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Spring 2004
Thurs 1-4

SOCIOLOGY 540: BASIC THEORETICAL PROBLEMS

Overview

We will explore a number of core theoretical issues in sociology by reviewing the work of major early figures in the field: Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, and Mead. The social and intellectual context in which these scholars developed their perspectives is emphasized. We will also read and discuss selections from some of the prominent intellectual inheritors of each major figure, closing with a special section on the institutionalism of Mary Douglas and John Meyer.

Requirements

- A. **Reading** in accordance with the syllabus.
- B. **Class attendance and participation in discussions** of the readings. In preparation for each class meeting, I will ask you to identify and be prepared to discuss a passage or section of the readings that you find particularly revealing or crucial to that week's topic.
- C. Two or more **oral presentations**, summarizing and critiquing articles or selected passages in the readings.
- D. Short **written assignments** explaining a concept or key idea from a reading, or reflecting on a reading in relation to contemporary society or a particular research problem.
- E. **Term paper** on a topic of your choice, in consultation with me. Papers are likely to be 20 to 30 pages in length and they should be primarily theoretical in nature, but substantive rather than metatheoretical.
- F. **Final examination** in essay form. The scheduled examination period is Monday, May 3, but a take-home examination is likely.
- G. Grading will consist of class participation, presentations, and short assignments (40%), paper (35%), exam (25%).

Books

Robert Bellah, ed. *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society*, 1975
Lewis Coser *Masters of Sociological Thought*, 2nd ed., 1977
Mary Douglas *How Institutions Think*, 1986
Emile Durkheim *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1995
Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber*, 1946
Donald Levine, ed. *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, 1972
Anselm Strauss, ed. *George Herbert Mead on Social Psychology*, 1964
Robert C. Tucker, ed. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., 1978

All books should be available in paperback except the Coser book. In addition, numerous copied articles and chapters are required reading. These will be available in the graduate student lounge. Some modifications in the course outline may be made as we proceed.

COURSE OUTLINE

- Week 1** Introduction and Course Overview
Jan 15
- Week 2** General Considerations on Theory and Classic Theorists
Jan 22 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," Gerth and Mills reader
Ritzer, Ch. 1, "A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory"*
Alexander, "The Centrality of the Classics," esp. pp. 11-34*
Luhmann, Ch. 14, "The Self-Thematization of Society," esp. pp. 332-55*
- Week 3** Issues and Approaches in Theorizing
Jan 29 Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, Chs. 3, 16*
O'Neill, "Sociology as a Skin Trade"*
Wallerstein, "Should We Unthink the Nineteenth Century?*" *
Meyer, "Society Without Culture: A Nineteenth-Century Legacy"*
Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought"*
Seidman, "The End of Sociological Theory: The Postmodern Hope"*
- Week 4** Marx: Materialism, Classes, Dialectical Change
Feb 5 Coser, "Karl Marx 1818-1883"
Tucker reader
Not required: Manuscripts of 1844 [pp. 66-125, but read pp. 70-81];
selections on pp. 126-142; first portion of *The German Ideology* [pp. 146-
176; but read pp. 176-200]; The *Grundrisse* [221-293]; Crisis Theory
[443-465]; selections on pp. 525-573 and on pp. 653-677; all of Part V
- Week 5** Marxian Analysis
Feb 12 Wright, *Classes*, Chs. 2-3*
Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, Chs. 1, 8, Epilogue*
Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*, Chs. 1-5, 7*
Chase-Dunn, *Global Formation*, Ch. 1 (pp. 13-47)*
- Week 6** Durkheim: Differentiation and the Moral Dimension
Feb 19 Coser, "Emile Durkheim 1858-1917"
Bellah reader (omit Chs. 11, 12)
Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 1-44, 84-157, 190-241,
303-54, 418-48

*Reserve reading available in graduate student lounge.

- Week 7** Durkheimian Analysis
 Feb 26 Collins, "The Durkheimian Tradition in Conflict Sociology"*
 Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, Chs. 1, 10*
 Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, Ch. 4*
 Dumont, *Essays on Individualism*, Chs. 1, 2*
- Week 8** Weber: Rationality, Religion, Authority (two weeks)
 Mar 4 Coser, "Max Weber 1864-1920"
 Gerth and Mills reader, all except
 XV. National Character and the Junkers
 XVII. The Chinese Literati
 Collins, "Weber's Last Theory of Capitalism"*
- Week 9** Spring recess.
 Mar 11
- Week 10** Weber (concluded)
 Mar 18
- Week 11** Weberian Analysis
 Mar 25 Baum, "Authority and Identity: The Case for Evolutionary Invariance"*
 Collins, "The Future Decline of the Russian Empire"*
 Collins, "Weber's Theory of the Family"*
 Perrow, "The Neo-Weberian Model: Decision Making, Conflict,
 and Technology"*
- Week 12** Simmel: The Individual, Forms, Culture
 Apr 1 Coser, "Georg Simmel 1858-1918"
 Levine reader
- Week 13** Simmelian Analysis
 Apr 8 O'Neill, "How Is Society Possible?"*
 Levine, "Simmel as a Resource for Sociological Metatheory"*
 Vromen, "Georg Simmel and the Cultural Dilemma of Women"*
 Scaff, "Georg Simmel's Theory of Culture"*
 Robertson, "Aspects of Identity and Authority in Sociological Theory"*
- Week 14** Mead: Mind, Self, Others
 Apr 15 Coser, "George Herbert Mead 1863-1931"
 Strauss reader

*Reserve reading available in graduate student lounge.

Week 15 Meadian Analysis

Apr 22 Blumer, "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism"*
Goffman, "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor"*
Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Ch. 1, Ch. 2 (esp. 66-75)*
Hall, "Social Interaction, Culture, and Historical Studies"*
Glassner, "Fit for Postmodern Selfhood"*

Week 16 Douglas and Meyer: Cultural Symbolism, Enactment, Institutionalism

Date TBA Douglas, *How Institutions Think*
Meyer et al., "Ontology and Rationalization in the Western Cultural Account"*
Meyer et al., "World Society and the Nation-State"*
Meyer, "Rationalized Environments"*
Lash, "Postmodernism: Towards a Sociological Account"*

*Reserve reading available in graduate student lounge.