SOC 457: DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Objectives

This course shows how sociological theory developed. We will analyze, apply, and compare the ideas of major theorists and place those ideas in context. The main purpose of the course is to convey the rich and diverse insights contained in sociological theory. We will repeatedly address three central problems:

1. The problem of explanation: How can we best account for how people do things together and how societies work?
2. The problem of modernity: How can we best describe, understand, and assess the rise of modern societies?
3. The problem of relevance: What light can theory shed on problems and changes in American and world society?

By the end of the course, you will have a good sense of the main lines of sociological thought and the way they inform current work in sociology. You should also be able to address contemporary issues with the intellectual tools provided by the major theorists.

Structure

Most of the course is divided into sections focused on specific types of theory. Within each section, we will study

1. Classic sources: We will examine the ideas of a classic figure using original readings and focusing on the main themes.
2. Contemporary developments: We will illustrate with specific examples how contemporary scholars extend and test classic ideas.
3. Applications: We will apply core ideas to an issue in modern society, especially in the form of assignments that also contribute to class discussion.

Requirements

1. Two exams, each worth 30% of your final grade. The exams will consist of short-answer and essay questions. Study questions for the individual readings will serve as study guides.
2. **Five writing assignments**, about 4 pages each. All assignments will be graded, but only the best three will count toward your final grade (10% each). To satisfy the College writing requirement in this course your average grade for all assignments must be at least a C.

- Essays that are seriously incomplete (e.g., because they do not cover all parts of the assignment) or do not reflect due care (e.g., because of sloppy writing) will be graded F and count as one of the three assignments that determine the assignment grade.
- The TA and I stand ready to provide assistance. We especially encourage you to submit a draft of one of the first two essays 48 hours before it is due, so that we can provide timely feedback.
- The schedule lists six assignments; you may choose to skip one. When you do skip, you must still write and bring to class an outline as a basis for your contribution to the relevant class discussion.

3. **Preparation, participation, and attendance**, worth 10% of your final grade. I expect you to be well prepared for each class, participate in discussion, and carry out in-class assignments. You will get credit for solid preparation and active participation.

- Adequate preparation means being able to answer questions thoughtfully, giving evidence that you have read the assigned material. Being unprepared counts as an absence.
- Less than three unexcused absences will increase your p/p/a grade by a full point, but each absence over three will lower your p/p/a grade by a full point (except in case of documented emergencies, major religious holidays, and prior approval from the instructor).
- Scheduled class debates will offer opportunities to earn extra participation credit.

4. **Extra credit.** I will offer extra credit options at various points during the semester, for example to enable you to change the weight of one of the exams.

**Readings**

Robert Heilbroner (ed.), *The Essential Adam Smith*
Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*
Robert Bellah (ed.), *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society*
Anselm Strauss (ed.), *George Herbert Mead on Social Psychology*
Donald Levine (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*

Online readings (available mostly via Blackboard)

**Schedule of classes, readings, and exams**

- For some classes I will supply written introductions, not listed in the schedule, that will be part of the course material
- I will often give specific assignments in class or via Blackboard.
- In several readings, I will identify key passages or pages ahead of time
- The schedule is subject to adjustments, changes or additions.
Introduction and History

8/29 Introduction
Lechner, “Overview” [optional]

8/31 What is theory, and what does it do?
Lechner, “Introduction”

9/5 How and when did sociology and sociological theory emerge?
R. Collins, “Prologue: The Rise of the Social Sciences”

9/7 What was the point of founding “sociology”?
A. Comte, “Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for Reorganizing Society”

Smith and Rational Choice Theory

9/10 Where do moral sentiments come from? Or: why Emory students adhere to the Honor Code
The Essential Adam Smith, 1-10, 65-77, 100-23, 145-7

9/12 What causes progress in the wealth of nations? Pins vs. iPhones
The Essential Adam Smith, 149-157, 159-72, 194-208, 248-58

9/14 What will make liberty flourish? Free trade and its critics
The Essential Adam Smith, 259-90

9/17 Does rational choice explain religious behavior? Faith as consumer choice

9/19 Are criminals rational? Rational choice and deterrence
R. Matsueda et al., “Deterring Delinquents”

9/21 How does rational choice shape public policy? Market solutions for social problems
Assignment 1: Using rational choice theory to design public policy on obesity
Debate: Proponents vs. critics

Marx and Marxist Theory

9/24 What are the driving forces in history? Inequality and its consequences
Marx, 3-6, 143-145, 147-65, 172-5, 190-200

9/26 What makes social classes powerful? Capitalism and its discontents

9/28 What’s to be done? The prospects of revolution

10/1 What does class analysis explain? The weight of exploitation
E.O. Wright, “Foundations of a Neo-Marxist Class Analysis”

10/3 Why is there no socialism in America? (Or is there . . . ?)
S.M. Lipset and G. Marks, It Didn’t Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States, chapter 8

10/5 Can Marx still inspire critiques of capitalism? The global justice debate
Assignment 2: A Marxian Manifesto for Occupy Wall Street
Debate: Proponents v. critics
Exam

**Durkheim and Durkheimian theory**

10/10 How do social forces shape religious life? Or: how ritual entrances us
Durkheim, selections 11, 12
10/12 How can a complex society create solidarity? Or: how the division of labor unites
Durkheim, selections 7, 8, 9
10/17 How can sociology remedy social “pathologies”? Dr. Durkheim’s prescriptions
Durkheim, selections 3, 4, 5
10/19 How does interaction produce commitment and solidarity? Beyond Durkheim
R. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, excerpt
10/22 How does society foster suicidal tendencies? The benefits of integration
D. Maimon/D. Kuhl, “Social Control and Youth Suicidality”
10/24 Does new technology drive us together or apart? A debate
**Assignment 3**: Technology, ritual, and cohesion
Debate: the Durkheimian pros and cons of new social media

**Mead and American Social Theory**

10/26 How does the self arise out of interaction? “Only communicate”
Mead, selections 6 (163-96), 7
10/29 How can a more democratic society evolve? Sociology and American liberalism
Mead, 8, 14
10/31 Why is science important to society? The pragmatic dream of reform
Mead, selections 2, 3, 9, 10
11/2 How does society shape our selves? You are whom you meet
L. Smith-Lovin, “The Strength of Weak Identities”
11/5 Once a criminal, always a criminal? How emotions influence “desistance”
P. Giordano et al., “Emotions and Crime over the Life Course”
11/7 Can (and should) social science guide reform? A debate
Mead, “The Working Hypothesis in Social Reform”
**Assignment 4**: The role of sociology in progressive change
Debate: How useful and progressive is sociology?

**Weber and Weberian Theory**

11/9 How can we truly understand human action?
11/12 What caused the “rise of the West”? The fall-out of the Reformation
11/14 What good is science? Looking for meaning in the iron cage
Weber, “Science as a Vocation”
11/16  What makes a leader “charismatic”? The secret to Obama’s success
   P. Smith, “Culture and Charisma”
11/19- Did Protestantism really cause the rise of (industrial) capitalism? Second thoughts
   21  J. Delacroix/F. Nielsen, “The Beloved Myth: Protestantism and the Rise of
   Industrial Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe”
11/26  What does rationalization mean today? Learning from McDonald’s
   G. Ritzer, “Credit Cards, Fast Food Restaurants, and Rationalization”
      **Assignment 5**: Examining how one sector is becoming “McDonaldized”
      Debate: how rational is rationalization?

*Simmel and Simmelian Theory*

11/28  How do people create social forms? Sociology as “geometry”
   Simmel, selections 2, 3, 6, 19
11/30  How does modern society affect the individual? Mental life in the metropolis
   Simmel, selections 18, 20, 23

Interlude. *Theory Jeopardy*

12/3   Preparation
12/5   Competition

12/7   How do fashions spread? Hats vs. T-shirts
   D. Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, excerpts
12/10  Are we going through another great transformation? Or: how life gets
   complicated in a “network society”
   B. Pescosolido/B. Rubin, “The Web of Group Affiliations Revisited”
      **Assignment 6**: Use one of “life's particularities and superficialities” to reveal one
      of its “deepest and most essential movements”

12/19  **Final exam**
12:30 p.m.