

Theories of Action in Contemporary Sociology

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Description

This course aims to present and discuss some new developments in the theory of action at the cutting edge of social theory. In order to situate the current preoccupation with action, the course will open with a return to the new theoretical movement of the 1980's (Bourdieu, Giddens and Habermas). Against the background, the course will then proceed to a systematic reconstruction of the pragmatic sociology of critique (Boltanski and Thévenot), dispositional sociological psychology (Lahire), the transformational model of social action (Bhaskar), the sociology of internal conversations (Archer), the critical theory of recognition (Honneth), the anti-utilitarian theory of action (Caillé), the sociology of experience (Dubet) and the dialectical sociology of the Montreal School (Freitag). The theories will not be analyzed in isolation. Rather it is hoped that through dialogue and comparison some of their limitations will be uncovered and a common framework for a complex critical social theory of action will eventually emerge.

Requirements

Reading: This an advanced *intensive* course with lots of reading materials (100 pages on average per day). Students who want to take this course are strongly advised to reserve the whole week for studying purposes.

Participation: Students are asked to present the reading materials and initiate the discussion.

Essay: Students have to write an essay of 10 to 30 pages on theories of action covered in the syllabus, theories not covered in the syllabus, or relate their own research to any of those theories.

Syllabus

Day 1: The New Theoretical Movement: Twenty Years Later

Alexander, J. (1988): "The New Theoretical Movement", pp. 77-101 in Neil Smelser (ed.): *Handbook of Sociology*. London: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. (1980): "Structures, habitus, pratiques", pp. 87-110 in *Le sens pratique*. Paris : Minuit.

Giddens, A. (1982): "Hermeneutics and Social Theory", pp. 1-17 and "Action, Structure, Power", pp. 28-39 in *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*. London: Macmillan.

Habermas, J. (1985): "Remarks on the Concept of Communicative Action", in Seebass, G. e Tuomela, R. (eds.): *Social Action*, pp. 151-177. Boston; D. Reidel.

Day 2: Dispositions and Situations of Action

Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L. (1999): "The Sociology of Critical Capacity", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2, 3, pp. 359-377.

Thévenot, L. (2006) : "Introduction", pp. 5-21 et "Les régimes d'une action qui convient : du familier au public", pp. pp. 93-110 in *L'action au pluriel. Sociologie des régimes d'engagement*. Paris : La Découverte.

Lahire, B. (1999): "Esquisse du programme scientifique d'une sociologie psychologique", *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, vol. CVI, pp. 29-59.

Day 3: Reflexivity and Agency

Bhaskar, R. (1998): "Societies", pp. 206-233 in Archer, M. (ed.): *Critical Realism. Essential Readings*

Archer, M. (2003): "Introduction", pp. 1-16 in *Structure, Agency and The Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. (2007): "Internal Conversations and their Outwards", pp. 269-313 in *Making Our Way through the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Day 4: Intersubjectivity and Recognition

Honneth, A. (1994): "The Social Dynamics Of Disrespect: On The Location Of Critical Theory Today", *Constellations*, 1, 2, pp. 225-269.

Honneth, A. (1992): "Integrity and Disrespect. Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition", *Political Theory*, 20, 2, pp. 87-201.

Caillé, A. (2011): "La situation actuelle de la sociologie" (Manuscrit).

Day 5: Agency and Society

Dubet, F. : "Les mutations du modèle", pp. 51-89 et "L'expérience sociale et l'action", pp. 91-134 in *Sociologie de l'expérience*. Paris : Seuil.

Freitag, M.: "Pour un dépassement de l'opposition entre 'holisme' et 'individualisme' en sociologie", *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, vol. XXXII, no. 99, pp. 169-219.