

Sociological theories: the tradition and current notions pt 1

Slawomir Kapralski

The course presents the fundamental changes of the main perspectives (paradigms) of social and (to some extent) political thought and offers a broad picture of the history of ideas, which significantly influenced contemporary sociology. The particular periods to be analyzed are: the separation of socio-political order from the world perceived as a whole (ancient Greece), the separation of the social and the political orders and the emergence of society as a distinct field of inquiry (the Enlightenment), the attempt to make the reflection on society a systematic and a science-like project and, on the other hand, the attempt to deconstruct society (Nineteenth Century), the beginnings of academic sociology (Twentieth Century). Special attention will be given to Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, the two “giants” of classical social theory. Their thought will be analyzed as an attempt to find elementary units of sociological analysis (“social facts” in case of Durkheim and “social action” in case of Weber). Their approaches will illustrate two contradictory tendencies in social theory: the one that regards society as a dominant reality, which regulates and controls individuals, and the one that interprets society as a kind of more or less ephemeral reality that emerges out of the multitude of individual actions. Eventually, the relation between “action” and “society” in the functionalist theory will be presented. The genealogy of the most important sociological categories will be analyzed, together with the changing problem agenda of social theory. When possible, the attempt will be made to link classical social theory with contemporary sociological approaches.

Students are required to attend the course and to read texts assigned to each unit. The course is organized in four meetings, five hours each. Absence in one meeting does not mean any consequences. Absence in two meetings generally means that a student is not allowed to complete the course, unless s/he has really good and evidenced reasons. In this case, s/he must write a “penalty essay” on a topic selected by the lecturer. Absence in three meetings, regardless of the reasons, means that a student is not allowed to complete the course. Final course essay will have to be written in accordance with the CSS regulations, the lecturer’s requirements, and on a topic selected from the list provided in one of the first meetings.

General readings:

“Sort of Textbooks”

Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Structure and Meaning: Relinking Classical Sociology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Fin de Siecle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason*, London-New York: Verso, 1995.

Gerard Delanty, *Social Theory in a Changing World. Conceptions of Modernity*, Cambridge, UK—Oxford, UK—Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Larry J. Ray, *Theorizing Classical Sociology*, Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999.

Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1998.

Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000.

“Reference Library”

Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, 2 volumes, London: Penguin, 1965-67.

Tom Bottomore, Robert A. Nisbet (eds.), *A History of Sociological Analysis*, London: Heinemann, 1979.

Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought. Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, New York 1977.

Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, London 1967.

Jerzy Szacki, *History of Sociological Thought*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1979.

1. Introduction to the Course. What is social theory and why do we need it?

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology* Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 1: Dimensions of the social: an introduction.

Delanty, G. 2000. The Foundations of Social Theory: Origins and Trajectories. In: B. S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Berger, P.L. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology. A Humanistic Perspective*. Chapter 6.

2. Ancient Greece: crisis and the origins of social theory.

Popper, K.R. 1966. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I: *The Spell of Plato*. London: Routledge. Chapter 4: Change and Rest.

3. Separation of “the social” from “the political” in the work of Thomas Hobbes.

Schochet, G.J. 1990. Intending (Political) Obligation: Hobbes and the Voluntary Basis of Society. In: M.G. Dietz (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

4. The Enlightenment Project. Reason, Progress, Society.

Bauman, Z. 1991. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 1: The Scandal of Ambivalence.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 2: Enlightenment, Reason and Science.

5. Three interpretations of the Enlightenment Project: August Comte, Karl Marx, and Herbert Spencer.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 3: Comtean Positivism and Sociology; Chapter 4: Reason’s Revolt Thunders.

Seidman, S. 1998. *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell. Chapter 1: Grand Visions: August Comte and Karl Marx.

6. In search of the elementary unit of sociological analysis. Emile Durkheim and “social facts.”

Lukes, S. 1975. *Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work. A Historical and Critical Study*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Chapter 10: The Method and Subject-Matter of Sociology.

Alexander J.C. 1989. Rethinking Durkheim’s Intellectual Development: On the Complex Origins of a Cultural Sociology. In: J. C. Alexander, *Structure and Meaning: Relinking Classical Sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press.

7. The Society in Us: Emile Durkheim on integration, religion, and identity.

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 5: Durkheim, Differentiation and Morality.

Durkheim, E. 1972. *Selected Writings*. A. Giddens (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1: Religion and Ritual; Chapter 12: Secularization and Rationality.

Lukes, S. 1975. *Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work. A Historical and Critical Study*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Chapter 23: The Sociology of Religion II.

8. In search of the elementary unit of sociological analysis: Max Weber and “social action.”

Ray, L.J. 1999. *Theorizing Classical Sociology*. Buckingham—Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 8: Max Weber: The Triumph of Reason?

Seidman, S. 1998. *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell. Chapter 2: The Promise of Sociology: Emile Durkheim and Max Weber.

Weber, M. 1949. "Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy. In: M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. E.A. Shils, H.A. Finch (eds.). New York: The Free Press.

9. Society as probability. Max Weber on society, rationalization and modernity.

Alexander, J.C. 1989. The Dialectic of Individuation and Domination: Weber's Rationalization Theory and Beyond. In: J. C. Alexander, *Structure and Meaning: Relinking Classical Sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ingram, D. 1987. *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Chapter 4: Weber's Theory of Rationalization.

10. Social theory after Weber. Interactionist perspective of the early American social theory. From action to system: functionalist theory in search of paradigmatic sociology.

Seidman, S. 1998. *Contested Knowledge. Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell. Chapter 3: From European Social Theory to American Sociological Theory: Talcott Parsons and the Autonomy of Theory.