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Thurs 2-5
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SOCIOLOGY 741: THEORY CONSTRUCTION

"He who does not know theory reads knowledge from the tracks of worms." – *Kama Sutra**

Overview

Theoretical thinking is central to every stage of the research process. This course will help you understand the indispensability of theorizing in clarifying thinking, guiding research design, developing empirical evidence, and assessing results. By the end of the course, you will recognize that the distinction between theory and data is misleading and that the quality of your research depends above all on how well you use theoretical analysis in every phase of your work.

Much of the reading material is taken from the philosophy of science and deals with the natural sciences rather than the social sciences. While I take no *a priori* position regarding the desirability of sociology emulating the natural sciences, and I do not share the view that 'science' is the only form of knowledge, many of the best analyses of theoretical and meta-theoretical issues derive from study of the natural sciences. You will not be expected to understand the details of the physics or astronomy discussed but only the implications of the discussions for social research.

In addition to intensifying your commitment to theoretical development, the course should help you improve your ability to construct good theoretical arguments and link them to well-theorized forms of evidence that can be used to evaluate those arguments. To that end, in some of the exercises you will analyze published works to evaluate their theoretical adequacy, and you will be asked to improve them by reformulating their theories or conceptualizations.

To a considerable extent, the course will operate as a collective enterprise. You will use each other as analytical mirrors, bouncing ideas off one another to improve your work.

Requirements

- A. **Reading** in accordance with the syllabus.
- B. **Class attendance**.
- C. **Presentations in class**, summarizing readings or your own work. One presentation, done in teams of two, will include summary, critique, and reformulation of a major article or book.
- D. **Written exercises** applying ideas discussed in class.
- E. **Term paper** on a topic of your choice, oriented toward producing a research proposal.
Papers are likely to be 20 to 30 pages in length.
- F. **Final exam**, probably in take-home format, at the end of the term.

Grading will consist of class participation and presentations (15%), exercises (20%), final exam (25%), and paper (40%), conjoined with my subjective evaluation of how well you master the course topics.

*Brought to my attention by cosmonaut trainer and former graduate student Steve Miner.

Term paper

The term paper should be related to your own research, leading toward a proposal that can be used for your master's paper or doctoral dissertation. Proposals may call for qualitative or quantitative methods, and "purely" theoretical proposals are also welcome. I am particularly receptive to proposals with an historical, comparative, or global dimension, but that is by no means a requirement.

While I will work with each of you in planning your papers, you should consult with other faculty members as well, particularly your present or future dissertation advisers. You will present your papers in class at the end of the term, in addition to preparing the written versions.

Though you likely will ignore this admonition, I urge you to **start the term paper early** so you can prepare a first draft and revise it in light of my comments. First drafts should be submitted two or three weeks before the end of the course. Term papers are due at the end of the semester; we will set a specific deadline later in the course.

Books to buy

Bernard P. Cohen, *Developing Sociological Knowledge: Theory and Method*
Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1989, 2nd edition

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
University of Chicago Press, 1970

Larry Laudan, *Science and Relativism*
University of Chicago Press, 1990

Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science*
Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979

Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987

– Required articles and chapters are available in Reserves Direct, the online library system for electronic reserves.

– Because I always end up falling behind with respect to the syllabus, I have scheduled a “catch-up” week toward the end of the term.

COURSE OUTLINE

- WEEK 1** Fundamental issues in theorizing research.
 Jan 19 Paradigm shifts in the history of science
 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
 Holism
 Laudan, *Science and Relativism*, Ch. 3
- WEEK 2** Is social science possible?
 Jan 26 Subjectivity, objectivity, intersubjectivity
 Laudan, Larry *Science and Values*, Ch. One (reserve)
 Interests and relativism
 Laudan, *Science and Relativism*, Ch. 6
 Couvalis, George *The Philosophy of Science*, Ch. 6 (reserve)
 Seidman, Steven "The End of Sociological Theory: The Postmodern Hope" (reserve)
 Sociological Theory, 1991
 Natural science vs. social science: meaning and agency; experimental and statistical control
 Collins, Randall "Sociology: Proscience or Antiscience?" *ASR*, 1989 (reserve)
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Ch. 13, Ch. 14 (535-546)
- WEEK 3** The nature of theory and theorizing.
 Feb 2 Interpretative understanding (*verstehen*)
 Geertz, Clifford "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (reserve)
 (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, Ch. 1)
 Weber, Max *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, 4-28 (reserve)
 Theory as conditional universals
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Chs. 4, 6
 Popper, Karl *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Ch. III (reserve)
 Inductive (grounded) theory
 Glaser, Barney, & Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chs. I, II (reserve)
- WEEK 4** Explanation and prediction.
 Feb 9 General considerations
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Chs. 1, 2
 Deduction and induction
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Ch. 3
 Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Ch. IV (reserve)
 Reductionism and emergent properties
 Black, Donald "Dreams of Pure Sociology" *Sociological Theory* (reserve)
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Ch. 11 (366-397), Ch. 14 (535-546)
 Falsifiability and falsification
 Popper, Karl *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Ch. IV (reserve)
 Functionalism
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Ch. 14 (520-535)
 Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 80-101

WEEK 5 Causality.

- Feb 16 General considerations
 Hage, Jerald, and Barbara Meeker *Social Causality*, Ch. 1, Ch. 2 (45-74) (reserve)
 Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 28-38
- Deterministic and probabilistic
 Carnap, Rudolf *Philosophical Foundations of Physics*, Chs. 19-21, 30 (reserve)
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Ch. 10, Ch. 14 (503-535)
- In applied research
 Lipsey, Mark "Theory as Method: Small Theories of Treatments" *New Directions for Program Evaluation* 57 (Spring), 1993: 5-38 (reserve)

WEEK 6 Concepts and conceptualization.

- Feb 23 Types of concepts; classifications and cross-classifications
 Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 38-46
 Hempel, Carl *Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science*, 50-58 (reserve)
 Kaplan, Abraham *The Conduct of Inquiry*, Ch. II (34-62) (reserve)
- Definitions and explication
 Cohen, Bernard *Developing Sociological Knowledge*, Ch. 7
 Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 149-68
 Hempel, Carl *Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science*, 1-20 (reserve)
- Logical derivation and truth tables
 Cohen, Bernard *Developing Sociological Knowledge*, Chs. 11, 12
- Levels of theorizing
 Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 47-53
 Lawler, Edward, Cecilia Ridgeway, & Barry Markovsky, "Structural Social Psychology and the Micro-macro Problem" *Soc. Theory* 11 (3, Nov): 268-90 (reserve)
 Collins, Randall "The Micro Contribution to Macro Sociology," *Sociological Theory*, 1988 (reserve)

WEEK 7 Evidence and measurement.

- Mar 2 Theory-ladenness of evidence
 Laudan, *Science and Relativism*, Ch. 2
 Popper, Karl *Objective Knowledge*, 341-357 (reserve)
- Fundamental measurement
 Carnap, Rudolf *Philosophical Foundations of Physics*, Chs. 6-10 (reserve)
- Indicators
 Cohen, Bernard *Developing Sociological Knowledge*, Ch. 8
- Operationism
 Hempel, Carl *Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science*, 39-50 (reserve)

WEEK 8 Testing.

- Mar 9 General considerations
 Cohen, Bernard *Developing Sociological Knowledge*, Ch. 13
 Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 15-28
Rules of method
 Laudan, *Science and Relativism*, Ch. 4
Competing theories
 Incommensurability
 Laudan, *Science and Relativism*, Ch. 5
 Conflicting predictions
 Laudan, Larry *Progress and Its Problems*, Ch. 2 (reserve)

WEEK 9 Spring break.

Mar 16

WEEK 10 Progress and cumulatvity.

- Mar 23 Kuhn revisited
 Laudan, *Science and Relativism*, Ch. 1
 Feyerabend, Paul *Against Method*, Introduction and Parts 1-5, 19 (reserve)
 Feyerabend, Paul *Problems of Empiricism*, Ch. 4 (reserve)
Research traditions and programs
 Laudan, Larry *Progress and Its Problems*, Ch. 3, 70-103 (reserve)
 Lakatos, Imre *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programs*,
 Ch. 2 (102-121) (reserve)

WEEK 11 Comparative and historical issues.

- Mar 30 Stinchcombe, Arthur *Theoretical Methods in Social History*, selections (reserve)
 Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 101-129
 Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Ch. 15

WEEK 13 Catch-up week.

Apr 6

WEEKS 13-15 Presentations and critiques of term papers/research proposals.

Apr 13, 20, 27