



McGill

McGill University

SOCI-652: CURRENT SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Time: Friday, 3:35pm-5:25pm

Fall Term 2023

Room: Leacock 808

Prof. Axel van den Berg

Office Hours: by appointment

Leacock 816, tel. 398-6846

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Course Description:

In this seminar we consider some of the central issues in contemporary sociological theory by critically examining a number of recent programmatic statements representing contending schools of thought. Students are expected to have basic background knowledge of classical and modern sociological theory and the issues they deal with. If you think your background is insufficient, you are *strongly* encouraged to read a basic introductory sociological theory textbook before the term begins or during the first weeks of the term.

Readings:

All books assigned should be available in the McGill Bookstore as well as [on reserve](#) in the McLennan library. The articles can be found on the MyCourses site for this course.

Books:

Archer, Margaret S. 2000. *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harding, Sandra. 2015. *Objectivity and Diversity: Another Logic of Scientific Research*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Reed, Isaac A. 2011. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the use of Theory in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hacking, Ian. 1999. *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hammersley, Martyn. 2023. *Methodological Concepts: A Critical Guide*. London & New York:

Routledge.

Articles:

Abend, Gabriel, 2008. "The Meaning of 'Theory'", *Sociological Theory*, 26 (2):173-199.

Loyal, Steven and Barry Barnes. "'Agency' as a Red Herring in Social Theory," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 2001, 31, 4, Dec, pp. 507-524.

Course Plan:

- Sept. 1st Introduction: Major Issues in Contemporary Sociological Theory; reading: Abend, "The Meaning of 'Theory'"
- *Sept. 8th Archer. *Being Human*, Introduction and Part I (pp. 1-117)
- *Sept. 15th Archer. *Being Human* II, Parts II, III and IV (pp. 121-319) **and** Loyal and Barnes, "Agency as a Red Herring"
- *Sept. 22nd Harding, *Objectivity and Diversity*
- Sept. 29th Harding, *Objectivity and Diversity* II
- *Oct. 13th Reed. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge*
- Oct. 20th Reed. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge* II; **paper outline due**
- *Oct. 27th Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*
- Nov. 3rd Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* II
- *Nov. 10th Hammersley, *Methodological Concepts*
- Nov. 17th Hammersley, *Methodological Concepts* II
- Nov. 24th Term paper presentations
- Dec. 1st Term paper presentations

Requirements and Assessment:

For the days marked by an asterisk, students will hand in a brief (no more than 3 pp.) review of the reading assignment for that day. *These reviews are due the previous day (i.e., Thursdays) at 5:00pm, by email.* The reviews together account for 25% of your final grade. Second, you will be writing a term paper on a topic to be decided in consultation with me. On October 20th you will hand in a brief outline of the planned paper with a preliminary bibliography which will be treated

as part of (i.e., graded with) the term paper. The topic need not be highly theoretical but you will be expected to address some analytical issue or problem and apply the methods of critical analysis (questioning logical consistency, underlying assumptions, and so on) used in the course on the literature that you will be reviewing. The last sessions of the course will be devoted to your oral term paper presentations. The final version of your term paper will be due on the last day of the term. It will contribute 50% to your final grade.

The remaining 25% of your grade will be determined by your participation in the seminar. You will be expected to come prepared to bring your own questions and insights to each meeting of the seminar and I will regularly call on each student to give his/her comments. Depending on the size of the class once or twice during the semester you will be a discussion leader. This means that you will initiate the discussion of the week's readings. This should be a short introduction of 5 to 8 minutes at most in which you will comment on the reading and raise questions to be discussed rather than summarize the reading.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Remise des travaux en français

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Plagiarism

French version:

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

English version:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).