

SOCIAL THEORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Syllabus

HTS 3102
Spring 2007
T/Th 3:00-4:30 pm
207 DM Smith

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Office hours: Tues. 1-2 or by appt.

Course Overview

Social theory was born amidst industrial and political revolution; it aimed at analyzing, interpreting, promoting, and criticizing the new modern social order. Much of this course is devoted to understanding how three founding theorists—Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber—addressed issues of their day and, arguably, ours: the efficacy of individual acts in the face of powerful and complex social forces, the social implications of technological and economic progress, the role of faith and meaning in a rationalized and increasingly secular world, the persistence and transformation of dramatic inequalities. In the latter part of the term we will examine contemporary theorists. Some develop new ways of addressing questions these same issues; others take up new questions or address the experiences of groups that were marginal to classical theory. Classes and assignments are designed to deepen your understanding of the theorists, but also to strengthen your ability to think critically, read closely, and construct sophisticated written and oral arguments about their ideas and yours.

Requirements

This course involves intensive reading, thinking, discussion, and writing about social theory. Requirements include:

Participation (10%)

Active engagement in discussions is essential to your success in this course. To participate effectively, read the assigned materials and think about the questions in the study guide handout and on the last page of the syllabus *prior to* class, and then arrive prepared to share your thoughts. (It goes without saying that you must attend class in order to participate; nonetheless, regular but silent attendance will not be considered “A” participation.)

Written Responses (15%)

Responses are one-page mini-essays on the week’s readings. They are due at the beginning of the class for which the readings are assigned. You must complete 10 responses throughout the semester, leaving three “free” weeks. Further instructions and specific questions to address will be provided in class.

Short Papers (Lowest grade 15%, others 20% each; total 75%)

Four papers of approximately 5 pages each will be assigned throughout the term; due dates are listed in the schedule below. The first three will focus on the classical theorists, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim; the last will focus on the contemporary theorists. More detailed topics and instructions will be provided as due-dates approach.

Policies

Late Policy

Late written responses will be given only partial credit. Late papers will be docked by the equivalent of one letter grade per week. Absolutely all late work—and any last-minute questions, pleas, excuses, etc.—must be submitted by 4:30 pm on Wednesday May 2, after which my in-box will be officially closed.

Grading:

Written responses will be graded using a check, check-plus check-minus system, where a check is considered satisfactory and equivalent to a low B. Grades will be based mostly on effort, i.e. whether your response shows evidence that you read thoroughly and made some attempt to synthesize, analyze, or critique the reading.

Papers will be assigned letter grades, including pluses and minuses. An “A” paper is one which meets the following criteria:

Discussion of texts is thorough, relevant, and shows good understanding of authors’ ideas.

Texts are quoted, paraphrased, and cited appropriately.

Central thesis or question and subsequent discussion and conclusions contain in-depth analysis, comparison, criticism, and/or consideration of implications.

Argument is logical, well-organized, clear, readable. (Papers will not be graded on grammar and spelling *per se*, but keep in mind that I can’t grade what I don’t understand.)

Honor Code

You are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code; please see me if you have any questions about how the code applies to the assignments in this course. The honor code can be found at: http://www.deanofstudents.gatech.edu/integrity/policies/honor_code.php

ADAPTS

I am happy to work with the ADAPTS office to accommodate students requiring consideration due to disability. The adapts URL is <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>.

Readings

Readings marked “*WebCT*” are available either to download from the course WebCT site; those marked “*Purchase*” can be found at Engineer’s bookstore.

Books for purchase include:

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Karen Fields, translator.

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons, translator.

Robert Jackall, *Moral Mazes*.

Notes:

- (1) Read each week’s selections in the order listed on the syllabus; some build on others.
- (2) Look out for ****starred**** page lengths so you can plan ahead for these unusually long reading assignments.
- (3) You should be able to succeed in this course without reading any materials beyond those listed on the syllabus. I do not recommend consulting secondary sources, though you may if you wish. Beware: not all secondary sources are equally accurate or useful. In writing papers you must cite all sources consulted.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

- T 1/9 **Introduction**
- Th 1/11 **Individuals and Social Order: Pre-Sociological Views**
Hobbes, Leviathan (excerpts). *WebCT*, 9 pp.
Smith, The Wealth of Nations (excerpts). *WebCT*, 23 pp.
- T 1/16 **Durkheim I: Social (Dis)Integration**
Durkheim, Suicide *WebCT* (find two separate excerpts labeled Suicide 1 & 2), 33 pp.
- Th 1/18 **Durkheim II: Varieties of Solidarity**
Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, *WebCT*, 25 pp.
- T 1/23 **Durkheim III: Beliefs and Rituals in Society**
Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, *Purchase*. Pp. 1-18, 33-39, 99-157, 418-448. **114 pp.**
- Th 1/25 **Durkheim IV: Functionalism**
Durkheim, “The Normal and the Pathological.” *WebCT*, 5 pp.
Finish Elementary Forms if necessary.
- T 1/30 **Durkheim in Action: The Case of the Puritan Colonists**
Erikson, Wayward Puritans, Ch. 3. *WebCT*, **93 pp.**
- Th 2/1 **No Reading. Catch-Up Day.**
- F 2/2 **PAPER ONE DUE** in my mailbox, 110 Smith, by 4:30 pm.
- T 2/6 **Marx I: Capitalist Exploitation 101**
From The Marx-Engels Reader (*Purchase*):
Capital Vol. One, Ch. X, Secs. 3-5 (pp. 367-376), 10 pp.;
“Wage Labour and Capital” (pp. 203-217), 15 pp.
- Th 2/8 **Marx II: Alienation and Commodity Fetishism**
From The Marx-Engels Reader (*Purchase*):
“Estranged Labour,” in Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (pp. 70-81), 12 pp.
Capital Vol. One, Ch. I, Sec. 4 (pp. 319-329), 11 pp.
From *WebCT*: Marx, “On James Mill” (excerpts), 4 pp.
- T 2/13 **Marx III: Materialist History**
From The Marx-Engels Reader (*Purchase*):
“German Ideology,” 149 bottom-165 middle, 172 top-174 bottom, 193-200, 18 pp.
Capital Vol. One, Chs. 31 & 32 (pp. 435-438), 4 pp.

- Th 2/15 **Marx IV: Workers of the World Unite**
 From The Marx-Engels Reader (*Purchase*):
 “The Coming Upheaval” (pp. 218-219), 2 pp.
 “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (pp. 473-491), 20 pp.
- T 2/20 **Marx in Action: Consent on the Shop Floor**
 Burawoy, “Thirty Years of Making Out,” *WebCT*, 7 pp.
 Burawoy, “The Essence of the Capitalist Labor Process” and “Obscuring and
 Securing Surplus Labor,” from Manufacturing Consent, *WebCT*, 12 pp.
- Th 2/22 **Weber I: Social Action and Order; Bureaucracy**
 Weber, Economy and Society (excerpts), *WebCT*, **35 pp.**
 Weber, “Bureaucracy” (excerpts), *WebCT*, **31 pp.**
- T 2/27 **PAPER TWO DUE. No Reading. Catch-Up Day.**
- Th 3/1 **Weber II: Social Change and Modern Capitalism**
The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (*Purchase*),
 pp. xxviii-xlii (Author’s intro), 13-80, 102-125; total **107 pp.**
 Try to read the whole things, but go at least through p. 80 for today.
- T 3/6 **Weber III: Social Change and Modern Capitalism, cont.**
 Finish the Protestant Ethic reading from last time.
- Th 3/8 **Social Interaction I: George Herbert Mead**
 Mead, “Self” (excerpts), *WebCT*, 43 pp.
- T 3/13 **Social Interaction II: Erving Goffman**
 Goffman, “On Face Work,” from Interaction Ritual, *WebCT*, 41 pp.
- Th 3/15 **Weber and Interactionism in Action: Corporate Managers**
 Jackall, Moral Mazes (*Purchase*), Chs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, **108 pp.**
 Try to read the whole thing, but go at least through Ch. 3 (p. 74) for today.
- T 3/20 & Th 3/22 **Spring Break**
- T 3/27 **Weber and Interactionism in Action: Corporate Managers, cont.**
 Finish up Moral Mazes from last time.
- Th 3/29 **Sociology’s Others: Race & Colonialism**
 DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk, Forethought & Chs. 1, 3, 9, *WebCT*, 36 pp.
 Fanon, “Decolonizing, National Culture, and the Negro Intellectual,” *WebCT*, 6 pp.
- T 4/3 **PAPER THREE DUE. No Readings. Catch-Up Day**

- Th 4/5 **Sociology's Others: Women & Gender**
 DeBeauvoir, The Second Sex (Introduction and Conclusion), *WebCT*, 34 pp.
 Gilman, Excerpts from Women and Economics, *WebCT*, 9 pp.
- T 4/10 **Bourdieu: Complicating Class and Culture**
 Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," *WebCT*, 18 pp.
 Bourdieu, "Classes and Classifications" from Distinction, *E-Reserves* 18 pp.
- Th 4/12 **Bourdieu in Action: Respect in the Barrio and the Office**
 Bourgeois, In Search of Respect (excerpt), *WebCT*, 22 pp.
- T 4/17 **Foucault and (Post)Modernity I**
 Foucault, "Panopticism," *WebCT*, 34 pp.
- Th 4/19 **Foucault and (Post)Modernity II**
 Foucault, "The Means of Correct Training," *WebCT*, 25 pp.
- T 4/24 **The Uses of Social Theory: A Modernist Perspective**
 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," *WebCT*, 28 pp.
- Th 4/26 **The Uses of Social Theory: Critical and Postmodern Perspectives**
 Hill-Collins, Black Feminist Thought, Chs. 2 (pp. 19-33), Ch. 10, *WebCT*, 33 pp.
 Foucault, "Truth and Power" (excerpts), *WebCT*, 14 pp.
- M 4/30 **PAPER FOUR DUE** in my mailbox in 110 Smith by 4:30 pm.

Central Questions in Social Theory

Use the following questions to orient yourself to the readings throughout the semester.

Agency and Structure: Are individual and collective actions driven by will, purpose, or some other form of human agency, or are they shaped by larger social structures such as class divisions, group relations, or cultural formations? Is action voluntary or determined?

Structure and Culture: Are our activities and ideas shaped mostly by the larger beliefs and values of our surrounding cultural environment, or do they reflect social structure and our positions within it? How are cultural and structural forces related? Is culture or structure more important in shaping individual action, social organization, and history?

Order and Change: What is the glue that keeps people living and working together in groups and societies rather than splintering apart? How are social stability and order created and maintained? Is social order voluntary or imposed, formal or informal, hierarchical or egalitarian, rational or irrational? How do social orders change over time? Do they generally progress, growing more complex, rational, just, or liberating—or not?

Human Nature, Difference, and Inequality: Is there any single, universal human nature that transcends all differences of class, status, gender, race, nation, etc.? Which are the most important differences among individuals or groups in our own society and in others? Are these differences natural or social in origin? How are differences related to distributions of wealth, prestige, power, and other social “goods,” and hence to inequality?

Knowledge: What is knowledge? How does it differ from faith or opinion? What makes knowledge valid or true—and what does “true” mean? What are the origins of knowledge? How is it acquired and distributed? What role does knowledge play in everyday life? What role should knowledge—especially scientific knowledge—play in politics and social policy?

Theorizing: What is the purpose of social theory? What constitutes valid theory? Should social theory be value-neutral, and can it be? What role should social theory play in social research? In social life?