

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

920:515 Fall'09

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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)

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 them 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 the new knowledge to occur as we focus on the following points:

- The classics of sociology are socially constructed. We should not then expect to find a perfect overlap between the texts that are currently designated as classics and those that were in that category even 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 Sugarman. 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.

By way of ending this introduction I return 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 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 2 Introduction

Structure of the course

Some problems in teaching classical theory to contemporary graduate students

The usefulness of our cultural assumptions: Gadamer on prejudices and pre-judgments

A useful model for making theoretical comparisons

WEEK II

Sept 9 The role of the classics: insights about contemporary divisions in the discipline

#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 16 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 23 Social systems shape ideas (Materialist, Structural)

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

"The German Ideology, part I"

"Alienation and Social Classes"

Marx, K. Capital I: chapter 1 "Commodities"

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>

WEEK V

Sept. 30 Contemporary work rooted in Marxist thought

(Be prepared to discuss Harvey and at least one of the *Rethinking Marxism* pieces)

##Fuchs, C. 2009. "A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of Transnational Informational Capitalism," in *Rethinking Marxism* 21:3 July (387 - 402).

##Kurasawa, F. 2009. "Global Justice as Ethico-Political Labor and the Enactment of Critical Cosmopolitanism," in *Rethinking Marxism*. 21:1 January (85 - 102)

##Young Min Moon; Mixrice. 2009. "The Illegal Lives": Art Within a Community of Others. *Rethinking Marxism* 21:3 July (403 - 419).

#Harvey, D. "Neo-Liberalism And The Restoration Of Class Power"

#Davidson, Neil. 2008. "Nationalism and Neoliberalism,"

www.variant.randomstate.org/pdfs/issue32/davidson32.pdf

WEEK VI

Oct 7 Durkheim

Developing the positivist tradition. Analyzing moral life in the material world

\$*Division of labor*Preface to the 2nd edition

Introduction: "the problem"

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"

Pp. 172-175 of "Organic Solidarity and Contractual Solidarity"

Book III: The Abnormal Forms (chapters I-III)

Strengthening the positivist tradition (Sociological vs. Psychological explanations)#*Suicide*: "The Social Element of Suicide," 297-325#"What is a Social Fact," from *Rules of Sociological Method***SECOND ESSAY DUE****WEEK VII**

Oct 14 Durkheim

The persistence of the elemental in the complex: in search of the basis of human mentality

\$*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

Author's Introduction (1-18);

Book 1: Chapter 1, part 3;

Chapter 4

Book 2: Chapters 1-4

Chapter 7, Parts I, II IV

Chapter 8, Parts II, V, VI

Book 3: Chapter 1

Chapter 4, Part III

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Parts I, III, IV

WEEK VIII

Oct 21 Contemporary work rooted in Durkheimian thought

Segre, Sandro. 2003. "A Durkheimian Network Theory," *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta Hilton Hotel, Atlanta, GA, Aug 16, 2003*Online <[.PDF](#)>. 2009-08-24 <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p107767_index.html>Inoue, H. 2004. "Emotional Syntax: A Durkheimian Analysis," *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Hilton San Francisco & Renaissance Parc 55 Hotel, San Francisco, CA, Aug 14, 2004*Online <[.PDF](#)>. 2009-08-24http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p110878_index.htmlJean-Louis Fabiani. 2005 "Should the Sociological Analysis of Art Festivals be Neo-Durkheimian?," in *Durkheimian Studies* 11:49-66Sawyer, R.K. 2002. "Durkheim's Dilemma: Toward a Sociology of Emergence," in *Sociological Theory* 20:2 July (228-247).Mustafa Emirbayer, ed. 2003. *Emile Durkheim: Sociologist of Modernity* (good as an overview)

WEEK IXOct. 28 Weber

Historical (ideas configure social systems)

\$*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism***THIRD ESSAY DUE****WEEK X**Nov 4 Weber's Political Sociology and Methodological concerns*Economy and Society*, vol. I

#"Social Action," and "Types of Social Action," Chapter 1, pp. 22-26

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

Economy and Society, vol. II

"The Distribution of Power within the Political Community: Class, Status, Party"

Chapter 9, pp. 926-940

#"Ideal Types," pp. 47-57 "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy"

WEEK XINov 11 Contemporary Weberian thought#Campbell, C. 1987. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Excerpts)#Greenfield, L. 2001. *The Spirit of Capitalism* (Excerpts)Adatto, K. and S. Cole. 1981. "Classical Theory in Contemporary Sociological Research: The case of Max Weber." *Knowledge and Society*. 3:137-62

(Worth a look)

A.I. Mahbub Uddin Ahmed. 2004. "Weber's Perspective on the City and Culture, Contemporary Urbanization and Bangladesh," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*. 1:1. January.**WEEK XII**Nov 18 Sociological Theories and Modern Life\$Wolff (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*

Part One, "The Field of Sociology," Chapter III

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

Part Four, "The Secret and the Secret Society," Chapter I

Part Five, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Chapter IV

4TH ESSAY DUE**WEEK XIII**Dec 2 Contemporary work related to Simmel

#Marx, G & G. W. Muschert. 2008. "Simmel on Secrecy. A Legacy and Inheritance for the Sociology of Information,"

Holt, D.B. and K. Searls. 1994, "The Impact Of Modernity On Consumption: Simmel's Philosophy Of Money", in *Advances in Consumer Research Volume 21*, eds. Chris T. Allen and Deborah Roedder John. Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 65-69.<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/display.asp?id=7564>#Choi, J. 2006. "The Metropolis and Mental Life in the Novel," in *New Literary History* 37:4, Autumn (707-724).

WEEK XIV

Dec 9 Mead and closing thoughts on the classics.

\$*Mind Self and Society*

pp. 42-51; 117-125; 144-178

##How, A. 2007. "The Author, the Text and the Canon." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 7(1): 5-22.

#Baehr, P. 2002. "A Concluding Look at the Three Concepts," in *Founders, Classics, Canons*. (183-84)

#Turner, K. 2002. "Conclusion," of *Classical Social Theory*, " (253-59)

5TH ESSAY DUE DEC. 16**Location of Readings**

\$ Bookstore

Sakai

Rutgers Library: Electronic Journal

Internet: as sites indicate