

Sociology G4050, Fall 2006
Instructor: Gil Eyal, ge2027@columbia.edu
Monday, 10-1, 411 Fayerweather
Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3, Fayerweather 405

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

The premise of this course is that the most significant distinction in the development of social theory was between emancipatory and non-emancipatory theories. The first kind of theories seek to speak in the name of a certain social group, whom they believe to be oppressed. Moreover, and this is the crux of the matter, they believe that society is better described from the point of view of the oppressed. That, so to speak, the view from below is the best view one could have. Moreover, they believe that this point of view contains keys for changing society as well, changing it in the direction of less oppression for everybody, which is what is meant by “emancipation”. Finally, they believe that in order to best understand society one must actively attempt to change it.

The second set of theories come in two versions. The first are what may be called properly mainstream sociological theories, or positivist theories. They do not claim to speak in anybody’s name, because they believe their authority to speak derives from science. They do not take the point-of-view of the oppressed, but most often that of the social planner. In other words, they believe that the view from above is the best view to have. They do not believe in emancipation, but, if they are interested in social change at all, in reform. They consider the emancipatory theories too ideological, too negative (hence the term “positivism”), too disruptive of society, and of their own bid to become a social science. For the second type of non-emancipatory theories, I chose the term “critical theory”. Like the positivists, they do not seek to speak in the name of anybody, because they are suspicious of the relation of representation. But they do not opt to speak in the name of science either, in fact, they consider the authority of science to be one of the major forms of oppression in our age. They do not claim to represent the point-of-view of the oppressed, but on the contrary are suspicious of people who do, especially if they are armchair intellectuals. But they don’t take the point of view of the social planner either, seeing it as the major sin of sociology. They don’t believe in neither emancipation (which they characterized as a dream turned into nightmare), nor in reform (which they characterize as the pragmatism of the mouse on the turning wheel). What is it that they do believe in? Are they wholly negative? Are they the epitome of what Marx called “critical critics”? I’m sure this is something we will debate vigorously in the course of the semester.

Like all theory, the value of this distinction between emancipatory, positivist and critical theories is heuristic. Reality is far more complex. In the work of most of the theorists we will discuss, one can find a combination of these concerns. Thus, Weber is part critical theorist, part positivist, and Marx probably blends all three concerns, though not in equal measure. Moreover, this distinction by no means captures all or even most of the concerns with which theorists engage. For example, Bourdieu and Foucault both intend their work to overcome the polarity of phenomenology and

structuralism. Nonetheless, the value of this distinction is in identifying a “problematic”, a particular mode of asking questions, from which by necessity flow a certain style of theorizing and certain concepts. The degree of consistency with which these problematics are worked out by the different theorists is variable, and while we may admire a theorist for being more rigorous (Marx is probably the most rigorous), it isn’t always a merit. One can follow quite rigorously a false path. Nonetheless, the concern with the three problematics explains the organization of this course, as well as my unabashed choice of starting with the cannon, with the three “classics” of sociology, Marx, Durkheim and Weber, because in their works one sees the most clearly the working out of these problematics, and much of later sociology is a response to the problems and questions they have raised: Marx is the quintessential emancipatory theorist; Durkheim’s life-long ambition was to give sociology the status of a positive science; and much of critical theory begins from Weber’s problematization of rationality. The classical theorists will engage us for roughly the first half of the semester, and then we will turn to contemporary twists and modifications of the original problematics. In the work of Schutz, Goffman and Grafinkel, one finds a fresh start on Durkheim’s problematic, though with distinctly Weberian tools informed by phenomenology and a concern with empirical observation of the everyday order of society. Bourdieu and Foucault continue the Weberian project of critical theory, but with the tools of post-structuralist analysis owing a great deal to both Durkheim and Marx.

Course assignments

There will be two written assignments. The due dates for the assignments are detailed in the course schedule below. There are no mid-term or final. Your grade will be composed of the two assignments plus class participation.

Books and readings

There are 8 books required for the course. They are available at the Columbia University bookstore, 2922 Broadway. There are also a few other readings that are on electronic reserves at Lehman library. They are marked with an asterisk. (*)

1. Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972).
2. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1984 [1893]).
3. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. (New York: The Free Press, 1912).
4. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (N.Y.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958 [1904-5]).
5. Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Vol. I*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978 [1956]).
6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

7. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995 [1975]).
8. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: an Introduction*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990 [1976]).

Course Outline and Readings

9/11 **Introduction - what is theory? how to read it?**

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895)

9/18 **The materialist conception of history**

Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*:

- 1) "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," pp.53-65.
- 2) "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," pp.70-105.
- 3) "Alienation and Social Classes," pp.133-135.
- 4) "Theses on Feuerbach," pp.143-145.
- 5) "The German Ideology," pp.149-200. (from "The premises from which we begin...")
- 6) "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," 3-6.

9/25 **The origins and dynamics of capitalism**

Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

- 1) "Wage Labor and Capital," pp.203-217.
- 2) *Capital* Vol.1, Chs.1, 6, 7, 10: "The Commodity," "The Buying and Selling of Labor Power," "The Labor Process and the Process of Producing Surplus Value," "The Working Day," pp.302-329, 336-376.
- 3) *Capital* Vol.1, Chs.26, 27, 31, 32: "The so-called Primitive Accumulation," "Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land," "Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist," "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation," pp.431-438.

October 2nd is Yom Kipur so class is moved to Friday, October 6th, 10-1, Fayerweather 411

10/6 **Classes and the state**

Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

- 1) "The Communist Manifesto," pp.473-500.
- 2) *Capital* Vol.3: "Classes," pp.441-442.
- 3) "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," pp. 594-617.
- 4) "Critique of the Gotha Program," pp.525-541.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

10/9 **The problem of solidarity**

- 1) *The Rules of Sociological Method*, “What is a Social Fact.”*

The Division of Labor in Society

- 2) Book I: “The Function of the Division of Labor,” pp.11-175.
- 3) Book III: “The Abnormal Forms,” pp.291-341.
- 4) “Preface to the Second Edition,” pp.xxxi-lix.

10/16 **Collective representations**

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

- 1) “Introduction,” “Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion,” pp.1-63.
- 2) Book 3: “The Principle Ritual Attitudes,” “Conclusion,” pp.337-433, 462-496.
- 3) *Suicide*, “Anomic Suicide”.*
- 4) “Individualism and the Intellectuals.”*

Max Weber (1864-1920)

10/23 **Rationalization and disenchantment**

Economy and Society, Vol.1

- 1) “The Definition of Sociology and of Social Action,” “Types of Social Action,” pp.4-26.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

Whole book.

10/30 **Class and rank**

Economy and Society, Vol.1

- 1) “Status Groups and Classes,” pp.302-307.
- 2) “Ethnic Groups,” pp.385-398.
- 3) “Class, Status, Party.”*
- 4) “Capitalism and Rural Society in Germany.”*

November 6th is holiday, no classes! Instead we meet on Friday, November 10th, 10-1, Fayerweather 411

11/10 Domination and bureaucracy

(1st assignment handout is given in class)

Economy and Society, Vol.1

- 1) "The Types of Legitimate Domination," pp.212-254.
- 2) "Religious Groups (Sociology of Religion)," pp.399-401, 422-433, 439-468.
- 3) "Bureaucracy." *

11/13 Phenomenology, ethnomethodology and Goffman

(1st assignment is due in department office, Fay 413, Friday, November 17th, by 4pm)

- 1) Alfred Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action," *Collected Papers*.*
- 2) Harold Grafinkel, "What is Ethnomethodology?" *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.*
- 3) Erving Goffman, "The Interaction Order."**
- 4) Erving Goffman, Selections from "Supportive and Remedial Interchanges," *Relations in Public*.*

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2001)

11/20 The Problem of Reproduction

Distinction, pp. xi-xiv, 1-256.

11/27 The relational approach to sociology

Distinction, pp. 257-396, 466-484.

- 1) "Legitimation and Structured Interests in Weber's Sociology of Religion."**
- 2) *Language and Symbolic Power*, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Classes."**

Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

12/4 Genealogy of Modern power/knowledge

Discipline and Punish.

Whole book.

12/11 **Subjection and Resistance**

(2nd assignment handout is given in class)

The History of Sexuality, vol.1: an Introduction.

1) Whole Book

Reader

2) "The Subject and Power."*

(2nd assignment is due back in main office on December 18th, no later than 4pm)