII. Habermas**

25. Alexander, pp.330-373.; \*Introduction to Part VIII, pp.349-350, Calhoun et al [Smilde]
26. \*Ch.26, pp. 351-376; Jurgen Habermas Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere.  
\*Jurgen Habermas, “Technology and Science as ‘Ideology’” [photocopy]
27. \*Ch. 27, pp.377-400, Jurgen Habermas, “The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society  
\*Ch.28, pp. 401-410; Jurgen Habermas, “Theory and Practice”

## **IX. Modernity and Post-modernity**

28. \*Introduction to Part IX, pp.413-418; handout by Philip Smith. [Smilde]
29. \*Ch.29, pp.413-428; Norbert Elias “The Social Constraint towards Self-Constraint”  
\*Ch. 30, pp.429-440; Zygmunt Bauman, “A Sociological Theory of Postmodernity”  
\*Ch.31; pp. 441-447; Niklas Luhman, “Describing the Future”
30. Manuel Castells, *Power of Identity*. Pp.1-67; pp.309-62.