CONTEMPORARY THEORY
a/ k/ a Sociology 502
Instructor: Paul DiMaggio
(8-1971, dimaggio@princeton.edu)
Term: Spring, 2003 (9:00 am – 12 noon, Wednesdays)
Room 190, Wallace Hall

Purpose: This 12-week seminar surveys the field of contemporary social theory, exposing you to major approaches, themes, thinkers and debates. There are several ways one could organize such a course: as a historical narrative of issues and debates; as an introduction to a set of important books or important thinkers, around varying approaches to theory and theory construction (from metatheory to cumulative theoretical research programs), or around key theoretical dilemmas (theories of action, mechanisms bridging micro and macro, comparative history). This seminar does a little bit of each, providing a tasting menu that will, I hope, provide at least superficial literacy and equip you to probe more deeply the ideas and approaches that you find most stimulating and useful. The focus throughout is on the instrumental value of theory, as a means of improving research. There are many ways that theory can do that – by making one question taken-for-granted assumptions and thus liberating one from conventional habits of mind, by exercising the imaginative faculties, by clarifying presuppositions that form the implicit ground for research, by presenting models for thinking about problems, and even by suggesting empirical propositions.

Eligibility: This seminar is required of first-year graduate students in Sociology. It is open to any graduate student in Sociology or other social-science department or the Woodrow Wilson school, and to senior-year sociology majors. Others may apply to instructor for admission.

Requirements
A. Read thoughtfully in advance and participate. Students are expected to do the reading thoroughly before the class meeting for which it is assigned, and to participate actively in class meetings. Some of the readings are very demanding, and the amount of reading in some weeks is quite substantial, so be sure to leave enough time. Emphasis is on mastering, responding critically and creatively to, and integrating the material, and, especially, extracting from the readings ideas or approaches that are useful to you in your own work. Try to extract something of value from each assigned reading, even as you evaluate it critically.

B. Four memoranda. During each 3-week period of the course (i.e., weeks 1-3, 4-6, and 5-7, 9-12), you are required to submit (preferably as an e-mail attachment addressed to the entire class) one memorandum of approximately 1000-1200 words on the week’s readings. (No credit will be given for memoranda handed in late, as part of the point is to prepare you to participate actively in seminar discussions.) Please view memoranda as writing/thinking exercises, not as finished products. Use them to engage the week’s materials, respond with questions, criticisms and new ideas they suggest, put into words impressions that seem worth developing, and think about how the readings might contribute to your own intellectual projects. Memos also provide a means by which I can give you ongoing individualized feedback. If you want to do more than the four that are required, I’ll provide feedback on those, too.

C. One extra thing, which can be: (i) a brief (c. 15 minute) seminar presentation on a topic of particular interest; (ii) a fifth memo; or (iii) an annotated bibliography on empirical research using ideas from a particular theorist, with attention to the fit between ideas and methods. Presenters will meet with me before their presentation to review strategies. No term paper or research project is required, nor is there a final examination.

Readings: Books of which we read very large chunks are available at Micawber's Books at 110-14 Nassau Street. (These selection will not be available for photocopying because the scope of the readings go beyond “fair use”). Except for these books, two copies of each week’s set of readings will appear in the seminar box in Sociology Department mailroom one week before seminar.
Books available at Micawber

Perry Anderson. *The Origin of Postmodernity.*
List Price: $18.00   Paperback – 143 pages (September 1998)
Verso; ISBN: 1859842224,

List Price: $11.95   Paperback - 219 pages (August 1967)

James S. Coleman. *Foundations of Social Theory.*
List Price: $35.50  Paperback Reprint edition (December 1994)
Harvard (Belknap Press); ISBN: 0674312260

Mary Douglas. *How Institutions Think.*

List Price: $10.75     Paperback - 270 pages (February 1982)

Jurgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.*

CONTemporary Theory

After a brief list of general references, topics and readings assignments are listed by week. Required readings come first, followed by week-specific reference resources. Readings associated with particular presentation topics appear on the separate topics list. Where possible I provide links to on-line versions of articles. In many cases, one must access these from a computer at Princeton University (or another University that subscribes to JSTOR or to other on-line services).

Useful secondary reference resources for course as a whole


Week 1 (February 5): Intro – Visions of theory

Required:

Other readings:
Week 2 (February 12): Parsons, the problem of action, and functional analysis

**Required:**
Parsons, Talcott. 1949 [1937]. The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers. NY: Free Press. Part I, pp. 3-20, 27-41, 43-84; ch 12, pp. 451-70.

**Reference resources for week 2:**
An On-Line Parsons Glossary from the U.K. http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/xpar.htm#1.4

Week 3 (February 19): Microsociologies --- Ethnomethodology, Phenomenology, Goffman

**Required:**

**Other resources for Week 3:**
Erving Goffman Internet links http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/usem/page_3.html
Interview with Randall Collins: ssc.wisc.edu/theory@madison/papers/wwCollins.pdf
Click on me: http://www.theorycards.org.uk/card06.htm
Week 4 (February 26): Individualism and rational choice

Required:

Other resources for week 4:

Week 5 (March 5): Structuralism & role theory: Nadel, Blau & White

Required:

Other resources:

Week 6 (March 12): Conflict theory: Marxism and social closure

Required:
**Other readings**

Antonio Gramsci links http://www.cruznet.net/%7Emarcus/gramsci-links.html
Andre Gunder Frank's website http://csf.colorado.edu/agfrank/syll_99.html

--------Spring Break--------

**Week 7 (March 26): Bourdieu and Douglas**

**Required:**


**Other Resources:**


Bourdieu bibliography on-line: http://www.iwp.uni-linz.ac.at/lex/sekttf/bbg/hyperbourdieu80-89.html
Big Bourdieu links site: http://www.utu.fi/herll/RUSE/blink.html
Secondary literature on Bourdieu: http://www.massey.ac.nz/~nrsedl/bourdieu/pierre.htm
Week 8 (April 2): Habermas

Required:


Nancy Fraser. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere/" Social Text 25/26: 56-80

http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0164-2472%281990%290%3C56%3ARTPSAC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N

Reference resources for week 8


Habermas On-Line: http://www.sla.purdue.edu/people/soc/mdeflem/HabermasOnline/default.html

Week 9 (April 9): Postmodernism

Required:


Click on me: http://www.theorycards.org.uk/card05.htm http://www.theorycards.org.uk/card03.htm

Other resources for week 9:

Foucault website: http://www.foucault.info/

Good links on postmodern thought from University of Colorado http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc_data/postmodern.html


Giddens, Anthony. Modernity and Self-Identity.

David Harvey, The Postmodern Condition.

Week 10 (April 16): Evolutionary Theory

**Required:**


**Resources:**

- Definition of alleles: http://www.nhgri.nih.gov/DIR/VIP/Glossary/pub_glossary.cgi?key=allele&view_value_pair=on
- Good glossary of genetic terminology: http://helios.bto.ed.ac.uk/bto/glossary/p.htm

Week 11 (April 23): Theories of Gender

**Required:**


**Other Resources for Week 11:**

Week 12 (April 30): Society as a Complex System

Required:


http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-8282%28198505%2975%3C332%3ACATEOQ%3E2.0.CO%3B2-I


Other resources for week 12:


http://xxx.lanl.gov/abs/cond-mat/0202174. (Last referenced 1/22/03.)

