

Spring 2010. Sociology 282  
Classical and Contemporary  
Sociological Theory  
Tues., Thurs., 11-12.20.  
King 306

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### Sociology 282. Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory

Classical sociology arose in response to the dramatic social transformation of European societies in the wake of the Industrial and French revolutions. Its central focus were the numerous social and political problems opened up by the advent of modern industrial society from the disintegration of community and the decline of the sacred to the emergence of new forms of exploitation and class conflict, and the pervasive rationalization and routinization of social life. The founding fathers of modern sociology--Durkheim, Marx, and Weber--formulated their theories in response to such problems, establishing, in the process, three distinct traditions in sociological theory and research.

This course explores the continuities between classical and contemporary sociological theory and research within each one of these three traditions: Durkheimian, Marxist, and Weberian. The course is divided into three four-week segments, each one devoted to one of the three traditions. Each four-week segment, in turn, is divided into two parts: 1) an initial two-week segment devoted to the "canonical" works of the original thinker; 2) a second two-week segment devoted to the theoretical elaborations and empirical applications of the original theories in contemporary sociology and to the use of sociological theory as social critique. Throughout the course, a consistent effort is made to evaluate sociological theories from the point of view of their empirical validity and explanatory power, as well as their "background assumptions" (values and methodological presuppositions).

### Background Readings, Attendance, and Assignments

In order to facilitate the assimilation of difficult material that is being covered fairly rapidly, a number of background readings are assigned. The main background reading for this class is Lewis Coser's *Masters of Sociological Thought* (chapters on Marx, Durkheim, and Weber). Background readings by Tom Bottomore and Robert Holton will help students understand the context and development of contemporary sociological theories (functionalism, Marxism, critical theory) and are *mandatory*. Readings that deal with specific criticisms of Durkheim's theory of suicide (Pope) or Marx's historical analysis of class conflict and Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (Hamilton) are *optional, but strongly encouraged*. Students are expected to have done the reading before class. This is very important, as the reading for this class is rather abstract and difficult at times. You will quickly lose track if you are behind in the reading. Remember that this is a four-credit course mandatory for all sociology majors and you are expected to devote the corresponding amount of time and effort to study. *Attendance will be taken as of the third week of class: more than two unexcused absences will negatively affect the participation portion of the grade. Papers should be posted on Blackboard at the specified time. Late papers will be penalized and extensions will be given only under exceptional circumstances.*

## Blackboard.

In order to encourage continuity and participation in the classroom there will be *six required Blackboard postings* throughout the semester. Students will be required to pose questions and/or write short summaries of the readings, and will not be formally graded on the postings. However, the frequency, length, and quality of your postings will be taken into account in determining the final grade (with frequency and quality more important than length). All postings will be due by Monday, 11 p.m. on the dates specified in the syllabus (except for the week immediately after Spring break when the posting will be due on Wednesday, 4/7, by 11p.m.).

## Course requirements

There will be two in-class quizzes (45 minute blue-book exams), two 6-7 page papers, and a final examination. In addition, there will be 6 Blackboard postings throughout the semester. Students will be expected to attend one feature film outside of regular class time.

## Grading

2 quizzes:	2x10%=20%
2 papers (6-7 pages):	2x20%=40%
Attendance, Participation, and Blackboard:	20%
Final exam:	20%

## Honor Code

This course and all its assignments are covered by the Oberlin College honor code. This means, most importantly, that—unless otherwise indicated—you are to produce your own work and honor the rules and conventions of scholarly quotation, attribution, and citation. While you are allowed to ask advice and help from librarians and official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by *you*. Some assignments may be collaborative in nature; those will be clearly identified as such. Any case of (suspected) plagiarism will be reported to the Honors Committee. For more details, see <http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/10-Policies-Honor.pdf>

## Required Books (All on hard copy reserve)

Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor on Society*  
(The Free Press, MacMillan, Inc., 1984, ISBN: 0-02-907960-8).

Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*  
(W.W. Norton: ISBN: 0-393-09040-X).

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods. Class, Race, and Family Life* (University of California Press, 2003; ISBN: 0-520-23950-4).

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Routledge, ISBN: 0-415-25406-X).

George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society 5* (Pine Forge Press, 2004; ISBN:978-141-2954303).

All other readings will be on the designated Blackboard site under "Course materials."

### Course Schedule

#### Week One. The History of Sociology and Sociological Theory

Tues. 2/9 Introduction to the class and syllabus

Thurs. 2/11 Classical Sociological Theory in Its Historical Context

Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, pp.3-61; 71-97.

#### Part One. The Durkheimian Tradition

#### Week Two. Community and Society. From Mechanical to Organic Solidarity

Tues. 2/16 Collective Consciousness and Mechanical Solidarity

*Background Reading.* "Emile Durkheim," in Lewis Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*, pp.128-174.

Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, pp.1-68.

Thurs. 2/18 The Division of Labor and Organic Solidarity

Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, pp.69-87; 101-149.

#### Week Three. The Crisis of Community, Excessive Individualism, and Suicide

*First Blackboard posting due Monday, 2/22 by 11 p.m.*

Tues. 2/23 The Problem of Social Integration

Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, pp.149-175; 291-323; preface to the second edition, pp.xxxi-lix.

Thurs. 2/25 Suicide as a Sociological Phenomenon

Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, pp.152-170; 241-276.

**[Optional]** Whitney Pope, *Durkheim=s Suicide. A Classic Analyzed*, pp.9-60.

#### Week Four. The Durkheimian Tradition: Structural Functionalism

Tues. 3/2 Structural Functionalism: Talcott Parsons

*Background Reading.* Robert Holton, "Talcott Parsons," in Rob Stones, ed., *Key Sociological Thinkers*, pp.96-109.

Talcott Parsons, "A Paradigm for the Analysis Social Systems," in Peter Hamilton., ed., *Readings from Talcott Parsons*, pp.168-178.

*Critique.* Ralf Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia: Towards a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis," in Dahrendorf, *Essays in the Theory of Society*, pp.107-129.

Thurs. 3/4 Functionalist Theory Modified

Robert Merton, "Manifest and Latent Functions," in Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968, second edition), pp.73-138.

**[Film]** *American Beauty* (viewing at scheduled time)

#### Week Five (March 3-10). Anomie, Gemeinschaft, and Gesellschaft

*Second Blackboard posting due Monday, 3/8 by 11 p.m*

Tues. 3/9 Social Structure and Anomie

Robert Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," in Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, pp.185-214.

Discussion of *American Beauty*

Thurs. 3/11 The Weakness of Strong Ties: A Critique of Gemeinschaft

1<sup>st</sup> Quiz, 45 minutes in class

Rose Laub Coser, "The Greedy Nature of Gemeinschaft," in Rose Laub Coser, *In Defense of Modernity*, pp.71-93.

Part Two. The Marxist Tradition.

Week Six. Marx as a Theorist of Class Conflict and Capitalism.

*Third Blackboard posting due Monday, 3/15 by 11 p.m*

Tues. 3/16 Marx's Historical Materialism

*Background Reading.* Lewis Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*, pp.42-87.

"Marx on the History of His Opinions," and  
"The German Ideology," in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 3-7, 148-163; 172 (from top of page)-188.

Thurs. 3/18 The Rise of the Bourgeoisie and Class Conflict

"The Communist Manifesto," in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 469-500.

First paper due Sunday 3/21, by midnight on *Blackboard*

Week Seven. Capitalism, Systemic Crisis, and Alienation

Tues. 3/23 The Systemic Crisis of Capitalism

"Wage Labor and Capital,"  
"Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp.203-217; pp. 700 [section III, bottom of page]-717.

Thurs. 3/25 Alienation in Capitalist Society

"Estranged Labor,"  
"The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society,"  
"Alienation and Social Classes,"  
Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 70-81, 101-105, 133-135;

**[Optional]** *Critique*: Richard Hamilton, *The Bourgeois Epoch*, pp.1-48.

\*\*\*\*\*Spring Break\*\*\*\*\*

**Week Eight. Marxism as Sociology. Social Class and Culture**

Tues. 4/6 Cultural Capital and Social Reproduction

*Background Reading.* Tom Bottomore, "Marxism and Sociology," in Bottomore and Nisbet, *A History of Sociological Analysis*, pp.118-148.

Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in Karabel and A.H.Halsey, eds., *Power and Ideology in Education*, Karabel and A.H.Halsey, pp. 487-511.

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods. Class, Race, and Family Life*, pp.1-103.

*Fourth Blackboard posting due on Wednesday 4/7 by 11 p.m*

Thurs.4/8 Social Class and Language Use

Basil Bernstein, "Social Class, Language, and Socialization," in Karabel and Halsey, pp.473-486.

Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, pp.107-160.

**Week Nine. Marxism as Sociology: Social Class in Institutional Settings**

Tues. 4/13 Social Class, Family, and Schools

Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, pp. 161-257.

Thurs.4/15 Second Quiz, 45 minutes in class

**Part Three: The Weberian Tradition**

**Week Ten. Religion and the Rise of Capitalism**

*Fifth Blackboard posting due on Monday 4/19 by 11 p.m*

Tues. 4/20 Western Rationality, Capitalism, and the Capitalist Spirit

*Background Reading.* Lewis Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*,

pp.216-260.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp.13-78.

Thurs.4/22 The Concept of the Calling and Calvinist Predestination

Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp.79-128.

**Week Eleven. Capitalism, Rationality, Bureaucracy**

***Sixth Blackboard posting due on Monday 4/26 by 11 p.m***

Tues. 4/27 The Protestant Ethic and Its Unintended Consequences

Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp.155-183.

Critique. Richard Hamilton, "Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic," in Hamilton, *The Social Misconstruction of Reality*, pp.32-106.

Thurs.4/29 Bureaucracy as Institutionalized Rationality

Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in Hans Gerth and C.Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, pp.196-244.

**Second paper due, Sunday, May 2, by midnight on Blackboard**

**Week Twelve. Critical Theory: Turning Weber Against Weber**

Tues. 5/4 Critical Theory: Instrumental Rationality and New Forms of Domination

*Background Reading.* Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*.

Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp.1-55.

Thurs.5/6 Critical Theory II: Modernity, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust

Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp.144-169, 247-257.

Zygmunt Bauman, "Sociology After the Holocaust," in Peter Beilharz, ed., *The Bauman Reader*, pp. 230-258.

**Week Thirteen. The Sociology of Rationalization and the Uses of the Classics**

Tues. 5/11 George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, pp.1-133

Thurs.5/13 Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, p.133-end

Arthur Stinchcombe, "Should sociologists forget their mothers and fathers?" *The American Sociologist*, 17 (1982): 2-11.

**Final Exam, Wednesday, May 19, 2-4pm**