

Advanced Sociological Theory

SOCI6001 — Fall 2025

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For updates, see: bit.ly/3HF2tyU
Mondays 11:30 – 14:15 in FYB105

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Office Hours by appointment

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, and it is often the only substantive course taken by every student. 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 triumvirate.

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 judgment. 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 a brief presentation (15–30 minutes, including discussion) advancing an argument about that session's readings and posing questions for discussion. By "advancing an argument," I mean that your presentation should have a *disputable* thesis related to the reading in some way, which is to say that, while you have reasons for your position you hold, you could imagine (and should mention) a coherent argument for an alternative position. If there are multiple presentations in a session, it is the responsibility of the presenting students to coordinate to minimize overlap.

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.

Please fill out the following survey to provide me some information about you and to indicate preferences for presentations: <https://forms.gle/9Vz7w2P1Cw8UP8Cs8>.

Assignments

The course grade will be calculated as the weighted average of a final paper (50%), a presentation on your final paper in the last class session (15%), seminar participation including the presentation (20%), and a series of writing exercises described below (15%).

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 two or even three full years of courses, students are expected to just absorb them through observation and practice.

In contrast, 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/3QIDixz.

AI Use Policy

As described in the description of the writing exercises, you are permitted to use AI writing and research tools with certain restrictions and requirements on those assignments. You are not permitted to use generative AI to produce text for the presentations or final paper.

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.

By **3 October**, you should submit a **preliminary list of the readings** for the final paper. This list is not set in stone; its purpose is just to give me a sense of what you are working on. You should include (and label) both works you have already read and a starting point for what you intend to read this semester. If it seems unrealistically long, I will ask you to rethink and prioritize.

The final class meeting, on **1 December**, will be dedicated to 15-minute **presentations** based on your final paper. This will not be a regular class session, but we will discuss the exact format in class (with some room for your input on what you would prefer). We will also cover in class about what I mean by these terms, but the two key requirements are to include discussions of 1) the “big question” of your chosen field, and 2) some of the “lateral moves” you seen in the literature you survey as well as moves you might consider for your own research.

The final paper will be due by the end of the day on 19 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 as 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.

Submission Instructions

The written assignments should be submitted electronically through the Blackboard site, in either Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or OpenDocument (.odt) format. Be sure to **begin** the file name with your name. It is not necessary to include your student ID number anywhere.

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, from the CUHK library: bit.ly/2BcOXzv. The citation manager I personally use, Zotero, is not included in the library's list, though. I've created a shared Zotero library for the major readings in the course (bit.ly/2P4kuWk), which 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).

1 September Introduction

Part I — The Individual and Society

8 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])

15 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

22 September NO CLASS MEETING

29 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
- *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Conclusion, Section II

3 October Preliminary Reading List Due

6 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)
- Emile DURKHEIM, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Ch. 5 section IV
- Karl MARX, “Alienation,” from the 1844 Manuscripts (*MER* pp. 70–81)
- George SIMMEL, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”

10 October First Exercise, First Reading Due

Part II — Theoretical Legacies of Marx and Weber

13 October The State as Organized Coercion

- Max WEBER, “Politics as a Vocation” and selections on bureaucracy (Chs. IV and VIII 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)

20 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
- Charles TILLY, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Blackwell, 1992), pp. 67–107.
- Wendy BROWN, “Finding the Man in the State” (*Feminist Studies* Vol. 18, No. 1, 1992) doi.org/10.2307/3178212

25 October First Exercise, Second Reading Due

27 October Classical Theories of Capitalism

- Karl MARX, selections from *Capital*, Vol. 1, Chs. 4, 6–7, 25–7, 31–2 (*MER* pp. 329–61, 419–38)
- Max WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, **all except Ch. 4**
- Immanuel WALLERSTEIN, “The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System” (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 16, No. 4, 1974)

doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500007520

- Randall COLLINS, “Weber’s Last Theory of Capitalism” (*American Sociological Review* Vol. 45, No. 6, 1980) www.jstor.org/stable/2094910

3 November Neo-Marxism: Class and Politics

- Max WEBER, “Class, Status, Party” (*FMW* Ch. VII)
- 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 Mieksins 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

10 November Debating Theories of Class

- From *Approaches to Class Analysis* (ed. E. O. Wright, Cambridge University Press, 2005)
 - Ch. 1, Erik Olin WRIGHT, “Foundations for a Neo-Marxist Class Analysis”
 - Ch. 3, David GRUSKY with Gabriela GALESCU, “Foundations of a Neo-Durkheimian Class Analysis”
 - Ch. 5, Aage B. SØRENSEN, “Foundations of a Rent-Based Class Analysis”
- Pierre BOURDIEU, “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups” (*Theory and Society* Vol. 14, No. 6, 1985) doi.org/10.1007/BF00174048

14 November Second Exercise Due

Part III — The Problem of a Science of Society

17 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
 - Chs. 1–2
 - Ch. 5, section II
- Max WEBER, *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, Part 1, Ch. I, Section 1: intro paragraph; A, paragraphs 1–8 and 11; and B
- Erving GOFFMAN, “Performances” (Ch. 1 in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959) — **you can read this quickly for the gist rather than the details**
- Harold GARFINKEL, “‘Good’ Organizational Reasons for ‘Bad’ Clinic Records” (ch. 6 in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, 1967)

24 November Sociology, Interests, and Values (MAKE UP DAY FOR HOLIDAYS)

- Max WEBER,

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- “Science as a Vocation” (*FMW* Ch. V)
 - Selections from “Objectivity in Social Science” (in *Methodology of the Social Sciences*), **pp. 89-93, 101-3, and 106-112**
 - Emile DURKHEIM, *Rules of Sociological Method*, Prefaces and Conclusion
 - C. Wright MILLS, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1959/2000), Chs. 1, 5 and 6

1 December Final Paper Presentations

19 December Final Paper Due