

HTS 6001
Social Theory Fall 2026

Instructor:

Dr. Bhumika Chauhan
Office: Old Civil Engineering Building (Room 136)
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Class Information:

Thursday; 5:00-7:45 pm
OCE 104

Office Hours:

Monday: 1 pm -3 pm (by appointment only)
Thursday 2 pm-3 pm (by appointment only)
Booking link: TBD

Course Overview

In this course, we will encounter and critically engage works by thinkers who were formative in the development of sociology, those whose ideas continue to echo through contemporary scholarship in a continuous conversation. The first half of the course is organized around the four canonical classical theorists – Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and DuBois. Because they set the stage for much of the subsequent developments—raising questions we are still seeking answers to and offering answers we still question—their work remains central to conversations in the social sciences. Reading them carefully will not only socialize you into those conversations (give you the shared language and concepts), but, by following their steps, will also help you learn different modalities of building sociological explanations, of *doing* social theory. The second half of the course is organized thematically, addressing some of the specific social issues and theoretical debates we encountered in the classical theorists. While we will continue to encounter key contemporary theorists, our discussion focuses on the following: self and meaning-making in social interactions; race and capitalism; patriarchy and capitalism; the sociality of knowledge; and power and hegemony.

Learning outcomes:

We will engage with the texts on three different levels:

1. Understand the theorists and texts: what disciplinary themes, concepts, and methodological orientations do they give us? How are they different from each other?
2. Learning scientific theory building: How do we build explanations of social phenomena based on empirical data?
3. What does the text tell us about an issue or a debate:
 - a. How is society possible? What holds it together and reproduces it (solidarity despite difference and conflict)? How does social change happen?
 - b. What is the relationship between the individual and society (agency and structure)? What is social about us, and how do we know ourselves and the

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world?

- c. What is the relationship between different aspects of society: economy, state, and technology?
- d. Power, conflict, exploitation, and oppression: what are class, race, and gender? What is the relationship between capitalism and racism, and capitalism and patriarchy?

Readings

Readings will be made available to students electronically, but you may want to purchase the following texts for easier reading.

Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds) *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 1st Edition
W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*
Emile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*
Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*
David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd Edition
Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Vol. 1 and 2)
Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Background and Reference Texts: If you have never done a social theory course before, I encourage you to read a few introductory texts and companions before the course and keep them handy during the semester. You may choose others.

Ritzer, George, and Jeffrey Stepnisky. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

Giddens, Anthony. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber*. Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds) *Classical Sociological Theory*. 3rd Edition, Blackwell, 2012 (General and Part Introductions)

Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds). *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Blackwell, 2002 (General and Part Introductions)

Turner, Bryan Stanley. *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Blackwell Companions to Sociology. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Assignments, Deadlines, and Grading:

Class Format and Grading

Class Participation	40%
Weekly Memos	Pass/fail
Leading two class discussions	20%
Term Paper	40%

Participation (30%)

This course is a seminar. Articulating concepts through writing and speaking, and engaging in academic conversations, is how we learn and *do* social science. The course is designed to help build this skill. Students are required to complete the readings before class and actively participate in class discussions. The weekly memos will help you participate effectively. You will receive multiple rounds of feedback during the semester, but note that you will be graded not only on what you get right but also on your ability to learn and grow. Don't be afraid to say, "I didn't understand this."

Weekly Memos (Pass/Fail; due every Wednesday before class at 11:59 pm)

To support sustained engagement with the course readings and to enhance class participation, you are required to write memos each week. These memos should be around 750 words long and posted on Canvas the day before class for all of us to read. They don't

have to be polished essays, but they should display serious engagement with the week's reading. I will read the memos each week, and it will help focus our class discussion.

A good memo will (1) discuss a key argument, concept, and/or problem raised by the week's readings, (2) discuss the main disciplinary themes, debates, or methods the readings is raising, (3) if relevant, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence, (4) reflect on how the reading relates to previous theorists and our class discussions, (5) pose 1-2 discussion questions about the readings, (6) note things that are not clear to you about the argument, and (7) reflect on how the week's readings relate to your research interests (this may inform your final paper).

Your memo need not have all of these elements; these are meant to guide your thinking and writing. Some weeks have multiple theorists and a collection of texts. It is up to you whether to write shorter memos for each or a consolidated memo that treats all readings as a constellation.

Leading Two Class Discussions (20%)

Twice in the semester, you will start off our class discussion. At the beginning of class, you will briefly (**about 10 minutes**) introduce the readings, first summarizing the key themes the readings touched on, and then, based on your memo, highlighting the theme that stood out to you, and posing questions for discussion. The objective is to launch the conversation rather than provide a comprehensive summary.

Again, in weeks that have more than one theorist, it is up to you whether you want to split your time and speak about the readings separately or treat all readings as a constellation.

We will proceed in **alphabetical order by last name**. In some weeks, we might have more than one student leading the discussion.

Term Paper (50%, due DEC 17)

Students are required to write a term paper in which they display mastery and insight into a topic related to sociological theory and in which they develop a sustained argument about the theoretical ideas they seek to engage.

Students have great latitude in choosing a topic, except that they should pick from among the theorists that we are reading in class. Examples of potential topics include: critically comparing two theorists; exploring how a specific theorist would approach a particular substantive issue; demonstrating how a particular theoretical lens may (or may not) prove useful in illuminating some empirical concern; and many more.

Importantly, the term paper is *not* an empirical paper. It should be a logical, rational discussion about the theoretical ideas themselves: What are the assumptions? What are the implications? How do ideas relate to one another? What empirical conditions might we deduce from these relationships? Consider looking at articles in *Sociological Theory* for examples (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/stx>).

To encourage students to begin preparing for the term paper early in the semester, I require all students to submit a **term paper proposal in Week 4**. It does not need to be more than a paragraph. Just describe the topic sufficiently for me to sign off on it. *The proposal is not a contract!* You may change topics at any point, but the longer you work on the paper, the stronger it will be. Element 7 of your weekly memos should also feed into this process.

I also expect to see a **proposed outline for your term paper by Week 11**. Again, the outline is not a contract; your final paper can deviate from the proposed outline. This requirement is simply a way for me to review the progress of your thinking on your chosen topic.

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Finally, I expect all students to meet with me at least once during **office hours to discuss their term paper between Weeks 12 and 14**. If given sufficient time, I can read a draft in advance of the deadline and provide feedback.

Final papers should not be fewer than 15 pages, and should not exceed 30 pages, excluding bibliography. Papers are due on **Dec 17**, no later than midnight.

Course Policies

Classroom Conduct/Community Agreements

We will co-create a more detailed community agreement in class that I will link here after our discussions for all of us to keep in mind and review. At a minimum, we acknowledge that systemic oppressions on the basis of gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion continue to make the university an unequal space. We will work together to make this classroom an inclusive space that fosters learning for all. We promise to treat all participants with respect, to make space for everyone to speak, and to listen to all participants.

Attendance

Class attendance is central to your learning in this course. Missing too many classes will impact your ability to follow subsequent classes and do your assignments.

But life happens! Prioritize your health and stay home if you're unwell. If you feel you are having trouble catching up, please set an appointment for office hours.

Late assignments

The policy for late assignments is that you will need a documented health, funeral, or university-sponsored excuse for turning in late assignments at full credit. Assignments turned in after their due dates without an excuse will receive a drop in letter grade every two days beyond their due date.

Accommodations

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at 404.894.2563 or their website as soon as possible to discuss your needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Then, make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your learning needs.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Academic misconduct is described fully in two documents: the Student Code of Conduct and the Academic Honor Code. The Student Code of Conduct outlines the Institute's expectations for academic and nonacademic conduct as well as students' rights and seeks to foster an environment conducive to academic excellence. The Code outlines nine charges that apply to academic misconduct. The Georgia Tech Academic Honor Code is a guide that articulates student and faculty expectations; it is designed to strengthen the level of academic integrity and trust within the Tech community. As described in the Academic Honor Code, faculty members are expected to create an environment where honesty flourishes.

Use of Generative AI Tools

Generative AI derives its output from previously created texts from other sources that the models were trained on yet doesn't cite sources. Per GaTech's Honor Code, you may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material (with due consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor). When/if you use AI platforms in your assignments, please write a note to clarify where in your process you used AI, include the prompt used to generate the material, and which platform(s) you used. See this article for how to cite AI properly: How to cite ChatGPT: <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

NOTE: These tools can produce inaccurate, offensive, and biased results. Uncritical use of these tools for your assignment, especially for a social science class, may lead to historically inaccurate and sociologically unscientific statements being included in your writing, which will negatively impact your grade. The point of the course is to learn to do social theory and think through the difficulties. AI-based shortcuts don't serve that goal.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 is a federal law that affords students certain rights with respect to their education records: • The right to inspect and review their own records • The right to request amendments to their records • The right to have some control over the release of personally identifiable information from their records. Generally speaking, all Institute employees who have access to student records are responsible for guarding the confidentiality of those records.

Mental Health Assistance

There are resources on campus at the GTech's Counseling Center to help if you are facing a mental health issue. In case of an urgent psychological crisis call Counseling Center at 238 404.894.2575 (Address: Smithgall Student Services Building, Suite; website: counseling.gatech.edu).

Sexual Harassment (Title IX)

All faculty members are considered "[Responsible Employees](#)" per GT's [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#). **I am, therefore, required to report allegations of sexual misconduct** to the Title IX office. You can reach out to the Title IX Coordinator with questions at 404-894-5698.

If you need to speak in confidence with someone who does not have an obligation to report to the Title IX Office, please contact:

- VOICE Advocates: 404.385.4451 | 404.385.4464 404.894.2500 (on-call advocate available outside of business hours) healthinitiatives.gatech.edu/well-being/voice
- The Center for Mental Health Care and Resources | 404-894-3498 | www.care.gatech.edu
- Women's Health at 404-894-1434, or any other clinician in Stamps Health Services at 404-894-9980

Acknowledgement

I'm grateful to Kate Pride Brown for sharing her version of this course.

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Course Schedule

*** NOTE: The course readings and schedule are subject to further change before the start of classes on Aug 27. Updates will be posted on Canvas.

*** Background readings

If you have never done a social theory course before, I encourage you to read a few introductory texts and companions before the course and keep them handy during the semester.

Ritzer, George, and Jeffrey Stepnisky. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

Giddens, Anthony. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber*. Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds) *Classical Sociological Theory*. 3rd Edition, Blackwell, 2012 (General and Part Introductions)

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Turner, Bryan Stanley. *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Blackwell Companions to Sociology. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Week 1

Aug 27: Introduction

Course syllabus (this document)

Robert K. Merton, "On the Sociological Theories of the Middle Range" (1968). *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Enlarged ed.). Free Press.

James S. Coleman, "Metatheory: Explanation in Social Science," in *Foundations of Social Theory*, 1–26.

Week 2

Sept 3: The Enlightenment

Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?"

Nisbet, R. *The Sociological Tradition* ("The Unit-Ideas of Sociology" p.3-20)

Burawoy, Michael. "For public sociology." *American sociological review*.

Calhoun, Craig. "The Critical Dimension in Sociological Theory."

Week 3

Sept 10: Marx: Historical Materialism, Class Struggle, State,

McLellan, Karl Marx: *Selected Writings*

Ch. 6: On "The Jewish Question"

Ch. 7: Toward a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

Ch. 8: The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts

Ch. 13: Theses on Feuerbach

Ch. 14: The German Ideology

Ch. 30: Critique of Political Economy

Ch 23: The Class Struggles in France

Ch. 25: The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

Ch. 18: The Communist Manifesto

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Week 4

Sept 17: Marx: Capitalist production and exploitation

McLellan, Karl Marx: Selected Writings

Ch. 32: Capital

Commodities: Use-Value and Exchange-Value [this tends to be the hardest read]

The Fetishism of Commodities

The Sale of Labour Power

The Production of Surplus Value

The Working Day

The Division of Labour

The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation

Primitive Accumulation

The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation

***Term Paper Proposal Due**

Week 5

Sept 24: Weber: Interpretative Sociology, Social Action, and Capitalism

Weber, Max, Economy and Society (Vol 1)

Ch. I. Basic Sociological Terms (3-29)

Weber, Max, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Further reading:

Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action"

Week 6

Oct 1: Weber: Power: Class, Status, Legitimation and Domination

Weber, Max, Economy and Society (Vol 1 & 2)

Ch. IX.6: Class, Status and Power (926-938)

Ch. III: Types of Legitimate Domination (212-251)

Ch. XI: Bureaucracy (956-963, 973-975, 980-989, 990-994)

Ch. XIV: Charisma and its transformation (1111-1124)

Week 7

Oct 8: Durkheim: Methods, functionalist sociology, social solidarity

Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Prefaces, Chap 1, 2, and 5 (pp35-38, 50-59, 119-135)

Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, (Book 1, Ch 1,2,3; Book 2, Ch 2)

Week 8

Oct 15: Durkheim: Social solidarity (cont), Sociology of religion and knowledge

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (1-39, 99-126, 141-157, 190-241, 367-373, 418-440) [Read the table of contents carefully for an outline of the argument. Focus on his argument, and pay attention to some of the illustrative cases. Skim the rest]

Week 9

Oct 22: DuBois: Class and Race

W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (Ch 1-5)

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Week 10

Oct 29: Microsociology, Self and Social Interaction

Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds) Contemporary Sociological Theory, 2nd Edition

Ch. 3: Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

Ch. 4: Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism

Candace West and Don Zimmerman, "Doing Gender"

Herbert Blumer, "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position."

Week 11

Nov 5: Race

Omi and Winant, Racial Formation in the United States (Ch 1-5)

Hall, Stuart. *Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance*.

***Term Paper Outline Due**

Week 12

Nov 12: Patriarchy

Silvia Federici, Caliban and the Witch ("The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women", 61-132)

Arruzza, Cinzia. "Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and Its Critics."

Week 13

Nov 19: Knowledge and Sociality

Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds) Contemporary Sociological Theory, 2nd Edition

Ch. 2: Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality

Ch. 14. Michel Foucault, Truth and Power

Ch 22: Dorothy E. Smith, The Conceptual Practices of Power

Ch 23: Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Epistemology

Week 14

Nov 26: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15:

Dec 3: Power and Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* ("The intellectuals." Pp. 3-23, "The State" 257-263; "The Conception of Law," 246-247)

Craig Calhoun, et al. (eds) Contemporary Sociological Theory, 2nd Edition

Ch 15. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

Further Readings:

Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*

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***Dec 17: Term Papers Due at 11:59 p.m.**