



# Contemporary Social Theory: An introduction

By Anthony Elliott

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This book is arguably the definitive undergraduate textbook on contemporary social theory. Written by one of the world's most acclaimed social theorists, Anthony Elliott provides a dazzlingly accessible and comprehensive introduction to modern social theory from the Frankfurt School to globalization theories and beyond.

In distilling the essentials of social theory, Elliott reviews the works of major theorists including Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Jurgen Habermas, Judith Butler, Slavoj Zizek, Manuel Castells, Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, Giorgio Agamben and Manuel De Landa.

Every social theorist discussed is contextualized in a wider political and historical context, and from which their major contributions to social theory are critically assessed. This book is essential reading for students and professionals in the fields of social theory, sociology and cultural studies, as it is both an original enquiry and a consummate introduction to social theory.

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## **Contemporary Social Theory: An introduction** By Anthony Elliott Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Review

**"This is the best contemporary social theory text currently on the market. It is highly accessible, explaining ideas in the clearest possible language without compromising depth and complexity. Accordingly, it is a book that would work well for students at all levels. Undergraduates with no background in social theory will be able to easily engage with this text, and this is something that can not be said of any other contemporary social theory textbook that considers the range of theorists and complexity of ideas that this book does. More advanced students, including professional social theorists, will find that Elliott provides great clarity on some of the most difficult, yet most influential, ideas in contemporary social thought."** – *Ann Branaman, Associate Professor of Sociology Florida Atlantic University, USA*

**"It is very hard to write an outstanding introduction to any subject and particularly hard to do so for a subject as demanding as contemporary social theory. Anthony Elliott succeeds superbly. His book offers a reliable guide to the big debates in social theory while never glossing over the difficult questions."** – *Professor David Held, Co-Director, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, LSE, UK*

**"Magnificent. Elliot visits a vast range of theorists and shows how they reveal the beautiful complexity of everyday social life. He makes social theory relevant and meaningful, simple, sexy and exciting."** – *Tom Inglis, Professor of Sociology, University College Dublin, Ireland*

**"No one I know is better able than Anthony Elliott to get to the heart of complex theories, then to write of them clearly yet critically."** – *Charles Lemert, Andrus Professor of Sociology at Wesleyan University and author of 'Thinking the Unthinkable', USA*

**"This is an amazingly fluent analysis of contemporary social theory. It should be widely read for its careful and insightful dissection of the main theories and of their particular strengths and weaknesses. It will be a must-read on many 'theory' courses around the world."** – *John Urry, Distinguished Professor, Dept of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK*

**"Intelligent and lucid, Anthony Elliott's introduction to Contemporary Social Theory provides a remarkably complete overview of thinkers and themes. In exploring the organizing question – what is society? - he skilfully guides the student through a galaxy of major figures including such luminaries as Bauman, Butler, Chodorow, Foucault, Giddens, Habermas, Lacan, and Lemert. Incorporating many valuable pedagogical aids, Elliott makes social theory highly accessible.**

***Contemporary Social Theory* bristles with insights into our troubled world."** – *Bryan Turner, Alona Evans Distinguished Visiting Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College USA*

**"This is quite simply the best introduction to contemporary social theory that I have read. Profound**

**and subtle in its judgements, yet very easy to read, Anthony Elliott has done much more than rehearse familiar debates or identify key thinkers. He has brought contemporary social theory to life by placing it within everyday experiences, troubles, and dilemmas. And he has done so with a remarkable breadth of theoretical virtuosity covering everything from sexuality to globalization, language to political institutions and governance. This book will be invaluable to students and teachers alike."** – *Professor Robert Holton, Fellow of Trinity College Dublin, Ireland*

**"Anthony Elliott is without question one of the leaders in the younger generation of sociologists. Contemporary Social Theory provides an overview of various recent sociological theories and is an essential text for anybody interested in sociological theories including Japanese students and faculty."** – *Professor Masataka Katagiri, Chiba University, Japan*

**"Here is the latest example of what Anthony Elliott does best: He brings his readers in on the key social, personal and political issues of our time. Always readable and interesting, Contemporary Social Theory: An Introduction includes a wide range of modern social thought, from structuralism, to feminism, to globalization, and engagingly demonstrates these theories' relevance in our own lives. As importantly, Elliott provides us a way to think critically, making the reader a more thoughtful reader of social theory as well as a participant in contemporary social debates. A book that is stimulating to both teacher and student alike and that enlivens the classroom experience."** – *Professor Jeffrey Prager, Sociology, UCLA, USA*

**"Anthony Elliott has written a wide ranging and appealing book, setting new standards for introductory texts in social theory. Contemporary Social Theory is clear in style and accessible in presentation. It is sure to stimulate students and beginners in the field whilst proving of considerable interest to their teachers. It will also strike sparks with those with a professional research interest in social theory."** – *Professor Paul du Gay, Organisational Behaviour, Warwick University, UK*

**"Extraordinary in scope, Contemporary Social Theory takes the reader on a world tour of social theory since the Second World War and offers the student clear and accessible guidance around what are often complex and obscure theoretical edifices. More than this, Anthony Elliott provides not just description but evaluation and critique, and the originality of his mind will make this a pleasure to read for all thoughtful people engaged with the politics of living."** – *Professor Paul Hoggett, Director of the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies, UWE, UK*

**"The renewal of the teaching of social theory can now take place! For in Anthony Elliott's scholarly, thorough and limpid volume, teachers of theory have the perfect support text, one guaranteed to bring students fully into the exciting drama that it lays out: the drama of contemporary social life as social theorists from the Frankfurt School to Giorgio Agamben have mapped it out."** – *Professor John Lechte, Higher Degree Convenor (SOC) Macquarie University, Australia*

**"Social theory gives us the building blocks to make sense of our lives and explore how they link to the processes which shape what we can do and how we live. But it takes a master of the craft to turn the blocks into a building in which it is possible to live and flourish. This book shows that Anthony Elliott is a master of the craft."**

**The house that is built within the pages of this comprehensive book is one of many rooms, in which all students will find a place in which they can think and, moreover, in which they will be given in an exceptionally accessible and well-informed style the resources which that thinking needs if it is going to succeed.**

**I have little doubt that thanks to its encyclopaedic spread, authoritative content and keen eye for the excellent illustration, this book will be valued highly by everyone who wants or needs to think - and live - with social theory. And ultimately that means all of us." – Professor Keith Tester, *Cultural Sociology, University of Portsmouth, UK***

**"Elliott provides a sweeping survey that is both accessible and sophisticated. Organised in thematic chapters that make excellent use of vignettes from the lives of everyday people to draw the reader into the issues, Elliott elegantly summarises the main points of each theorist's work, provides some discussion that stretches the reader's understanding, and rehearses the main criticisms. The book weaves together the disparate strands of social theory, including psychoanalysis, feminism, (post)structuralism, and critical theory alongside the issues of globalization and postmodernity. This book will set the agenda for many university courses in contemporary social theory." – Professor Douglas Ezzy, *Head of School, Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania, Australia***

**"For the last 20 years Anthony Elliott has been bringing his unique personal and intellectual insights to the major debates of our time, in an impressively wide-ranging series of texts on social theory and psychoanalysis. More recently he has produced a provocative series of works on risk and globalization, the allure of celebrity and plastic surgery, and the trials and terrors of the new individualism. Here, in his new introductory text, Elliott returns with new insights to some of the classics of social theory, and charts a path through the most interesting and important contemporary social theorists. I can think of few writers better equipped to carry off this task, and Elliott has done it here magnificently. Elliott combines his deep knowledge of social theory, his lightly worn erudition, and an engaging style that is a pleasure to read. The personal stories that begin most chapters were a highlight and manage to bring home what is at stake in the theories and ideas that follow. What he has achieved here should win over a generation of new students to social theory." – Anthony Moran, *Lecturer in Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Australia***

**"Covering an impressive range of theories and theorists, and presenting them in an accessible and elegant fashion, reading Anthony Elliott's text is an ideal way to navigate the often complex terrain of modern social thought." – Professor David Inglis, *University of Aberdeen, UK***

About the Author

**Anthony Elliott** is Director of the Hawke Research Institute, where he is Research Professor of Sociology at the University of South Australia.

## **Users Review**

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#### **Ann Gross:**

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