

Sociology 242G

Issues in Theory Construction

Spring 2011

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Course Syllabus

Books to Buy

1. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Routledge.
2. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.
3. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Larry Laudan, *Progress and Its Problems: Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth*. University of California Press.

For emergency purposes: Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (on reserve).

Course Requirements

1. Select a research program in sociology and (a) trace its origins and development, (b) formalize it in terms of the ideas of Popper, Lakatos, and Laudan, (c) examine some of the empirical research devoted to it and tell us whether it is a progressive or degenerating program. Present your analysis to the class (30 minutes) and then write up a formal discussion for the professor.
2. Lead a discussion one week on the assigned readings.
3. Take-home final exam.
4. Participation in class discussions.

Grading

- 25% on the 30-minute presentation
- 25% on the formal writeup of the 30-minute presentation
- 25% on the take-home final
- 25% on leading class discussion and overall class participation

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Week 1, April 1: Course Introduction and Orientation

- Sanderson, "Reforming theoretical work in sociology: A modest proposal," plus four critiques and Sanderson's reply. *ASA Theory Section Newsletter* 2005.

Week 2, April 8: Popper and Falsificationism

- Popper, *Logic of Scientific Discovery*, chs. (I-VII, and X)
- Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, ch. 10, "Truth, Rationality, and the Growth of Scientific Knowledge"

Week 3, April 15: Kuhn and Paradigms

- Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.
- Lakatos and Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, chapters by Kuhn (1-23), Watkins (25-37), Toulmin (39-47), Williams (49-50), Popper (51-58), Masterman (59-89), and Kuhn ("Reflections," 231-78)

Week 4, April 22: Lakatos and Research Programs

- Lakatos, "Falsification and the methodology of scientific research programmes," pp. 91-196 in Lakatos and Musgrave.
- Lakatos, "Lectures on scientific method," in *For and Against Method*, pp. 19-111.
- Ketelaar and Ellis, "Are evolutionary explanations falsifiable? Evolutionary psychology and the Lakatosian philosophy of science" (plus commentaries), *Psychological Inquiry* 2000.
- Wagner and Berger, "Do sociological theories grow?" *AJS* 1985.

Week 5, April 29: Laudan: Research Traditions and Comparative Theory Testing

- Laudan, *Progress and its Problems*

Week 6, May 6: Eclecticism and Synthesis

- Sanderson, "Eclecticism and Its Alternatives" *Persp in Soc Theory* 1987.
- J. Cardwell and K. Kalab, "Searching for the theoretical Godot: A plea for theoretical diversity in modern sociology." *Soc Focus* 1986.
- S. Fuchs and S. Ward, "What is deconstruction and where and when does it take place? Making facts in science, building cases in law." *ASR* 1994.
- Sanderson, *Evolution of Human Sociality*, ch. 9, pp. 143-57.
- Unification and GUTs in physics; theories of everything; string theory.

Week 7, May 13: Formal Theorizing: Developing Theories

Propositionally

- G. Jasso, "Formal theory," pp. 37-68 in Turner, *Handbook of Sociological Theory*.
- Rodney Stark, "Micro foundations of religion: A revised theory." *Sociological Theory*, 1999.
- Collins *Conflict Sociology*, abridged ed., ch. 5, pp. 167-228.
- Sanderson; Why the Best Theorists are Not Theorists (with one exception) How things work in physics; do we need "general theorists." Do we need a general theory journal? If so, what should it do?

Week 8, May 20: No class – professor away at conference.

Week 9, May 27: Dissecting and Formalizing Research Programs I

I will start with a more detailed formalizing of my DCT.

Then we will have student presentations.

Week 10, June 3: Dissecting and Formalizing Research Programs II

More student presentations