Sociology 97: Tutorial on Sociological Theory
REVISED March 10, 2020 due to Coronavirus (revisions are in red)

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[I’ll hold office hours by phone (617-495-7569) or Zoom]

Graduate Instructors: Hanna Katz (hkatz@g.harvard.edu)
Derek Robey (derekrobey@g.harvard.edu) (Head TF)

Section Times:  Wednesday 9-11 am
(subject to change)  Wednesday 12-2 pm
Wednesday 3-5 pm

Course Overview:

Sociologists are a diverse group, but we are all bound by one common goal: a desire to understand the social world. Using a variety of data, methods, and perspectives, sociologists ask, “How and why are patterns of social organization created, maintained, and changed? And how are these patterns consequential for people’s lives?” In our quest to identify and understand social patterns, sociologists develop theories—logical, evidence-based explanations of the properties of, and processes involved in, social organization.

This course introduces students to the theoretical foundations of present-day U.S. sociology. We ask, how did the US sociological enterprise—the enterprise in which we are currently embedded—come to be? And how did these historical developments shape what it means to “theorize” within sociology today? Through an interrogation of early writings, students are expected to become critical consumers of, and creative, careful analysts of, sociological theory. Students will demonstrate their burgeoning proficiency with sociological theory through weekly quizzes, two short essays, and a final project that evaluates a contemporary sociological question of their choice.

Why study classical sociological theory?

Sociological theory has changed dramatically over the years: theories published in sociology journals today bear little resemblance to the first sociological theories published in the 1800s. Nevertheless, these early theories remain important to our present-day scholarship for at least four reasons.

First, in every academic enterprise, new theories typically develop in response to established theories. More specifically, new sociological theories typically seek to refine, extend, complicate, challenge, or even dismiss earlier scholars’ ways of looking at the world. The present-day discipline of sociology has thus been powerfully shaped by the sociological conversations that came before. In teaching the historical development of these theoretical conversations, we aim to advance students’ understanding of what sociology is fundamentally about today, and why.

Second, because present-day sociology programs are committed to objective, evidence-based theorizing about the social world, it is often easy to forget how even our contemporary approach to sociology—the very
questions that we think to ask, the very data we can imagine gathering, and even the interpretations of those
data that we are able to develop—is fundamentally shaped by our present-day social world. Examining how
sociological theories evolve over time provides a powerful illustration of how knowledge itself is socially
situated, and helps students develop into critical consumers of, and especially innovative producers of,
sociological knowledge in the present.

Third, a review of our intellectual roots makes clear that sociological theories often do much more than help
explain our social world; they also can be constitutive of our social world. For example, Karl Marx’ theories of
capitalism and communism not only explained the relationship of labor to capital in the industrial revolution,
they also provided the rationale underlying numerous revolutionary movements and new forms of
government. Interrogating how sociological theorists of the past influenced the very societies they sought to
explain, and examining why some sociological theories had more power to shape the social world than others,
provides a valuable reminder to present-day scholars of the tremendous responsibility associated with
sociological theorizing, and underscores the importance of generating unbiased, evidence-based, and complex
theories that do justice to the social world in which they operate.

Finally, theorizing is a central task of sociologists. Understanding how the process, practice, and goals of
theorizing develop and change over time will help students develop their own responsible and rigorous
approach to creating and applying sociological theories in their classes, their research, and their lives.

Course Objectives:

1. Learn the complicated, conflictual, and sometimes contradictory origin stories of the discipline of
sociology.
2. Using this origin story as a case study, develop the capacity to think critically about the relationship
between power, evidence, and the social construction of knowledge.
3. Evaluate whether and how theory can be used as a tool to improve our understanding of the social
world.
4. Examine how theory can also be constitutive of the social world.
5. Develop responsible and rigorous approaches to analyzing and applying sociological theories. These
approaches require:
   a. a commitment to evidence-based, critical reasoning, and
   b. practicing clear, concise, and accessible communication skills, both in speech and in writing.
6. Understand how you, as Harvard sociology students, are participants in an ongoing sociological
conversation. What you choose to study, and how you choose to study it, is fundamentally shaped by
the theoretical conversations that have unfolded in the past. What you choose to study, and how you
choose to study it, will also shape the future of the discipline, including the problematics that
sociologists choose to engage, and the social worlds constituted by our theories.

Course Readings:

This course privileges original texts. We also sometimes assign readings by more contemporary scholars to
help place those original texts in context.

All required readings are found on the course website. If you prefer to read on paper instead of on the
computer, you have the option of purchasing a course packet from your section leader. Details will be
provided in class.
Because much of the sociology we study in this class was written more than a century ago, students sometimes find the readings rather difficult to understand at first pass. Don’t worry, it gets easier with practice! We encourage you to allocate sufficient time each week to really dig in and engage the author’s ideas. We further suggest that you allow the four questions below to guide your weekly analysis:

1. According to this scholar, why is society how it is? What holds society together?
2. What does this scholar see and prioritize in their analysis? What do they give primacy to, and what is secondary? What is missing altogether?
3. According to this scholar, what explains social conflict?
4. According to this scholar, what explains social change?

Course Expectations:

Participation

Participation is crucial to the learning experience in this course. Students are expected to attend every class, to have read the assigned readings prior to class, and to participate thoughtfully in class discussions. Participation comes in many forms, including asking thoughtful questions, discussion in small groups, pointing out when the material is unclear, and so forth. We do grade your participation every week, so if participating in class is difficult for you for any reason, please discuss this with your instructor as soon as possible.

Respect

Whether in lecture or in section, it is important that our classroom environment is conducive to experimentation, exploration, and personal development. Each scholar must be comfortable asking all of their questions and presenting even uncomfortable ideas. Sometimes the simplest questions are the hardest to answer, and lead to the best class discussions. Sometimes the most polarizing discussions lead to the greatest theoretical and personal insights. To this end, all comments, suggestions, and feedback should be presented and received in the spirit of learning and with a genuine intention to help each other grow as scholars. Respect for each other is imperative, even (and especially) when we discuss polarizing issues.

Assignments

Students are expected to complete 10 weekly quizzes, 1 short mid-term essay, and a longer, final project comprised of an essay and a relaxed presentation via zoom.

- **Quizzes:** Each week, the first ten minutes of class will be spent taking a short, open-book, open-note (but not open computer) quiz. The aim of the quizzes is to evaluate students’ understandings of key concepts from that week’s readings. Quizzes will be graded on a scale of 0-1-2-3, where 3’s are awarded sparingly and only for exceptional performance and especially innovative insight; 2s are awarded for generally correct answers and a solid understanding of the key concepts; and 1s are awarded to quizzes with significant conceptual inaccuracies or confusion. If you do not arrive to section on time for the quiz, you will receive a score of “0” for that week’s grade. Students’ final quiz grade will be determined by averaging their top EIGHT quiz scores (That is, we’ll drop your two lowest quiz scores in the final tally). **Starting the week of March 23rd**, these quizzes will be administered electronically, either via email or via Canvas.

- **Mid-term Essay:** The (one) mid-term essay requires students to engage critically with theory, and to develop comfort with theoretical writing. The (one) midterm essay prompt will be distributed in class two weeks before the assignment is due. Students’ essay will be strictly
• **Final Project:** Students conclude the semester by choosing a contemporary sociological “puzzle” that they find interesting, and identifying three different theories or theoretical traditions by which sociologists have tried (or could try) to make sense of that puzzle. These theories may be drawn from course readings, or from more contemporary sociological work, but at least one must be a theorist from the second half of the course (week of March 23 - Week of April 17). The essay will summarize and evaluate those three traditions and make an argument about which theorist offers the best understanding of the issue, and why. The argument should be supported by evidence from scholarly publications, and the student’s own logical reasoning. Students are encouraged to think about the standpoint, evidence, and assumptions undergirding each theoretical approach in their analyses. Students’ essays will be strictly limited to 10 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1-inch margins all around. Your bibliography does not count as part of your page limit.

**Workshopping the final project:** Students are expected to present their final project ideas to their classmates during the last section of the semester via zoom. These presentations provide students an opportunity to receive thoughtful, critical feedback from their colleagues prior to submitting their final project.

• **Submission Process:** All essay assignments should be turned in through the course Canvas site by 11:59 p.m. on the date when they are due. Please identify yourself only by your student ID number, and not your name, on your assignments.

• **Late Policy:** One partial grade will be deducted from papers that are turned in after the deadline and before midnight of the following day (for example, an A- paper would be given a B+). Another partial grade will be taken off for each additional 24-hour period that the paper is late. Extensions may be given, but only in the case of medical emergency or major religious observance, and only with written documentation. All requests for extensions should go directly to Professor Viterna for approval and must be made 48 hours in advance of the relevant deadline unless the emergency precludes otherwise.

• **Submission Dates:** Students should expect a quiz in class every week from February 10th to the end of the semester. The Midterm essay is due on MARCH 23rd. (Note: Students who turned in the midterm by the original May 9th deadline will receive a “bump” of 1/3 of a letter grade on their midterm score). The final project is due on MAY 8th. Please note: Students from previous semesters regularly reported that Soc 97 assignments take more time and labor than they anticipate, so please put these dates on your calendar and plan to start working on them well in advance of the deadline.

• **Assignment Weights:**

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Section Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Quizzes (Average of top 8 scores)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Essay #1</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>35%</td>
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**Grading Criteria**
Each of the essays you write must make a clearly stated argument and support that argument with appropriate evidence. They must also be free of grammatical and typographical errors, as they will be graded on both content and style. The citations and bibliographies should conform to the American Sociological Association standard. See the ASA Style Guide, available in the Lamont Library Reference Room Ready Reference HM 73 .A54 or at this site: (https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/asastyleguide.pdf). On writing, we recommend Howard Becker’s Writing for Social Scientists, and visits with the department’s writing fellow (https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/pages/writing-papers-sociology).

In evaluating written work, we look for:

1. Mastery of topic
2. Focus; cogency of argumentation
3. Use of appropriate logic and evidence
4. Clarity and organization in writing
5. Originality

In assigning grades, we apply the following criteria:

- Work in the A range exhibits strikingly original, thoughtful, logical, and coherent engagement, expressed in a clear, cogent, and error-free way. Only work that makes masterful use of evidence and offers insightful and accurate analysis will be considered for an A grade.
- Work in the A- range exhibits mastery of the material and offers a good analysis expressed in a clear, cogent, and error-free way.
- Work in the B range exhibits solid effort, with some minor errors of logic or argumentation, or some minor stylistic weaknesses. Such work indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement.
- Work in the C range exhibits inadequate understanding of the material and inadequate analysis, or deficient, error-plagued writing.
- See the Registrar’s online information regarding other grades.

Your final course grade will be calculated by converting each of your assignment letter grades according to Harvard’s standardized numeric scale (A = 4.00, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.00, B- = 2.67, C+ = 2.33, C = 2.00, C- = 1.67, D+ = 1.33, D = 1.00, D- = 0.67) and weighting.

**Plagiarism**

In accord with Harvard University policy, plagiarism results in an automatic F in the course and will be subject to disciplinary action by the College. Know that it is our responsibility to be vigilant in this regard. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism (including issues of collaboration), please ask. Indeed, if you have any questions at all about the course or the assignments, please ask.

**Academic Integrity and Collaboration**

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a
classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

Policy for laptops and other electronic devices

No laptops or other electronic devices will be accepted in section, with the exception of aid devices for students with special needs.

Time Commitment

This is a labor-intensive course. Each week, students are required to not only read, but also to digest and interrogate, approximately 100-150 pages of dense literature. These are not readings that you can comprehend with a quick “skim.” We believe that the payoffs of this intellectual labor are clear, and student evaluations suggest the same! But each semester students comment to us how truly surprised they are by the time commitment required by this course. As such, we encourage you to think ahead about how you will make space each week for the readings and writings required by this course, and adjust your other classes, and your extracurriculars, accordingly.

Flexibility

Despite the many hours that instructors put into the development of a thoughtful, well-organized, and engaging syllabus at the start of the semester, the reality is that we can never plan for every aspect of how a semester will unfold. Student interests vary from one semester to the next, real-world events change the tenor of a particular debate, instructors get sick, classes are cancelled due to snowstorms, and so forth. We therefore reserve the right to modify this syllabus over the course of the semester as required to meet the needs of the class. Any modification to the syllabus will be announced in class, posted on the course website, and emailed to the course mailing list. You are responsible for making sure you are using the most up-to-date version of the syllabus. Your patience and flexibility are greatly appreciated should such needed changes occur.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Students in Soc 97 attend **three mandatory lectures** across the semester:

- Monday, January 27th, 4:30 p.m.  Informational Meeting
- Wednesday, February 26th, 5:00 p.m.:  Writing Workshop
- Wednesday, April 29th, 5:00 p.m.: Classical/Contemporary Connections

There are no readings assigned for these lectures.

In addition to the three lectures, students meet in weekly small-group discussion sections. Students must read and digest approximately 100 pages of classical sociological work prior to each section, following the schedule below. Please see the course website to sign up for the section that best fits your schedule.

**Part I—Introduction**

What is sociology? What is sociological theory? What do we mean by “classical” and “contemporary” theory? Why might scholars pursue “grand theory” over more particular theories, or vice versa? Which approach is more accepted today, and why? This short segment provides students with the key concepts and strategies they will require for a successful semester.

**Week of February 3: What is Sociology? What is Sociological Theory?**


**Part II—The Canon**

Pick up any textbook on “Classical Sociological Theory” and chances are high that it will name Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx as the “founders” of modern sociological thought. This origins story, despite being ubiquitous, is nevertheless inaccurate. We begin our semester by studying the major concepts of W-D-M, not because they were disciplinary “founders,” but rather because their concepts undeniably have been central to the development of present-day sociological thinking.

**Week of February 10: Max Weber**


Week of February 17: Emile Durkheim


Week of February 24: Karl Marx


**PAPER #1 DUE MONDAY, MARCH 9th, 11:59 p.m.**
Part II--The Actual Origins: Power, Canonization, and the Social Construction of Knowledge

Now that we know the basic ideas developed by Weber, Durkheim, and Marx, we can begin to interrogate the deeper questions of this course: How does canonization occur? Who was “written out” of the sociological canon, so that W-D-M could be “written in?” And how has their inclusion—at the exclusion of other scholars—shaped what it means to theorize in present-day sociology? Please note: many of the readings in the weeks ahead are difficult to read. Some are infuriating because they promote absurd and wholly-unsubstantiated racist and sexist arguments. Others include truly heart-wrenching (and gut-wrenching) descriptions of the torture, killing and other forms of abuse regularly suffered by real historical figures. Yet all are critical stops on our intellectual journey, so please plan to give yourself the necessary time and space to digest each week’s complicated works.

Week of March 2: Early “Mainstream” Sociology in the United States

21. “Early ‘Mainstream’ Sociology.” – Short synopsis by Professor Viterna (read this first!)  
22. Blackmar, Frank W and John Lewis Gillin. 1924. Pp. 13-27, 367-379 in Outlines of Sociology (3rd Edition). New York: The MacMillan Company. (Read this quickly, just to get a sense of what early “mainstream” sociologists meant by “natural laws.” You do not have to actually learn or study any of the laws themselves, but you might think about how they were developed, and why they are problematic).  

Week of March 9: NO CLASS DUE TO CAMPUS CLOSING

Week of March 16: Spring Break/No Class

Week of March 23: The Global South Part I—Imperialism and Post-colonial thought


- On Violence: pp. 1-11; 16-18; 22-26; 30-34; 37-40; 57-60
- On Culture: pp. 158-168; 170; 171-174; 177-179

**Week of March 30: U.S. Sociology, DuBois, and the Color Line**


   - Table of Contents plus Pp. 1-2, 229-256.


40. Booker T. Washington’s 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech

**Week of April 6: Wells, Cooper, and Early Intersectional Theories in US Sociology**


**Week of April 13: Metropole Women and Reform-oriented Sociology**

   - Chapter 1 (pp. 1-21) “Present at the Creation”
   - Chapter 2 (pp. 23-27; 39-45; 46-63) -- Harriet Martineau
- Chapter 3 (pp. 65-72; 90-104) -- Jane Addams

**Week of April 13: The Global South Part II—Theorizing Morals from Other Religious Traditions**


54. Sarasvati, Pandita Ramabai. (1887) 1982. Chapters 1, 2, and 6 in *The High Caste Hindu Woman*.


**Week of April 20: Power + Standpoint + Semester Recap**


- Chapter 14 (pp. 229-236)—C. Wright Mills
- Chapter 16 (pp. 266-276)—Steven Lukes

**Week of April 27: Theory Application Presentations—No Readings**

(but please log on with an unwavering commitment to provide excellent feedback to your colleagues)

**FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY, MAY 8th at 11:59 p.m.**