

Sociology 200

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Mr. Imber
Office Hours: T: 9-9:45; 11-12:00
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and by appointment

Fall 2008
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OBJECTIVES:

There are two, often competing, objectives to teaching and learning sociological theory: (1) It is necessary to cover considerable ground, in terms of history, biography, and concepts; and (2) It is essential to pay close attention to primary texts, without which the history, biography and concepts would make no lasting impression. In order to achieve both objectives, this course will undertake an intensive review of the times, figures, and ideas that form the basis to theorizing sociologically. We will examine various texts intensively in order to see what each theorist was trying to grasp and understand. You will have the opportunity to write two kinds of papers during the course. One type will call for straightforward accounts of what you learn about these theorists, their theories, and the times in which they theorized. The other type will call for the unpacking of specific passages in a theorist's work, in order to link those passages and that work with present realities.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought* (2nd ed.)

Laura Edles and Scott Applerouth, *Sociological Theory in the Classical Era: Texts and Readings*

Bryan S. Turner, *Classical Sociology*

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

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Examinations: All examinations are open-book.

A. MIDTERM EXAM (short answer questions and essays on lectures and readings): **Distributed October 10; Due October 17.**

B. FINAL PAPER (in form of a Take-Home Exam): Due at the end of exam period. (Distributed at the last class.)

Papers: (All written assignments must be typewritten, between 5 and 8 pages. Use **bold, dark**, clear ribbon or cartridge; no spelling errors - all late assignments will be penalized.)

1. Focusing on Comte, Spencer, and Marx, compare their different assumptions about human nature and the nature of society.

DUE: September 23.

2. Summary of theories of either Cooley and Mead, or Masaryk and Mannheim

DUE: Before November 25.

3. Select either PAPER A, B or C

PAPER A: Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: An Analysis

PAPER B: Comparison of Four Special Readings on Spencer, Durkheim, Weber, and Mannheim

PAPER C: African-American Perspectives in Sociological Theory:
Classical Roots

DUE: December 9.

These assignments will be discussed further in class. All assignments handed in late will be penalized.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

September 2: Explanation of objectives of the course. What is sociological theory?

Part One: Classical Pursuits: Evolution, Revolution, and Progress

September 5: The Origins of Sociology

Coser, "Auguste Comte"

*"Population Increase and the Law of Three Stages." (Distributed in class)

September 9: Herbert Spencer's Evolution

Coser, "Herbert Spencer"

* "Social Structure and Social Function." (Distributed in class)

* "Progress: Its Law and Cause." (Distributed in class)

*Special Reading: T.S. Gray, "Herbert Spencer on Women: A Study in Personal and Political Disillusion".

September 12: Comte and Spencer: Why Do They Represent the Origins of Sociology?

September 16: Marx and the History of All Hitherto Existing Society

Either: Coser, "Karl Marx" or Edles and Appelrouth, "Karl Marx"

Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 66-77.

September 19: Alienation: Theology/Sociology/Psychology

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, concluded.

* “The Notion of Alienation.” (Distributed in Class)

“Capital” (1867) in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 53-64.

September 23: The Moral Imperatives of Society: Durkheim

Either: Coser, “Emile Durkheim” or Edles and Appelrouth, “Emile Durkheim”

“What Is a Social Fact” and “The Normal and the Pathological,” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 89-97.

September 23: FIRST PAPER DUE

September 26: Suicide and Solidarity: Durkheim

“The Division of Labor in Society” and “Suicide” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 99-121.

“Emile Durkheim on Civil Society,” in Bryan S. Turner, *Classical Sociology*, pp. 88-110.

September 30: **NO CLASS** – Reschedule: Social Disorganization and Anomie

“The Elementary Form of Religious Life” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 124-134.

*Special Reading: Guenther Roth, “Durkheim and the Principles of 1789: The Issue of Gender Equality.”

October 3: General, Formal, and Philosophical Sociology: Georg Simmel

Either: Coser, “Georg Simmel” or Edles and Appelrouth, “Georg Simmel”

“Exchange,” “Conflict,” and “Sociability” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 253-275.

October 7: Group Affiliation and Stratification

“The Stranger” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 276-279.

“Georg Simmel and the Sociology of Money,” in Bryan S. Turner, *Classical Sociology*, pp. 147-163.

October 10: Simmel, concluded.

“Fashion” and “The Metropolis and Mental Life” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 282-299.

MIDTERM EXAMINATION DISTRIBUTED, DUE OCTOBER 17

Part Two: Modernity as the Central Subject of Sociological Theory

October 17: Max Weber on Interpreting Social Action

Either: Coser, “Max Weber” or Edles and Appelrouth, “Max Weber”

“Max Weber and Karl Marx” in Bryan S. Turner, *Classical Sociology*, pp. 48-71.

October 21: Authority, Bureaucracy, and Rationalization

“Class, Status, Party,” “Types of Legitimate Domination,” and “Bureaucracy” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 163-190.

“Max Weber on Economy and Society” in Bryan S. Turner, *Classical Sociology*, pp. 72-87.

October 24: Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, “Author’s Introduction” and Part I.

October 31: Weber, concluded.

Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, Part II.

*Special Reading: Guenther Roth, “Marianne Weber and Her Circle”

Part Three: Theoretical Trends: Optimism, Pessimism, and Empirical Reality

November 4: The Problem of Psychology for Sociology: Is There a Human Nature?

Coser, “Charles Horton Cooley”

*Dennis Wrong, “The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology” (Distributed in Class)

November 7: American Sociology’s Early Optimism: Progressivism and Pragmatism

Either: Coser, “George Herbert Mead” or Edles and Appelrouth, “George Herbert Mead”

“Self” and “Society” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 369-390.

November 11: Warnings from Abroad: Theoretical Origins of Critiques of Marxism

*Thomas Masaryk, “Sentences” (packet on Masaryk distributed in class)

November 14: The Reconstruction of Society

Coser, “Karl Mannheim”

“Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Culture” in Bryan S. Turner, *Classical Sociology*, pp. 129-146.

*Special Reading: David Kettler and Volker Meja, “Their ‘Own Peculiar Way’: Karl Mannheim and the Rise of Women”

Part Four: Defining the Canon: Women and African-Americans in the History of Sociology and Sociological Theory

November 18: The Women's Question

“Charlotte Perkins Gilman” in Edles and Appelrouth

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “How Home Conditions React Upon the Family.” *American Journal of Sociology*, March 1909.

Linda Grant, et al., “Women's Sociological Research and Writing in the AJS in the Pre-World War II Era.” *American Sociologist*, Fall 2002.

November 21: Gender and Race: What Kind of Question?

Mary Taylor Blauvelt, “The Race Problem As Discussed by Negro Women.” *American Journal of Sociology*, March 1901.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “A Suggestion on the Negro Problem.” *American Journal of Sociology*, July 1908.

SECOND PAPER DUE (BEFORE November 25)

November 25: Double-Consciousness vs. Class Consciousness vs. Individual Consciousness, etc.

“W.E.B. Du Bois” in Edles and Appelrouth.

“The Souls of Black Folk” and “The Souls of White Folk” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 325-345.

“The Philadelphia Negro” in Edles and Appelrouth, pp. 316-321.

December 2: Du Bois on Sociological Theory: “Sociology Hesitant”

*W.E.B. Du Bois, “Sociology Hesitant” (Distributed in Class)

*W.E.B. Du Bois, “Mr. Sorokin's Systems,” in *The Journal of Modern History*, (1942) 14:500-521. (Distributed in Class)

*W.E.B. Du Bois, Review of Robert Austin Warner, *New Haven Negroes: A Social History*, in *American Historical Review*, 47:376-77 (January, 1942). (Distributed in Class)

December 5 The Dignity of Protest: Radicals and Conservatives

*Kelly Miller, "Radicals and Conservatives" (Distributed in Class)

December 9: Review

Papers A, B or C due

Take-Home Final Distributed in Class

Important Dates: September 23: First Paper Due
October 17: Midterm Exam Due (Distributed October 10)
November 25: Second Paper Due
December 9: Papers A, B or C Due

How to Write a Paper that Compares and Contrasts Comte, Spencer, and Marx

FRANCE	ENGLAND	GERMANY
Comte	Spencer	Marx
Who rules?	What is progress?	When does history end?
How does change occur?	What is regressive social change?	What class is most revolutionary?
Knowledge is power	Society as organism	Materialist conception of history
How is Comte conservative?	How is Spencer libertarian?	How is Marx conservative?
statics/dynamics	laissez faire/evolution	revolutions means/mode of production
Religion of Humanity	Industrial Society	Communism/end of alienation

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Thoughts on the Third Written Assignment: DUE: December 9.

I would like to have the opportunity to talk to each one of you individually about what you plan to write about. Obviously it would help if you think NOW about which paper you would like to write. I urge you to plan to see me.

Select either PAPER A, B or C

PAPER A: Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: An Analysis

The main purpose of this assignment is to reiterate in your own words, with appropriate citations in Weber, the main arguments of the book. I am particularly interested in your addressing how Weber's arguments fit or do not fit with the arguments and perspectives of the earlier theorists, including Comte, Spencer, Marx, Durkheim, and Simmel. Obviously, you are not obliged to refer to all these theorists, only those you believe are most relevant as collaborations of or counterpoints to Weber's thesis.

PAPER B: Comparison of Four Special Readings on Spencer, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, and Mannheim

In this paper, you must first read the four readings and then, in conjunction with Coser's and/or Edles and Appelrouth's presentations of them, you should draw comparisons and contrasts between what the special readings say, and what these commentators say. You may find that will rely more on Coser's presentations of "The Man" section to each of his chapters - but you should decide what is most interesting to do. The focus is not only on "gender" but also on women in and around sociology.

PAPER C: African-American Perspectives in Sociological Theory: Classical Roots

As in the case of PAPER B, you must focus on the readings by and about Du Bois and Miller and any others that touch on the issue of race. It is very important that you try to establish in your paper how these readings coincide with and diverge from the contributions of the "mainstream" theorists, including any of those we will have read (or read about) in the class.

What Harry Potter Can Teach the Textbook Industry

Diane Ravitch

Diane Ravitch is a research professor, New York University; distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; and member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education.

As the world knows, the latest installment in the Harry Potter series sold five million copies on the first day it was available. Many thousands (or millions) of American children stood in line for hours to buy the book.

Here's the rub: the same children complain incessantly that their textbooks are boring. Whereas they hunger to get a Harry Potter book of nearly nine hundred pages, they can barely tolerate the equally large books that are assigned in school. **What does Harry Potter have that the textbooks don't?**

Today's textbooks represent a major achievement in visual design. They glitter with charts, photographs, drawings, and pedagogical advice to the reader. But they are boring.

While researching a book about textbooks, I asked a major publisher why the textbooks are so heavy with graphics. He said, "American kids don't like to read anymore. They are so accustomed to watching television and the Internet that a book can't hold their attention without lots of visual stimuli."

The success of the Harry Potter series shows that this assumption is wrong. American youngsters will read books that are exciting and well written, regardless of their graphics. They devour the Potter books because author J. K. Rowling has infused them with classic themes drawn from legend and myth, as well as biblical imagery. Like J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* books, Rowling's books resonate with suspense, mystery, intrigue, and showdowns between the forces of good and evil.

In contrast to the gripping tales told by Rowling and Tolkien, our history textbooks skim lightly above the surface of events, ignoring the fact that history is first of all a story. The history books excel at mentioning vast numbers of events, people, and ideas and compressing them into short summaries of a page or two. The drama of history and biography is sacrificed to the imperative of "covering" everything in a single volume. **Clashes of good and evil have been banished, replaced by pedestrian prose and thumbnail sketches.**

Similarly, our reading and literature books have achieved the heights of banality. Those who assemble them are careful to weed out controversial themes, anything that might upset pressure groups from left and right. They aim not to engage students' imagination but to bolster their self-esteem. Demographic correctness—the right percentage of authors and characters from every possible segment of society—has become more important than literary excellence.

Harry Potter has triumphed because his author understands the power of story. If the story is good enough, children will take a flashlight to bed so they can keep reading after the lights are out. Unlike textbook publishers, who must screen everything they print to avoid giving offense, she is free to write about a dysfunctional family, about the moral necessity to confront evil, and about how bad things happen to good people.

There is something terribly wrong with the political process that dulls the materials in our classrooms. Our children quite rightly reject writing that has been processed and homogenized by scores of textbook committees.