SOCI 282 CLASSICAL/CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL/SOCIological THEORY

SYLLABUS

Classical & Contemporary Social/Sociological Theory
341 King Building
15:00.16:15 (TR)*
SOCI-282-01 (CRN #7804)
http://www.steward.net/oberlin/soci282/syllabus.html (this page) †

Dan Steward
224 Rice Hall ‡
14:00.16:30 (W) ‡
dan.steward@oberlin.edu ‡
440.775.5170 ‡
http://www.steward.net

Description

We will study both classical and contemporary social/sociological theories, with special emphasis on the work of the "Holy Trinity" of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. We will consider these theories from both a scientific perspective and a humanistic perspective, using selections from the original works of various theorists (in English translation) as well as secondary sources.

Requirements

Students are expected to attend class regularly, to participate actively and courteously, to abide by the rules of Oberlin College (especially the Honor Code) and the instructor.

Students should purchase the following text/s: Levine, Donald N. (1995) Visions of the Sociological Tradition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; ISBN: 0-226-47547-6); and Schneider, Mark A. (2006) The Theory Primer: A Sociological Guide (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; ISBN: 978-0-7425-1892-6). In addition, various other printed texts, films, recordings, and other media (referred to generally as "texts") will be assigned and made available during the term. Students should engage these texts critically, assessing their validity against personal experience, common sense, and the methods of research and interpretation modeled by the sociologists and other scholars who author such texts. Various exercises may be assigned from time to time over the course of the term to guide students in practices of research, writing, oral presentation, and critical interpretation. Such exercises may take the form of homework, in-class assignments, or small group projects. As a general rule, these exercises will not be graded; they may, however, be converted into graded assignments (e.g., pop quizzes) if and when this seems pedagogically appropriate to the instructor.

Each student will be graded on the basis of his/her: class participation, term paper, and performance on each of two examinations. Details are provided below, and will be discussed in class and posted online.

Participation

Students should attend class regularly and well-prepared, should participate actively in our discussions, and should complete assignments in a timely fashion.

Attending class regularly means missing no more than two or three sessions over the course of the term. We are all adults, and I will not be taking attendance as a regular matter—but I will be paying attention to it. If your personal circumstances give rise to a chronic failure of attendance, you should discuss it with me (or expect a substantially lowered grade as a consequence).

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Being prepared means doing the assigned readings (or viewings, or listenings) before the class sessions in which they are to be covered, and giving some thought to them. What is most intriguing? What is most confusing? Can you think of examples from your own life, or from your knowledge of the world, that bolster an author's argument? Can you think of counter-examples that challenge the argument, inviting us to refine or reject it? Can you think of alternative theories and concepts that offer us a better grasp of the topics we are studying?

Participating actively means speaking up, but it means more than that—it also means paying attention to others, listening to the instructor and to the other students, and staying on-task when we are doing in-class exercises. We all get bored or distracted sometimes, but we can work together to make this an invigorating class. If you find yourself feeling alienated from the class or the texts, please speak with the instructor. He can't fix everything, but he will try to help.

Grading: Class participation will be graded as follows: At the end of the term, a modal score will be assigned to everyone in the class, reflecting the overall quality of class participation over the course of the term. For each student, this score will be adjusted upwards or downwards to reflect his/her own contributions. The instructor will be able to determine a student's participation because he will be keeping track of individual levels of active participation in discussions and timely completion of various assignments in-class or online. (Late submissions of assignments may be accepted by the instructor, but subject to a grading penalty, so this may affect more than a student's participation score.) Participation scores will range between 0-10 points (of a total of 100 points used for determining final grades). Although participation is only 10% of the points determining grades, please bear in mind that this can make a difference of an entire letter-grade.

Papers

Here are my basic expectations for your term papers. We will go into more detail as the semester unfolds:

- Do something fun and interesting.
- Do it well.
- It may...
  - ...explore concepts, propositions, theories or paradigms that you find particularly intriguing, either by focusing on the work of a particular social theorist/tradition or by comparing and contrasting analogous concepts (or propositions, or theories, or paradigms) from different theorists/traditions.
  - ...explore a topic primarily as an exercise in clarification of concepts (or propositions, theories, or paradigms); or primarily as an exercise in application of them to social phenomena of interest to you; or primarily as an exercise in testing, criticizing, or in/validating the work of a particular theorist/tradition.
  - ...emphasize your opinions rather than just the facts (though you should have and share reasons for the opinions you hold).
  - ...emphasize research that you have done, or it may emphasize your analysis of texts/artifacts we have studied together as a class (provided you do more than just rehash what others have said).
- It should...
  - ...be connected to topics/issues we have covered in this course, or that we *should* have covered (i.e., that count as social/sociological theory, even if we didn't address them); if you are worried about going out-of-bounds, then just run your topic by me first.
  - ...take the form of a ten-to-twelve page term paper (double-spaced) with citations to relevant texts in the form of a bibliography/references list.
  - ...be completed by the end of April.
- You may find it useful to do some/all of the following as you get started on this...
  - ...peruse the glossaries in our texts (or in other sociology texts that you have read) for concepts that you find intriguing; or look at the tables of contents of dictionaries/encyclopedias that focus on sociology or social/cultural theory/critique (e.g., Raymond Williams's *Keywords*).
  - ...peruse the tables of contents of theory readers (e.g., Charles Lemert's *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*).
- browse the web/bookstore for recent (or even not-so-recent) publications that address sociological themes of interest to you, and then consider whether you might like to write a review of such a publication and the way that it uses (or fails to use) social theories that are relevant to that theme. (I suppose that one might even do this with respect to certain films and other media, though one must be careful to really bring social theory to bear.)
- search through online tools like JSTOR to find recent articles about topics/theorists of interest; if you do this, you might find it helpful to limit your searches to journals like *Sociological Theory* or *Theory and Society*. (But then broaden your search if that strategy doesn't bear fruit.)

**Examinations**

There will be two examinations in this class: a midterm and a final. The midterm will be due by the beginning of the last class before Spring Break (2009.03.19), and the final will be due by the end of our assigned exam period (2009.05.15). The final will be cumulative.

Both exams will be take-home, distributed a week before they are due, and subject to time limits once started (75 minutes from the time you open the exam). They will be open-book and open-note, but not collaborative (i.e., you must complete them alone). You may use a computer to review your notes and/or texts during the exam, and to write/print any essay questions, but not to research your answers. (Googling and wikipedia are cheating so far as exams are concerned.) You will have the option of writing your essay question in a blue book, or typing it on a computer.

These exams typically will include an essay question (students will be given several questions from which they must select one). They will also include non-essay questions (matching, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, etc.). Students will be expected to select the best answers to such questions, bearing in mind that they are designed to test your understanding of the texts and class lectures/discussions, and not your beliefs or the way things really are.

**Exam Grading:** Each exam question will be assigned a point value and this will be indicated on the exam; students should have a good sense of how much time to devote to each question. The non-essay questions are generally all-or-nothing, but sometimes partial credit is given for well-reasoned answers (and there is often an opportunity to justify your answer on a question). The essay questions are graded comparatively. For any given essay question, more points will be awarded for answers that are well-reasoned, well-written, and responsive to all parts of the essay question; fewer points are awarded for answers that are sloppy, incoherent, incomplete, or poorly-written. Point totals for exams will be adjusted downward for annoyances such as: deciphering illegible writing, tracking down unstapled pages, suffering eye strain from answers written in pencil, etc. Please read and follow the instructions on the examinations.

**Schedule**

The assignments for this course are divided into several units. Details for each unit will be provided online (as updates to this Syllabus and/or as email messages to the class) and in class announcements. The assignments will be tweaked as we work through materials, taking into account where the class interest lies, what transpires outside of the bubble of our class, etc. You will always have plenty of notice regarding your obligations, so don't worry about the plasticity of the schedule, but please do pay attention to announcements in-class and through email.

Each unit is typically broken down into lists of texts that you should peruse and questions/notions that you should ponder. For each unit, there are target-dates indicating when we will be covering the unit.

**Perusals:** To peruse a text means that you have spent some time trying to understand it, to make sense of it, and to
criticize it. If there are materials that you need only skim, the instructor will tell you. Sometimes texts will be available online, and sometimes the instructor will provide paper copies in class. Many of these texts are publicly available, and also available in a class cache (in case the public links die). You will need a login id and password to access the texts in the class cache (at http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/), and these will be provided to you in-class.

**Ponderables:** The texts for each unit are chosen to enable and stimulate critical discussions in-class, and the ponderables are offered to get all of us thinking about the same interpretive challenges posed by a particular text—in the hopes that we will all be "on the same page" for our class discussions. We will not necessarily discuss every ponderable, but you should have started thinking about each of them before the relevant class session.

**HIDE_DETAIL 282.01: Overview/Introduction**

Target Date/s: 2009.02.03—2009.02.10

Dan will be filling in the details here over the next few days... They will just repeat what we've already done...

peruse...

-...
-...
-...
-...

ponder...

- 282.01.01. What []
- 282.01.02. []

**HIDE_DETAIL 282.02: Karl Marx & Marxism**

Target Date/s: 2009.02.12—2009.02.24

peruse...

- Marx & Engels. 1848. pp. 473-491 ("Bourgeois and Proletarians" and "Proletarians and Communists") from _The_Manifesto_of_the_Communist_Party_. This is one of the more accessible statements of the Marxian theory of history, including its indictment of capitalism (which, you will note, is praised as a great advance in the productive forces). It is also a foreshadowing of what we now call "globalization."
- Marx, Karl. 1844. pp. 70-81 ("Estranged Labor") from the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts." This is the kernel of Marx's thought on alienation -- you should compare your understanding of this problem with Schneider's operationalization of the concept in chapter 2 of this book.
- Engels, Friedrich. 1844. pp. 579-585 ("Working-Class Manchester") from _The_Condition_of_the_Working_Class_in_England_. JUST SKIM THIS. This is just a taste of the squalid living conditions of the working class in England, but Engels really isn't as good at this as Dickens.
- Schneider, Mark. 2006. pp. 47-86 ("Karl Marx and Capitalism") of _The_Theory_Primer_. Read this both as an illustration of Schneider's interpretation of "sociological theory" and as an argument about the relations between the "forces of production" (aka technology) and the "relations of production" (aka social relations).
- Marx, Karl. 1859. pp. 4-5 from the preface to _A_Contribution_to_a_Critique_of_Political_Economy_. This
is the kernel of Marx's thought on the base-superstructure. There's quite a bit packed into the paragraph "The first work...to a close." -- or at least a lot unpacked from it...

- Schneider, Mark. 2006. pp. 87-109 ("Historical Materialism and Its Legacy") of _The Theory Primer_. Does Schneider help you make sense of Marx here? Do you think that this paradigm (isn't base-superstructure something of an orienting-strategy?) works well as a way of interpreting gender relations?
- Engels, Friedrich. 1878. pp. 718-724 ("On the Division of Labour in Production") from _Anti-Duhring_. Compare the technological optimism of Engels (here and, with Marx, in the _Manifesto_) to the conflict legacy of the Marxian tradition. Why don't we see more harmonious planning of the economy?

ponder...

If the ponderables we use for Weber are helpful, I'll go back and add more specific Marx-ponderables. Otherwise, the email about Marx included questions to consider, and you have the Schneider theory table to play with....

**HIDE DETAIL 282.03: Max Weber**

**Target Date/s:** 2009.02.26—2009.03.10

**peruse...**

- Selections from _The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism_ (chs 2 & 5). (Skim this, but see if you can make sense of the questions below, and *read* any passages that strike you as especially interesting or problematic.)
- Schneider, chapter 4 ("Max Weber and Capitalism"). (Read this -- does this help you understand the Weber you've read? Are there any interpretive moves that you find problematic?)
- Schneider, chapter 5 ("Weber and Analytic Typologies"). (Read this, and read it critically. Do you think that Weber's "ideal types" are the same as the "analytic typologies" that Schneider advocates?)
- Selections from Weber's "The Types of Authority and Imperative Co-ordination" in a book by A.M. Henderson & Talcott Parsons called _Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization_. (We'll use this more as a reference work than anything else, but you should: skim section 1, "The Definition, Conditions, and Types of Imperative Control"; read section 2, "The Three Pure Types of Legitimate Authority"; skim sections 3-4, "Legal Authority: The Pure Type with Employment of a Bureaucratic Administrative Staff"; skim sections 6-7, "Traditional Authority"; skim section 10, "The Principal Characteristics of Charismatic Authority and Its Relation to Forms of Communal Organization"; skim sections 11-12, "The Routinization of Charisma and Its Consequences"; and read section 13, "Combinations of the Different Types of Authority").

 ponder...

- 282.03.01. The PE is a relatively recent (2002) translation by Stephen Kalberg. You may be more familiar with passages of Weber that were translated decades earlier by Talcott Parsons. For example, you have surely heard/read about "the iron cage" of modern life. This is a bit of poetic license on Parsons' part -- which I applaud -- and you will find a more literal translation in Kalberg ("the steel-hard casing"). The passages quoted in Schneider are from the Parsons' translation, but I think that the Kalberg translation is (on the whole) more readable (even though I miss "the iron cage").
- 282.03.02. Sociologists and social theorists sometimes say that Weber should be understood as engaging in a dialogue with the ghost of Karl Marx. As you read through Weber, keep in mind that some passages might be lines from such a dialogue. Mark, note or highlight them; be sure we make the connection in our class discussions.
- 282.03.03. You may want to take note of the glossary and endnotes in the PE, but don't feel that you must
read the notes.

- 282.03.04. In chapter one, Weber notes that there is a correlation between religious affiliation and socioeconomic stratification: Protestants tend to be more successful businessmen than Catholics. This is one puzzle, but Weber has bigger fish to fry. What was the significance of religious belief in the development/emergence of capitalism?

- 282.03.05. Your reading begins with chapter two ("The Spirit of Capitalism"), and the substance of this chapter begins with an illustration from the writings of America's great entrepreneur Benjamin Franklin. Read the passage at pp14-15. If this is the "spirit of capitalism" how would you summarize it in a sentence?

- 282.03.06. True or False: Weber dismisses Franklin (and most Americans of his stripe) as a hypocrite.

- 282.03.07. We typically define "utilitarianism" as the philosophical principle "the greatest good for the greatest number" -- and when we do we often think of "the good" in terms of "happiness" (or maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain). That is to say, we sometimes think of utilitarianism as akin to hedonism. This is clearly NOT the way that Weber is using the word "utilitarian" on p. 16. What does Weber mean by the term?

- 282.03.08. Notice the passages on pp18-19, from "Nevertheless, it is surely..." until "Hence, it is the origin of this mode of thinking, and its carrier groups, that actually needs to be explained." How is Darwinian selection a *necessary* part of the explanatory work, and how is it *insufficient*?

- 282.03.09. What does Weber mean by the "auri sacra fames"?

- 282.03.10. What is "adventure capitalism"? Is it the same as "modern capitalism"?

- 282.03.11. What is "economic traditionalism"? Have you ever heard the term "satisficing" (as opposed to optimizing, maximizing, or minimizing)?

- 282.03.12. Where else have you encountered the notion of a "reserve army" of workers?

- 282.03.13. What do you think Weber means by an *internal* dedication to work?

- 282.03.14. Which is more consistent with modern capitalism: the piece-rate system or factory wages? Why?

- 282.03.15. Notice the passage on p.29 where Weber refers to a "rationalization" process. In what sense are the new forms of social organization that he describes here more *rational* than those they replaced?

- 282.03.16. Notice the passage on p.31 where Weber refers to contemporary hostility towards religion amongst capitalists (and capitalist workers). How is this *irrational*?

- 282.03.17. Pause and reflect: Are there correlations between religious commitment and the spirit of capitalism today? Has religion become completely irrelevant? Is modern capitalism fully emancipated from its old supporting framework?

- 282.03.18. In chapters 3-4, Weber discusses the ethos of various Protestant sects, especially with respect to notions of vocation, predestination, and asceticism. We are skipping these chapters, so you may find it useful to skip ahead and read through Schneider pp122-131 before reading chapter 5 in Weber.

- 282.03.19. In chapter 5, Weber discusses a variety of Protestant sects, from Puritans to Pietists to Presbyterians to Methodists to Quakers to ... We don't need to get into this level of detail, but try to appreciate the distinction he is drawing between a Puritanical Protestantism and a traditional Catholicism.

- 282.03.20. When we think of "ascetic" we sometimes think of figures like Gandhi. Is Gandhi a good example of the sort of asceticism that Weber associates with the spirit of capitalism? Why or why not? (And what is the significance of Baxter's "ebionitic proclamations"? See p.104.)

- 282.03.21. Puritans objected to wealth, and so were especially ill-suited to serve as capitalist entrepreneurs. Comment.

- 282.03.22. How is "pariah capitalism" related to modern capitalism? (See p.111.)

- 282.03.23. What about this weird episode regarding the _Book of Sports_? Does somebody want to look into this further for a paper topic?

- 282.03.24. What are the two ingredients in a Weberian recipe for "investment capital"?

- 282.03.25. Is the protestant ethic purely an urban phenomenon?

- 282.03.26. Pay attention on p. 121 to the discussion of workers. So much of the argument in PE seems more applicable to entrepreneurs and the self-employed. How plausible are Weber's claims with respect to the "vocational calling" of wage laborers?

- 282.03.27. Do you live in an iron cage? A steel-hardened cloak?

- 282.03.[]: []
Notes

Dates are expressed yyyy-mm-dd, and times are expressed on a 24-hour clock. Days of the week are coded: M=Monday; T=Tuesday; W=Wednesday; R=Thursday; F=Friday; S=Saturday; U=Sunday. Thus, office hours from 9:00am until 4:30pm on Wednesdays are expressed as 14:00-16:30 (W).

Please note that the online headquarters for this course is the web address (also known as a "uniform resource identifier/locator"—a "URI"/"URL") for this Syllabus (given above), and not Blackboard. If you are unable to read the tails in this Syllabus, try enabling Javascript in your browser; if that fails, contact dan.steward@oberlin.edu.

Unless otherwise announced, office hours will be held in Azariah's Cafe in Mudd Library. Don't waste your time waiting me down in my office. Meetings will be first-come, first-served unless we set an appointment ahead of time. I defer email messages to phone calls, but I strongly recommend face-to-face meetings at Azariah's Cafe if you want to communicate with me outside of the classroom. I encourage every student to drop by for a chat early in the semester.

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