

**Social Theory: A Humanist Perspective**  
**EP&E 361b**  
**M, 1:30-3.20**  
**Spring 2006**

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Brief description

This course will present an introduction to social theory and discuss some of the main debates (micro/macro, agency/structure, explanation/understanding) from a humanist perspective. The course will be conducted through a close reading of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality*.

Expanded description

Since their emergence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as relatively autonomous disciplines, the social sciences are poised between two approaches: a naturalistic and nomothetic approach that aims to study the social world with the methods of the natural sciences, and a humanist and ideographic approach that analyses society as a human construct. In this course, we will present an introduction to social theory from a humanist perspective. Our basic text will be *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. A close reading of the book (and its footnotes) will allow us to study the sociology of knowledge, phenomenological theory of action, anthropological philosophy and classic social theories (Weber, Durkheim, Marx, G.H. Mead, A. Schutz). In the class, the themes of the book and the reading materials will be systematically linked to more contemporary debates in social theory and the philosophy of the social sciences.

Class contact

This is a seminar class. There will be two hours of contact every week. In this period there will be an introductory lecture by the convener and a student presentation of the readings, followed by a class discussion of the theme at hand. Students are expected to participate in the class.

The convener will be available for more extended consultation before and after the class, or at any other time by appointment.

Assignments

Students will be asked to write one short essay (5 to 10 pages), a more extended final essay (10 to 20 pages), and to make a class presentation of the reading materials so as to initiate the discussion. The first paper will be a take-home exam and will be worth 30%. Class presentation and participation will be evaluated at 20%, while the final essay will count for the remaining 50%.

## Required Readings

The following book is the core text of this course:

Berger, P. and Luckmann, T.: *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*

The following books are required:

Berger, P.: *The Sacred Canopy*

Giddens, A.: *New Rules of Sociological Method. A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*

Honneth A and Joas, H.: *Social Action and Human Nature*

Bernstein, R.: *Restructuring Social and Political Theory*

Books can be purchased at the Labyrinth Bookstore.

The course reader is available at Tyco.

## Syllabus

Week 1: January 9

Introduction and Presentation of the Course

### I. Sociology of Knowledge

Week 2: January 13 (Friday class in advance of Martin Luther King Day)

B&L, pp. 1-18.

Scheler, M.: *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, pp. 33-63.

Mannheim, K.: *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 237-280.

Week 3: January 23

Hacking, I.: *The Social Construction of What?*, pp. 1-36.

Fuller, S.: *Social Epistemology*, pp. 3-30

Edwards, D., Ashmore, M. and Potter, J.: "Death and Furniture: The Rhetoric, Politics and Theology of Bottom Line Arguments against Relativism", *History of the Human Sciences*, 1995, 8, 2, pp. 25-49.

### II. Phenomenological Foundations

Week 4: January 30

Husserl, E.: *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, pp. 101-155 (sections 27-50), 168-170 (section 55).

Weber, M.: *Economy and Society*, pp.3-28.

Week 5: February 6

B&L, pp. 19-46

Schutz, A.: "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action" in *Collected Papers*, I, pp. 3-47.

Schutz, A.: "On Multiple Realities", *Collected Papers*, I, pp. 207-259.

### III. Society as Objective Reality

#### Philosophical Anthropology

Week 6: February 13

B&L, pp. 47-52.

Gehlen, A.: *Man. His Nature and Place in the World*, pp. 3-53, 377-400.

#### Institutionalization

Week 7: February 20

B&L, pp. 53-79

Mead, G.H.: *Mind, Self and Society*, pp. 43-90.

Parsons, T.: *The Social System*, pp. 25-67.

#### Externalization- Objectivation- Reification

Week 8: February 27

B&L, pp. 79-92

Durkheim, E.: *The Rules of Sociological Method*, pp. 35-47, 50-84.

Marx, K.: *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pp. 106-119.

\*\*\*Spring Break\*\*\*

#### Legitimation

Week 9: March 20

B&L, pp. 92-128.

Wuthnow, R.: *Meaning and Moral Order*, pp. 18-65.

Lukes, S.: "Alienation and Anomie", pp. 74-95 in *Essays in Social Theory*.

### IV. Society as Subjective Reality

#### Socialization

Week 10: March 27

B&L, pp. 109-163.

Mead, G.H.: *Mind, Self and Society*, pp. 135-178.

#### Individualization

Week 11 : April 3

B&L, 163-183

Bourdieu, P.: "Understanding" and "Postscript" in Bourdieu et al.: *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Societies*.

Beck, U.: *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, pp. 30-41.

Goffman, E.: "Alienation from Interaction", pp. 113-136 in *Interaction Ritual*.

### V. Dialectics

## Marxism and Phenomenology

Week 12: April 10

Marx, K.: "Theses on Feuerbach", in *The German Ideology*, pp. 121-123.

Sartre, J.P.: *The Problem of Method*, pp. 84-166.

## The Micro-Macro Link

Week 13: April 17

Bhaskar, R.: "On the Possibility of Social Scientific Knowledge and the Limits of Naturalism", pp. 66-87 in *Reclaiming Reality*.

Giddens, A.: "Agency, Institution and Time-Space analysis", pp. 161-174 in Knorr-Cetina, K. and Cicourel, A. (eds.): *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology. Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies*.

Bourdieu, P.: *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 72-95.

## Indicative Bibliography

(to be consulted for research purposes)

Alexander, J.: Theoretical Logic in Sociology, 4 vols.

Alexander, J.: Twenty Lectures. Sociological Theory since World War II.

Alexander, J. et al.: The Micro-Macro Link

Archer, M.: Culture and Agency

Archer, M.: Being Human. The Problem of Agency.

Bauman, Z.: Culture as Praxis

Bauman, Z.: Modernity and the Holocaust.

Beck, U.: Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity.

Benhabib, S.: Critique, Norm and Utopia. A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory.

Berger, P.: An Invitation to Sociology. A Humanistic Perspective.

Berger, P.: The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociology of Religion

Berger, P. and Kellner, H.: Sociology Reinterpreted. An Essay on Method and Vocation.

Berger, P.: Berger, B. and Kellner, H.: The Homeless Mind. Modernization and Consciousness.

Berger, P.: Facing Up to Modernity

Bernstein, R.: The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory.

Bhaskar, R.: The Possibility of Naturalism

Bhaskar, R.: Reclaiming Reality

Blumer, H.: Symbolic Interactionism

Bourdieu, P.: Outline of a Theory of Practice

Bourdieu, P.: The Logic of Practice

Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.: Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.

Garfinkel, H.: Studies in Ethnomethodology

Gehlen, A.: Man in the Age of Technology

Giddens, A.: Capitalism and modern social theory; an analysis of the writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Giddens, A.: New Rules of Sociological Method.

Giddens, A.: Central problems in social theory : action, structure, and contradiction in social analysis

Giddens, A.: The Constitution of Society  
Giddens, A. and Turner, J. (eds.): Social Theory Today.  
Habermas, J.: Logic of the Social Sciences  
Habermas, J.: The Theory of Communicative Action  
Hunter, J. and Ainlay, S. (eds.): Making Sense of Modern Times. Peter L. Berger and the Vision of Interpretative Sociology.  
Honneth, A.: The Struggle for Recognition.  
Joas, H.: G.H. Mead. A Contemporary Re-examination of his Thought  
Joas, H.: Pragmatism and social theory  
Johnson, T., Dandeker, C. and Ashworth, C.: The Structure of Social Theory  
Luckmann, T.: The Invisible Religion. The Transformation of Symbols in Industrial Society.  
Luckmann, T.: Life-world and Social Reality  
Löwith, K.: Max Weber and Karl Marx  
Lukács, G.: History and Class Consciousness  
Mannheim, K.: Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology  
Mannheim, K.: Essays on the sociology of knowledge  
Outhwaite, W.: Understanding Social Life  
Paci, E.: Function of the sciences and the meaning of man  
Parsons, T.: The Structure of Social Action.  
Parsons, T. et al.: Toward a General Theory of Action  
Schutz, A.: The Phenomenology of the Social World  
Schutz, A.: Collected Papers, 4 vols.  
Schutz, A. and Luckmann, T.: Structures of the Life-world  
Thomason, B (1982): Making Sense of Reification. Alfred Schutz and Constructionist Theory.  
Winch, P.: The idea of a social science  
Wittgenstein, L.: Philosophical investigations  
Woodhead, L. (ed.): Peter Berger and the Study of Religion.  
Wuthnow, R. (1984): Cultural analysis. The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas.