

# Contemporary Sociological Theory

## Spring 2011

James 3604 Brooklyn College  
Sociology 7102X  
Mondays, 6:30-8:10

Prof George Cavalletto  
office hours after class  
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### Syllabus

***The object of study.*** As students discovered in “Development of Sociological Theory,” classical social theory was created in an endeavor to gain an understanding of large-scale socio-historical processes that operate across the “macro” field of entire societies. We will devote much of first part of this semester to an examination of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century social theories that adapt these classical understandings and expand their parameters by incorporating new social, cultural and psychological conceptual approaches. But we will also turn to an entirely different 20<sup>th</sup> century theoretical endeavor: one focused on the “micro” field of inter-personal and small group social behaviors.

In the second half of the semester, we will deal with a number of more recent approaches that attempt to interconnect these macro and micro theoretical approaches. Of particular interest will be theorists of the last several decades who utilize such theoretical syntheses to bring into conceptual view what they believe to be radical alterations in the fundamental structures of modernity.

By the end of this course, students should be familiar with crucial concepts and theories that animate the contemporary sociological endeavor. They should be able to apply this knowledge critically to a variety of arenas of social life. They should be able to make connections between theory, research, and actual social behaviors, and to relate these approaches to an array of personal and social policy considerations.

***The method of study.*** A principal aim of the course is training students to read critically theoretical and investigative texts of social science and to write about and discuss issues related to these readings intelligently. Thus, *students are required to carefully read each class’s texts prior to class and to complete most of the written homework assignments concerning these readings.*

The success of our joint discussion and thinking about of the texts depends on readings being completed in advance of the class meeting. Even if a student plans not to do a homework assignment on a specific reading, she or he is nonetheless required to complete the reading prior to class and to do so with the homework question in mind, making sure that this question is answered in the text’s margins or at least in the student’s mind.

#### **Term grade will be based upon on the following:**

- ***Attendance*** — class attendance is critical and required. More than two unexcused absences will cause your grade to be lowered by one notch (A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B).
- ***Homework assignments*** — **50% of grade.** Students are encouraged to turn in each week’s homework assignment. But students are required to turn in only *eight* of the twelve of the weekly assignments. Students who turn in more than the eight required homeworks will receive *extra credit*. *No late homeworks will be accepted!*
- ***Final examination*** — **50% of grade.**
- ***Class participation*** — Class participation is graded. You can *add up to 4 extra points* to your final grade by intelligent class participation and discussion pertinent to the readings and the issues raised by the readings. Disruptive, disrespectful class behavior will result in a student’s course grade being lowered.

*If your homework assignments are done well, they should prove very helpful in preparing for the final examination, as the final will focus on the same issues addressed by the assignments.*

#### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

BOOK: *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* – copies at bookstore.

COURSE PACKETS: *All assigned readings will be passed out in class in the form of course packets*

## Assignments

**Jan 31:** Introduction and overview

### Part I: Mid-Century American Social Theory

**Feb 7: Parsons—General Theory**

- Talcott Parsons et al., *Toward a General Theory of Action*

**Feb 14: Goffman—The Dramaturgical Self**

- Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

### Part II: Critical Theory

**Feb 23 (Wednesday): Marcuse and Adorno—Domination and False Consciousness**

- Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*
- Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered”
- Theodor Adorno, “Free Time”

**Feb 28: Habermas—The Rise and Fall of the Public Sphere**

- Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

**Mar 7: Habermas—Two-Level Theory of Society**

- Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two, Lifeworld and System*

### Part III: Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Theory

**Mar 14: Dorothy Smith—A Sociology for Women**

- Dorothy E. Smith, “A Berkeley Education”
- Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*

**Mar 21: Michel Foucault—Modern Disciplinary Society**

- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*

**Mar 28: Foucault—The Social Production of ‘Sexuality’**

- Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*

**Apr 4: Bourdieu—Basic Concepts and Methods**

- Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Space,” “Structure, Habitus, Practices,” and “The Field of Cultural Production”

**Apr 11: Bourdieu—Stratified Society, Class, Status, and Agency**

- Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*

**Apr 18, 25 <spring break>**

### Part IV: Post-Modernity or Late Modernity?

**May 2: Beck—A Life of One’s Own in a Runaway World**

- Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*

**May 9: Bauman—Post-Modernity or Late-Modernity?**

- Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*

**May 16:** Review session

**May 23:** Final