

Advanced Sociological Theory
SOCI6001 – Fall 2021
Prof. Mark COHEN

For updates, see: bit.ly/3jVJ6Si

Mondays 11:30 - 14:15
Sino Building Room 429

mark.cohen@cuhk.edu.hk

Office Hours Mondays 15:30 - 17:30
Sino Building Room 420

Course Description

One of the few constants of anglophone sociology is the first year graduate sociological theory seminar. It is taken by every graduate student in a department, usually together as a cohort. Thus, if there is a shared intellectual legacy for this diverse discipline, it is handed down to each new generation of scholars in courses like this one. The core of this legacy continues, despite myriad projects to revise the “canon” over the years, to be the work of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. Any given version of this course (or even of an undergraduate-level Classical Theory lecture) will include other authors as well, but the “others” are considerably more variable than the core trinity.

This is, considering the contemporary discipline as a whole, an admittedly odd situation. The questions pursued, methods used, and positions advanced by these three thinkers can seem quite far removed from most of the work done by sociologists today. Yet, there is a reason for these authors’ position and for the expectation that every student of sociology should be familiar with their work. What they all produced classics *of* were accounts of the profound historical changes that their societies had undergone in the preceding century and were still undergoing in their time. That is to say, they were all, in different ways, theorists of modernity. Today, only a minority of sociologists directly take on “modernity” as a subject of study, but we recognize that the processes that are sometimes called modernization — including capitalist economic development, urbanization, bureaucratization, individualization, secularization, as well as reactions and countermovements to each — are an unavoidable historical background to the particular social settings and phenomena that we do study.

The primary purpose of this course is to introduce students to the classic, and some more contemporary, interpretations of this background. Students will read and discuss major works by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, supplemented with texts by other authors. Secondly, students will, through a series of exercises leading up to a final paper, gain practice in the essential skill of “writing with theories.”

Class Sessions

Reading and Preparation

This is a graduate-level seminar and as such is reading-intensive. In order to participate in the seminar discussion, it is essential that you read the assigned texts before each meeting. All readings will be made available electronically. However, I would strongly advise you to purchase the major works we will be covering, though whether it makes more sense to acquire Chinese rather than English editions, I will leave up to your own judgement. At some point in your career, you will probably teach them.

Seminar Attendance, Presentations, and Participation

Attendance is required and participation in discussion is expected. The purpose of a seminar is to not merely *be informed* about a particular set of ideas but instead to *get practice* actually mobilizing those ideas in arguments. I recognize that for various reasons, people have different levels of comfort engaging in seminar discussions. Nonetheless, I strongly encourage you to push yourself to contribute. I believe you will find it to be easier than you might think.

Students will take turns leading seminar sessions. Seminar leadership involves preparing and presenting brief summaries of that session's required readings and posing questions for discussion. It is important that you engage with the presentations and questions of your classmates. For sessions with readings by multiple authors, the presentation should focus on **one** reading and note the contrasts with other readings. The exact schedule, including whether each student presents once or twice, will depend on the number of students enrolled and will be determined during the first class session.

After the student presentation and any following discussion, I will usually lecture briefly on the broader ideas and context touched on by the readings. In some sessions, I will also prepare more structured activities for discussion or debate. In general, though, the more the seminar is driven by your contributions and questions, the better.

My strong preference is to hold in-person class meetings. However, in the event that we need to hold remote meetings by Zoom, you will still be expected to participate over the audio link.

Assignments

The course grade will be calculated as the weighted average of a final paper (75%) and a series of exercises (25%), with a modifier (unsatisfactory = down one fraction of a letter grade, satisfactory = no change, exceptional = up one fraction of a letter grade) based on seminar leadership and participation.

Exercises on Writing with Theories

Most sociologists are not "theorists." Instead, they engage with theories insofar as they

represent the organizing principles of an existing literature, i.e. as partially competing and partially complementary attempts to explain phenomena and answer core questions within a particular social domain. To some extent, sociologists in different specialties engage with the same, or at least linked, theories (such as the “functionalism” or “conflict theory” perhaps familiar from your undergraduate courses). Often, though, each subfield has its own theoretical schools and debates between them, and even the shared theories take on a specific form and color in each particular domain.

So, professional sociologists are expected to some extent to be familiar with the “big” theories of the discipline, but they are most responsible for being able to speak and write cogently about the theoretical terrain in their particular specialization. This is, however, easier said than done. It requires certain skills of thought and writing that are not usually taught explicitly. Instead, especially in the context of North American PhD programs that often involve three full years of courses, students are expected to just absorb them through observation and practice.

However, rather than three years to endlessly read and discuss and write seminar papers, RPg students at CUHK are expected to be finished with a full thesis in three or four years for a PhD, two for an MPhil. As such, I have attempted to formulate a series of exercises that will introduce you to some of the core skills involved in “writing with theories” as is required to review and situate your own research within a literature. The exercises are described in a separate document, available at this link: bit.ly/3yS6ciL.

Final Paper

The major graded assignment for this course is an essay of roughly 15 to 20 pages. You are free to write on any topic related to the sociological theories we cover in class. A classic term paper for a theory seminar would involve picking some question that concerns different theorists considered in the course — and one or two who are not, if one wishes — then critically analyzing what they have to say about it, and to each other, and in the process trying to say something of one’s own on the question.

However, given the accelerated pace of the research graduate programs at CUHK, I suspect most of you will not feel you have the time to spend on purely theoretical questions unrelated to your research projects. So, as an alternative I encourage you to write a review of the *theoretical* literature relevant to a research project you are working on.

In general, a literature review offers an answer to the following two questions: First, what are the major theoretical perspectives in the subfield you seek to contribute to and on what do they disagree? Second, what “gap” or “puzzle” exists among those perspectives that your research will contribute to resolving? So, in the first place, your paper should address these questions, but because this is a term paper rather than just a literature section of an article, I also want you to address a couple of broader questions. How do these positions relate to the broader currents of sociological theory, classical and contemporary, covered in this course? What are some of the implications of resolving the specific empirical puzzle you will be tackling for the more general theoretical questions that have interested sociologists?

You can think of this as a combination of a first draft of the “theory chapter” of a potential

future thesis and practice for writing those parts of a research proposal that entail sketching the theoretical significance of your project.

The final paper will be due by the end of the day on 17 December, uploaded to the course website. See below for formatting guidelines and submission procedures. The papers will be assigned a letter grade according to the following rubric:

- A The paper fully achieves at least **three** of the following criteria, and demonstrates a significant engagement with the remaining **one**:
 1. Clearly identifying its question, convincingly locating its specific connection with the broader theoretical problems of sociology
 2. Cogently and charitably presenting existing approaches to that question in terms of specifications, methods, and conclusions, as well how the different approaches disagree and what points and counterpoints are made amongst them
 3. Setting out an open gap or puzzle within the debate among existing approaches.
 4. Linking the debates within this subfield or topic to the wider theoretical questions in sociology, as seen in the readings for this course
- A- The paper fully achieves at least **two** of the criteria listed for an A paper, displays significant progress towards at least **one** other, and demonstrates a serious attempt at the remaining **one**.
- B+ The paper fully achieves at least **one** of the criteria listed for an A paper, displays significant progress towards at least **one** other, and demonstrates a serious attempt at the remaining **two**.
- B The paper demonstrates either significant progress towards or a serious attempt at **all** the criteria listed for an A paper.
- B- The paper demonstrates either significant progress towards or a serious attempt at **three** of the criteria listed for an A paper.
- C+ The paper demonstrates familiarity with a representative slice of a subfield within sociology, without succeeding in providing much analytical organization to the studies cited or conveying their intellectual significance.
- C The paper reflects the student's having read a substantial number of studies in a particular subfield.
- C- The paper reflects the student's having undertaken a minimally satisfactory amount of reading during the semester.

Note that a B+ is considered a passing grade for PhD students in the Department of Sociology. Mathematically, assuming an excellent grade on the exercises, the absolute minimum grade on the paper consistent with this passing grade is a B.

The paper should be submitted electronically through the Blackboard site, in either

Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or OpenDocument (.odt) format. Please also keep in mind the university's policy on academic honesty (bit.ly/2vRlsyb). Following that policy, the final paper should be **separately** submitted to VeriGuide (bit.ly/2Mrt6Zh). Do NOT try to upload the “academic honesty statement” to Blackboard unless I specifically ask for it.

All quotations and references to outside sources must be properly cited, using parenthetical citations in ASA style. Guides can be found online (a basic one: bit.ly/2KTAxB9). As an aside, I would recommend that you invest the time in setting up a citation manager to take care of this automatically (see here: bit.ly/2BcOXzv). I've created a shared Zotero library for the major readings in the course (bit.ly/2P4kuWk) though it can easily be exported to another program.

The text should be formatted according to the following guidelines:

- A4 size, 2.5 cm margins on all sides
- Name and title at the top of the first page
- Page numbers included after the first page
- Double spaced: this means that the white space between each line of text is about the same height as the characters themselves. Note that when set up for Chinese, Microsoft Word often has the setting “snap to grid” enabled, which results in spacing *much* wider than what it should be. Please make sure the text is *actually* double spaced.
- Times New Roman font, 12 point size

Schedule and Reading List

All required readings are available for download at the links provided (while on CUHK's network or VPN) or else through a Google Drive shared folder here: bit.ly/30knSCs. If you print out the readings, PLEASE minimize paper use by printing double-sided, and with 2 pages per side if the PDF pages are small enough (i.e. roughly A5 size or less, 5.8 x 8.3 in / 148 x 210 mm). An annotated list of additional readings on the various topics can be found here: bit.ly/3hoo3lR (NB: this is a work in progress).

6 September Introduction

Part I – The Individual and Society

13 September Cooperation and Exchange

- Adam SMITH, *The Wealth of Nations: A Selected Edition* (ed. Kathryn Sutherland, Oxford University Press, 1998)
 - Introduction
 - Book I: Chs. 1-3, 7 and 9, and selections of Ch. 10
 - Book II: Ch. 3
 - Book V, Ch. 1 parts I-III
- Karl MARX, *Capital* Vol. 1, Ch. 1 (pp. 302-329 in the *Marx-Engels Reader* 2nd edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker, W. W. Norton, 1978 [hereafter, *MER*])

20 September Social Solidarity and the Division of Labor

- Emile DURKHEIM, *Division of Labor in Society*,
 - Introduction
 - Book I
 - Ch. I
 - Ch. II sections I and IV
 - Ch. III sections I and IV
 - Ch. V sections I-II and V
 - Ch. VI sections I and II
 - Ch. VII

27 September Social Change, Social Functions, and Their Dysfunction

- Karl MARX and Friedrich ENGELS, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Section I (*MER* pp. 473-91)
- Emile DURKHEIM, *Division of Labor in Society*,
 - Prefaces
 - Book II
 - Ch. I (skip section III)
 - Ch. II
 - Book III (entire)
 - Conclusion

4 October The Individual against Society

- Alexis de TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, Book 4, Chs. 6-8
bit.ly/2ZiZNyD (google books link; text files also available at Project Gutenberg)

- Karl **MARX**, “Alienation,” from the 1844 Manuscripts (*MER* pp. 70-81)
- George **SIMMEL**, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”
- Emile **DURKHEIM**, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Ch. 5 section IV
- Herbert **BLUMER**, “The Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead” (Ch 2 in *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*)

11 October Gendered Individuals

- Candace **WEST** and Don H. **ZIMMERMAN**, “Doing Gender” (*Gender & Society* Vol. 1, No. 2, 1987) doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002
- Dorit **GEVA**, “Globalizing Gender” (Ch. 3 in *Social Theory Now*, ed. Benzecry, Krause, and Reed, University of Chicago Press, 2017)
- Susan **FERGUSON**, “Intersectionalist and Social-Reproduction Feminisms” (*Historical Materialism* Vol. 24, No. 2, 2016)

Part II – Theoretical Legacies of Marx and Weber

18 October The State as Organized Coercion

- Max **WEBER**, “Politics as a Vocation” and selections on bureaucracy (Chs. 4 and 8 in *From Max Weber*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, 1946 [hereafter, *FMW*])
- Charles **TILLY**, “War-Making and State-Making as Organized Crime” (pp. 170-91 in *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge University Press, 1985)

25 October The Powers of the State

- Michael **MANN**, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results” (*European Journal of Sociology* Vol. 25, No. 2, 1984) doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600004239
- Pierre **BOURDIEU**, “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field” (translated in *Sociological Theory* Vol. 12, No. 1, 1994) www.jstor.org/stable/202032
- Ben **ANSELL** and David **SAMUELS**, “Inequality and Democratization: A Contractarian Approach” (*Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 43, No. 12, 2010) doi.org/10.1177%2F0010414010376915
- John **MARKOFF**, “Overflowing Channels: How Democracy Didn’t Work as Planned (and Perhaps a Good Thing It Didn’t)” (*Sociological Theory* Vol. 37, No. 2, 2019) doi.org/10.1177%2F0735275119850866

1 November Classical Theories of Capitalism

- Max **WEBER**, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (read all except for Ch. 4)
- Karl **MARX**, selections from *Capital*, Vol. 1, Chs. 4, 6-7, 25-7, 31-2 (*MER* pp. 329-61, 419-38)
- Karl **POLANYI**, *The Great Transformation*, Chs. 4-6

8 November Neo-Marxism: Class and Politics

- Claus **OFFE** and Helmut **WIESENTHAL**, “Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form” (*Political Power and Social Theory* Vol. 1, 1980)
- Ellen Miexsins **WOOD**, “The Separation of the Economic and the Political in

Capitalism” (*New Left Review* Series 1, no. 127, 1981)

- Erik Olin WRIGHT, “Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise” (*American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 105, No. 4) www.jstor.org/stable/3003886

15 November Debating Theories of Class

- Max WEBER, “Class, Status, Party” (*FMW* Ch. 7)
- Erik Olin WRIGHT, “A Framework for Class Analysis in the Marxist Tradition” (Ch. 1 in *Approaches to Class Analysis*, ed. Wright, Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Pierre BOURDIEU, “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups” (*Theory and Society* Vol. 14, No. 6, 1985) doi.org/10.1007/BF00174048
- John H. GOLDTHORPE, “Class Analysis and the Reorientation of Class Theory: The Case of Persisting Differentials in Educational Attainment” (*The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 47, No. 3, 1996) www.jstor.org/stable/591365
- Vivek CHIBBER, “Rescuing Class from the Cultural Turn” (*Catalyst* Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017)

Part III — The Problem of a Science of Society

22 November Are Social Facts “Things”?

- Karl MARX and Friedrich ENGELS, selections from *The German Ideology* (in *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 149-58 and 172-6)
- Emile DURKHEIM, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Introduction, and Chs. 1-2 and 5 (section II only)
- Max WEBER
 - Selections from “Objectivity in Social Science” (in *Methodology of the Social Sciences*), pp. 89-93, 101-3, and 106-112
 - *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, Part 1, Ch. I, Section 1: intro paragraph; A, paragraphs 3, 5, 7-9 (through p. 15), 10-11; and B
- Claudio E. BENZECRY and Daniel WINCHESTER, “Varieties of Microsociology” (pp. 42-74 in *Social Theory Now*, ed. Claudio E. Benzecry, Monika Krause, and Isaac Ariail Reed, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017)

29 November Sociology, Interests, and Values

- Max WEBER, “Science as a Vocation” (*FMW* pp. 129-56)
- Emile DURKHEIM
 - *Rules of Sociological Method*, Prefaces and Conclusion
 - *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Conclusion, Section II
- C. Wright MILLS, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1959/2000), Chs. 1 and 6