

Contemporary Sociological Theory (UPDATED)
CONCEPTS AND APPLICATIONS

112-2 (Spring 2024)
Tuesdays 09:10 to 12:10

Instructor	Jeffrey Weng 翁哲瑞
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Course description	Marx, Weber, Durkheim—the canon is clear for what we call “classical theory.” We might add W.E.B. Du Bois, who was a contemporary and an acquaintance of Weber’s. But what about “contemporary” theory? What, besides being subsequent to classical theory, makes contemporary theory contemporary? Why are so many contemporary theorists French? What does contemporary theory add to the classical canon? Moreover, what useful things can we do with theory? These and many other questions we will attempt to answer during this semester.
Objectives	By the end of the course, students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Understand the arguments of the major theorists▪ Be able to put various theories in conversation with one another▪ Apply theory to concrete situations
Course materials	All readings will be available on NTU COOL.
Expectations	<p>Most of the course’s readings are not long, but most of them are difficult. Learning how to read theory comes with practice, and if you don’t understand something the first time, read it again. And again. Understanding the readings is not just about repeating the words in the reading, but being able to explain the ideas in your own words and even give your own examples. Students will be expected to actively participate in class activities and be respectful at all times of their peers.</p> <p><i>Assignments.</i> Students are expected to turn in assignments on time and to take exams as scheduled. No late assignments will be accepted, and missing an exam will result in zero credit for that exam.</p> <p><i>Teaching assistants.</i> There will be no discussion sections outside of regular class time. Instead, the last hour of each class will be reserved for small group activities with which the TAs will assist. TAs will also be responsible for taking attendance, holding weekly office hours (which will be announced in week 3), as well as grading memos, quizzes, and the final exam.</p> <p><i>Electronics policy.</i> I will permit the use of electronic devices in class for now. Students are expected to be considerate of their peers and use their best judgment. If I discover that these devices are causing more harm than good, I reserve the right to prohibit use during class.</p>

Harassment and bullying. To be able to learn, students need to be and feel safe. No harassment or bullying behavior of any kind is acceptable among any members of the university community. The instructor and the TAs are required by university policy to report suspected cases of sexual harassment or assault to the university’s Gender Equity Committee (台大性平教育委員會, tel: 3366-9607, 3366-9608, email: gender@ntu.edu.tw).

Academic honesty. Students are expected to produce work that is honest and original. Violating the university’s policies against cheating and plagiarism will result in automatic failure of the course and referral for further penalties. Students with questions about how best to follow this policy are encouraged to ask the instructor or TAs.

Updating and revising the syllabus. This is the first time this course is being offered in English at NTU. It is also my first time teaching it. As the semester progresses, we will encounter aspects of the class that need modification and improvement. The schedule may change. Please be patient with the class as I work to improve it.

Requirements and grading

TASK	%	DESCRIPTION
Weekly memos	10%	Starting week 3, each student will write a short memo and submit it to NTU COOL by 5pm the day before each class. Memos need not be turned in on weeks with quizzes. There is thus a total of 9 weeks during which you can turn in a memo. You are allowed to skip a maximum of 2 of those weeks; any missing memos beyond 2 will count against your final grade. For each memo, please include the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three vocabulary words whose meaning you did not understand and their definitions (in English or Chinese) 2. One short quotation of about one or two sentences (followed by its page number in parentheses) in the week’s reading that you found to be surprising, strange, or otherwise interesting. Explain briefly (in one or two sentences) why you felt this way. 3. (Optional) Something specific from the reading that, despite repeated attempts, you were not able to understand. This is an opportunity to get your questions answered in class.
Quiz 1	10%	There will be three quizzes consisting of 2 or 3 short-answer questions administered during the semester. Each quiz will be 50 minutes long and cover material from the preceding weeks of class.
Quiz 2	20%	
Quiz 3	20%	

Requirements and grading

TASK	%	DESCRIPTION
Final poster project and oral exam	40%	Each discussion group will choose a theorist that we have not encountered in class, select one work by that theorist, and discuss the arguments and ideas of that work. Students will also compare this theorist with one or more theorists that we have read for class. Some theorists from whom students may choose include: Harold Garfinkel, James Coleman, Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann, Howard Becker, Bruno Latour, Patricia Hill Collins, Gayatri C. Spivak, E. Said, A. Gramsci. If students have additional ideas, please consult with the instructor. Details on how the oral exam will be conducted will be disseminated closer to the time of the exam.

Schedule

	WEEK	DATE	TASK
	1	Feb 20	Introduction
	2	27	No class (228 Memorial Day)
PART 1: POLITICS	3	Mar 5	Polanyi, Karl. [1944] 2001. <i>The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times</i> . Boston: Beacon Press. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapters 1, 6, 19 (pp. 3–20, 71–80, 231–244)
	4	12	Foucault, Michel. 1977. <i>Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison</i> . New York: Vintage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pp. 3–31, 195–228
	5	19	Bourdieu, Pierre. 1994. “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field.” <i>Sociological Theory</i> 12(1):1–18.
	6	26	Scott, James C. 1998. <i>Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pp. 1–8, 309–316, 333–341
	7	Apr 2	Spring break (no class)
PART 2: GENDER & SEXUALITY	8	9	Quiz 1 (no memo due this week) Goffman, Erving. 1963. <i>Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity</i> . Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pp. 1–5, 73–91, 102–104, 126–130.
	9	16	Foucault, Michel. [1976] 1978. <i>The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction</i> . New York: Vintage Books. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pp. 3–26, 135–159

Schedule		WEEK	DATE	TASK
		10	23	Beauvoir, Simone de. [1949] 2011. <i>The Second Sex</i> . New York: Vintage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pp. 3–17, 283–295
		11	30	Butler, Judith. [1990] 1999. <i>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</i> . New York: Routledge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pp. 1–22, 181–190
PART 3: CLASS AND CULTURE		12	May 7	Quiz 2 (no memo due this week) Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 51(2):273–86.
		13	14	Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. <i>Outline of a Theory of Practice</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chapter 2 (pp. 72–95)
		14	21	Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. <i>Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste</i> . Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pp.169–172, 226–256
		15	28	Quiz 3 (no memo due this week) (No readings)
		16	Jun 5	Final project and oral exam