

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

920:515 Fall'08

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M 4:10-6:50

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Lucy Stone: Sociology Seminar Room

Office Hrs. M: 12:00-1:00; W: 3:00-4:00

Classics are earlier works of human exploration which are given a privileged status *vis-à-vis* contemporary explorations in the same field. The concept of privileged status means that contemporary practitioners of the discipline in question believe that they can learn as much about their field through understanding their earlier work as they can from the work of their own contemporaries (Alexander, 1987: 11-12)

Though classical theory has great prestige in principle, much of sociological research ignores it in practice. The bulk of quantitative sociology, as well as most ethnographic and life-history research, proceeds without reference to canonical theory or the problems it defines (Connell, 1997: 1513)

Kant's Critique of Pure Reason attracted little attention when it first appeared in 1781, leading him to restate the doctrine several times (1783, 1785) in more popular form (Collins, 2000: 630).

A few of the texts we will be discussing during the semester are *The German Ideology*, *The Protestant Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism*, *The Division of Labor in Society* and *Suicide*. You've all had exposure to those texts and some of the others that we will be engaged with. One question that arises then is what could we possibly assume that you will **learn** from/about those texts that is new? Formulated in an even more pragmatic manner, the question might sound like "how can these largely late 19th and early 20th century classical texts **help you survive** as an early 21st century graduate student?" Posing those distinct formulations as related questions is my way of saying that there would be something peculiar about expecting you to engage the same texts again without acknowledging the fact that, as a sociologist in training, you now have more at stake in engaging these texts than you did in your past identity as an undergraduate student.

By the end this course I expect that you would have learned new ways of thinking about the classics and about yourself. I expect that new knowledge to occur as we focus on the following points:

- The classics of sociology are socially constructed. The simple point of that assertion is that there would be not a perfect overlap between the texts that are designation classics today and, for example, those that were in that category a mere half century ago. By extension, there is no need to assume that our contemporary classics will continue to occupy that category 50 or even 25 years hence. Let me make this same point retrospectively by asking, "what did Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel view as classical texts?"
- Because, as Alexander points out, classics occupy a privileged position in a discipline, we will get the most out of these texts by treating them as products that have been elevated to the status of classic rather than as texts that were immediately recognized as such. After all, by definition (earlier work given a privileged status), and in spite our notion of "best seller," it is difficult to construct a text as a classic in the lifetime of its author

- It is valuable for us to pay attention to the institutional embeddedness (their social support for production) within which the classical authors worked. This will also lead us to focus on the types of audiences (markets) for whom they wrote. During this discussion we will see that the types of institutional supports that classical theorists had were in many instances quite different from the options that you have today.

In addition, our efforts during the semester will be helping you survive in the field of sociology by providing you with elements of what Bourdieu refers to as “habitus,” (a feel for the game). This will occur most directly from the fact that your returned engagement with these texts will allow you to become more comfortable with the complexity of the concepts that they are built upon. Such a level of comfort will ultimately serve as an indication of your socialization into the discipline. Connell (1997) puts this most persuasively when he states (1512): “It is not just through direct commentary that the classical texts affect the discipline. As symbols of ‘what is most distinctively sociological’ (Barry Sugerman. 1968:84. *Sociology*), they influence what kind of discussion counts as sociological theory, what theoretical language sociologists are to speak in, and what problems are most worth speaking about.” Nothing more need be said on that score about the benefits of the submersion in the classics that you are about to undertake.

I end this introduction by returning to the last point above on what I hope you will learn during the semester that is new. There I discussed the importance of learning about the institutional embeddedness and market orientations of the classical theorists. The web of that discussion during the semester will help you survive in the field of sociology because it makes explicit an assumption that you might have only been operating with implicitly when you make the decision to enter graduate school. The assumption to which I speak is that by becoming a sociologist you, like the classical theorists, will be able to gain institutional support for your work. In other words, you are making the assumption that you will be able to gain an audience, a market niche, for your future research. In order to accomplish that long-term goal you will be greatly aided by having a deep familiarity with the classics as social facts.

I have structured the class to operate as a seminar. This means that during most of the sessions, in addition to my lecture, we will engage the texts as a basis for dialogue around the issues that I have outline above.

Texts at the Livingston Campus Bookstore

Durkheim, E.	<i>Division of Labor in Society</i>
Durkheim, E.	<i>Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i>
Durkheim, E.	<i>Suicide</i>
Mead, G. H.	<i>Mind, Self and Society</i>
Simmel, G.	<i>Conflict and Web of Group Affiliations</i>
Tucker, R. (ed.)	<i>Marx-Engels Reader</i>
Weber, M.	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>
Wolff, K. (ed.)	<i>Sociology of Georg Simmel</i>

Additional readings will be posted on SAKAI or can be accessed via the Internet

Expectations

Class participation		20pts
4 short essays (5-6 pages)	[14 pts each]	56pts
A 5 th essay (10-15 pages)		24pts
		Total 100pts

It is departmental policy to strongly discourage you from taking an incomplete. Doing so might have negative consequences for your overall evaluation at years end.

WEEK I

Sept 8 Introduction: *Getting comfortable*

Such different worlds: Some problems of teaching classical theory to contemporary graduate students

WEEK II

Sept 15 *Different views on the role of Classical Theory Today*

#Alexander, J. 1987. "The Centrality of the Classics." In Giddens, A. and J. Turner (eds.) *Social Theory Today*.

##Connell, R.W. 1997. "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Social Sociology*. 102:6 (1511-1557)

(Skim if you have the time: *Intriguing historical background on the impact of social networks on theory dominance*)

#Collins, R. 2000: 638-660. "Philosophy Captures the University." In his *The Sociology of Philosophies*

WEEK III

Sept 22 *Some conceptual roots of early sociology*

#Durkheim, E. "The Principles of 1789 and Sociology." In Durkheim, E. 1973. *On Morality and Society*.

#Durkheim, E. "Sociology in France in the nineteenth Century." In Durkheim, E. 1973. *On Morality and Society*.

Simmel, G. Chapter 4, "Individual and Society in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Views of Life." In Wolff (ed), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*

(Skim: *more background on Kant and the Enlightenment*)

Bowman, C. "Kant and the Project of Enlightenment"

<http://www.phil.upenn.edu/~cubowman/kant.html>

FIRST ESSAY DUE

WEEK IV

Sept 29 *Social systems shape ideas (Materialist, Structural)*

\$Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*:

“The German Ideology, part I”.

“Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”

“Alienation and Social Classes”

WEEK V

Oct 6 *Marx and Engels: Historical Method: The historical context of the present*

\$Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*:

“Working-Class Manchester”

“The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850

“The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,”

“The Civil War in France”

“On Imperialism in India”

SECOND ESSAY DUE**WEEK VI**

Oct 13 *Social change and their long-term impact on members of society*

\$Durkheim, *Division of labor*

Preface to the 2nd edition

Book I: “The Function of the Division of Labor”

Chapter I: “The Method of determining this Function

Chapter II: “Mechanical Solidarity”

Chapter III: “Solidarity arising from the Division of Labor: Organic

Chapter VII: “Organic Solidarity and Contractual Solidarity

Book III “Abnormal Forms

Chapters, I-III

WEEK VII

Oct 20 *The empirical tradition (Sociological vs. Psychological explanations)*

\$Durkheim, *Suicide*

pp. 152-89; 197-216; 241-276; 297-325

“What is a Social Fact,” from *Rules of Sociological Method*

WEEK VIII

Oct 27 *Learning about the present by investigating the past; Moral basis of Society;*

Collective Representation

\$Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

Author’s Introduction (1-18);

Book 1: Chapter 1, part 3;

Book 2: Chapters 1-4

Chapter 7, Parts I, II IV

Chapter 8, Parts II, V, VII

Book 3: Chapter 1

Chapter 4, Part III

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Parts I, III, IV

THIRD ESSAY DUE**WEEK IX**Nov 3 *Historical (Macro; ideas shape social systems)*\$Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism***WEEK X**Nov 10 Weber's Political Sociology and Methodological concernsFrom Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. I

"Political Communities," Chapter 9, pp. 901-940

"The Types of Legitimate Domination," Chapter 3, pp. 212-254

Weber, "Ideal Types," pp. 47-57 of *Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy***WEEK XI**Nov 17 *Weber's Subjectivist Sociology*From Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. I

"The definition of Sociology and Social Action," Chapter 1, pp. 4-26

Schutz, A. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Chapters 1 and 5**4TH ESSAY DUE****WEEK XII**Nov 24 *Sociological Theories and Modern Life*\$Wolff (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*

Part One, "The Field of Sociology," Chapters I-III

Part Two, "Quantitative Aspects of the Group," Chapters I and III

"The Metropolis and Mental Life," pp. 409-426

WEEK XIIIDec 1 *Showing complexity in the apparently simple*\$Simmel, *Conflict and Web of Group Affiliations*

"Conflict," Chapters 1 and 3

\$Wolff (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*

"The Negative Character of Collective Behavior," pp. 396-401

WEEK XIVDec 8 *The regeneration of membership for societies; micro sources of social stability*\$Mead, *Mind Self and Society*

pp. 42-51; 117-125; 135-175

Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*

pp. 118-124; 136-141; 165-167; 181-185; 189-194

5TH ESSAY DUE DEC. 15

Locations of Readings

\$ Bookstore

Sakai

Rutgers Library: Electronic Journal

Internet: as sites indicate