

Emory University
Department of Sociology
Wed. 2:30-5:30 p.m.
Tarbutton 206

Dr. Frank Lechner
Spring 2016
7-7530
flechn@emory.edu

Sociology 540: Basic Theoretical Problems

Overview

This course examines basic theoretical problems in sociology by analyzing the work of classical theorists and some of their contemporary successors. We will cover many kinds of problems but return repeatedly to three themes:

- the problem of explanation: how to account for social action and societal structure
- the problem of modernity: how to describe, explain, and assess the rise of modern societies
- the problem of relevance: how to use theory to address moral issues and political reform

We will assess the legacy of pre-World War II social theorists and draw lessons from it. Raising questions about the substance, shape, and merits of the sociological tradition, the seminar aims to convey the interesting insights it contains and encourage you to use its intellectual tools to frame your own projects.

Texts

Robert Bellah (ed.), *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society*
Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber*
Donald Levine, *Visions of the Sociological Tradition*
Donald Levine (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*
Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*
Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [but online translation OK]
Other materials posted or linked on Blackboard

Requirements

1. Preparation and active participation, including brief memos prior to seminar sessions (10% of final grade)
2. Two presentations—one on a major classic text (preferably with a partner; to include brief written synopsis and critique), one on a Chicago monograph (20% of final grade)
3. One take-home essay, due April 27 (20% of final grade)
4. Paper, 15-20 pages, due April 29 (50% of final grade)
 - Note: Proposal due 3/23, draft due 4/17, peer-editing/comments due 4/20

Schedule

- Additional reading guidance will be given in the seminar or sent via/posted on Blackboard
- Items marked * are recommended
- Selection and order of readings is subject to minor changes
- Some major works to be studied and presented by students are not listed

- Week 1
1/13 Introduction and history; Comte as “founder”
Donald Levine, Prologue, Ch. 2-5
Steven Seidman, “Beyond Presentism and Historicism”
Comte, “Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for Reorganizing Society”;
Positive Philosophy, “Necessity and Opportunities of This New Science”
Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity*, Ch. 3
*Randall Collins, “Prologue” [historical overview]
- Week 2
1/20 British tradition 1: Norms and civil society
Levine, Ch. 7
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. XIII
Mohammed Cherkaoui, “Thomas Hobbes: On Generating Social Order”
Hume, “Why Utility Pleases”
Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part I/Sec. I: I, III; S III: II; P II/S II: III; P III: I
Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Part 1: VI
Bentham, “Of the Principle of Utility”
James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, Chs. 10, 11
*Jerry Muller, “Adam Smith: Moral Philosophy and Political Economy”
- Week 3
1/27 British tradition 2: Exchange and market
Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, “The Grumbling Hive”
Hume, “Of Commerce”
Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Part IV: I; Part V: III
Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book I: I-III, VIII; Book III: I, IV
Mill, *A System of Logic*, Book VI: Chs. VII-IX
Spencer, “The Social Organism”
Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, 89-102
- Week 4
2/3 Marxian tradition 1: Class and revolution
Levine, Ch. 10
Tucker reader, 3-6, 70-81, 143-63, 172-219, 469-491, 594-617 (*Introduction)
Michael Burawoy and Erik Wright, “Sociological Marxism”
*Robert Antonio, “Introduction: Marx and Modernity”
- Week 5
2/10 Marxian tradition 2: Capitalism and exploitation
Tucker reader [mainly Capital I], 222-6, 302-329, 336-61, 384-442, 653-8
Giovanni Arrighi, “Marx, Schumpeter, and the “Endless” Accumulation of Capital and Power”
- Week 6
2/17 French tradition 1: Democracy and revolution
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Critical edition: Vol. I: Introduction, 2, 3, 5; V. II: 4; V. III, Part II: 2, 4, 5, 8; V. IV, P. III: 7 [Reeve translation: V. I: 2, 3, 5, 12; V. II, S. I: 2, 4, 5, 8; S. III: 7]
Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, P. I: 5; P. II: 1-3, 5-9; P. III: 1-3, 8

Jon Elster, *Alexis de Tocqueville: The First Social Scientist*, excerpt
*Raymond Aron, “Alexis de Tocqueville”

- Week 7
2/24 French tradition 2: Division of labor and solidarity
Levine, Ch. 8
Bellah reader, 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 (*Introduction)
Rules of Sociological Method, Chs. I, V
Division of Labor, Preface to the Second Edition
Mustafa Emirbayer, “Useful Durkheim”
- Week 8
3/2 French tradition 3: Religion and knowledge
Bellah reader, 11, 12
Durkheim, *Primitive Classification; Moral Education*, excerpts
Randall Collins, “Interaction Ritual Chains and Collective Effervescence”
*Robert Alun Jones, “On Understanding a Sociological Classic”
- Week 9
3/9 German tradition 1: History and meaning
Levine, Ch. 9
Gerth and Mills reader, IV (115-28), V, VII, VIII, IX (*Introduction)
Weber, *Economy and Society*, Part 1: I; *Collected Methodological Writings*
(selections)
Michael Burawoy, “For Public Sociology”
- Week 10
3/23 German tradition 2: Capitalism and rationalization
The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
Gerth and Mills reader, XI, XII, XIII
John Hobson, “Reorienting Weber?”
*Gordon Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism*, Ch. 5
Proposal due
- Week 11
3/30 German tradition 3: Social forms and styles of life
Levine reader, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 15, 18, 19, 20, 24 (*Introduction)
Suzanne Vromen, “Georg Simmel and the Cultural Dilemma of Women”
*Elizabeth Goodstein, “Georg Simmel’s Phenomenology of Modern Skepticism”
- Week 12
4/6 American tradition 1: Self and interaction
Levine, Ch. 12
Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*, Ch. 5
Mead, “The Problem of Society”; *Mind Self, and Society*, Part III and IV
Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, I, X
Herbert Blumer, “The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism”
*Neil Gross, “Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Twentieth-Century
American Sociology”

Week 13
4/13 American tradition 2: Process and community
Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*,
“Methodological Note”
Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, and pre-WWII Chicago monographs [to be
assigned]
Andrew Abbott, “Of Time and Space: The Contemporary Relevance of the
Chicago School”

Week 14
4/20 Reflections and presentations
Peer comments due

4/27 **Essay due**
4/29 **Paper due**