

# CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Nitsan Chorev

[nitsan\\_chorev@brown.edu](mailto:nitsan_chorev@brown.edu)

SOC 1010

Fall 2009

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-3:50pm

Room: J. Walter Wilson 503

Office hours: Thursday, 4-6pm

Maxcy Hall 408

## SYLLABUS

### I. Introductory comments

We usually take it for granted that people around us follow social rules, norms and conventions – but how are social “order” and stable social existence possible? And under what conditions does social change – that is, the breaking of rules and the making of new ones – become possible? When we follow the rules or mobilize for new ones, do we act as free-willing individuals or do we merely respond to social structures we have no control over? How do economic conditions affect our behavior? Do ideas, or culture more generally, have transformative powers?

One of the most gratifying ways to approach such sociological questions is via historical analysis, that is, by presenting a historical puzzle, and offering an argument that would provide an insight not only for the specific historical case in question, but for other cases as well. Arguably, no one has linked historical investigations and sociological inquiries more effectively than the so-called “classical sociologists”: Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel. The historical event they were fascinated by was a revolutionary one: the transition from one social system—feudalism—to a new one—capitalism. Other characteristics of the new, modern, society that captured their imagination included the emergence of the national-state and a rational bureaucracy, the decline of religion, and the social implications of the urban metropolis.

In this class we will explore the ideas and arguments developed by Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel as well as various contemporary versions of their ideas. All four used the rise of modern society to offer historical insights regarding their contemporary era, as well as sociological arguments about society more generally. All four have become major inspirations for generations of sociologists to come; and their insights, while often modified and revised, are still useful not only for analyzing the early formation of capitalism and the modern state, but also for analyzing contemporary transformations that we experience today.

## II. Course requirements

Read the required materials *carefully*. Do not just skim them. Pay particular attention to the main argument of each text and to the way it is constructed and verified. Review each text critically, compare it to other texts and theories we have already explored, and prepare questions for discussion in class.

The formal requirements of the class include:

1. Class attendance and participation (10% of the final grade).

2. Two short reaction papers (each 5% of the final grade).

Twice this term you need to submit a reaction paper on the readings for the class. You can choose the text to write your reaction paper about, with two conditions: each reaction paper needs to address a different author, and you have to submit the paper before the class in which we discuss that text. Late memos will not be accepted. The reaction paper should be 2-pages long. In the reaction paper you have to show that you've read the text, and that you've understood its *main* arguments. For that purpose, you need to address the following question: what is the main question motivating the text? What is the main theoretical argument? What are (if any) the competing explanations rejected by the author? What is the empirical evidence (if any) the author uses to support the argument? What is the theoretical/analytical reasoning (if any) the author uses to support the argument? Is the main argument convincing? If so, why? Why not?

3. Analyze a current text that relates to our readings (40% of the final grade).

Is classical sociological theory relevant for understanding contemporary society? You are asked to respond to this question by finding a text – it can be a book, a short story, or a movie, or it can also be a compilation of texts regarding a current political, social or economic event – and analyze it using the tools offered to us by the sociological theories we read. Write a double-spaced 10-page essay that discusses the text by using sociological theories but that also explores the limits of classical sociological thinking.

4. Final exam (40% of the final grade).

## III. Readings

Many of the readings are available on OCRA (class password is SOC1010).

In addition, there are assigned books (see list below) that can be purchased at the Brown Bookstore (or you can buy used books, which are much cheaper). These books are also on reserve at the library.

All the items listed below are required readings. The items with a star [\*] are the ones NOT available on OCRA.

*Books to buy*

Weber, Max. 2002. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Third edition. Roxbury Publishing.

Durkheim, Emile. 1984. *Division of Labor in Society*. Free Press.

Durkheim, Emile. 2001. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

\* \* \*

**1 Introduction (Sept 10)**

**2 The historical context: from Feudalism to early capitalism (Sept 15)**

Dobb, Maurice. 1947. *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*. New York: International Publishers. Pp. 33-50, 123-151

**KARL MARX**

**3 Marx's theoretical foundations (I): historical materialism (Sept 17)**

Marx, Karl. 1978 [1859]. "Marx on the History of His Opinions (Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*," pp. 3-6 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton.

**4 Marx's theoretical foundations (II): ideology and ideas (Sept 22)**

Marx, Karl. 1978 [1845-46]. "The German Ideology: Part I," pp. 146-175, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton.

**5 Labor in the capitalist system (I) (Sept 24)**

Marx, Karl. 1978 [1844]. "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," pp. 70-81 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert Tucker (Estranged Labor). New York: W. W. Norton.

Braverman, Harry. 1974. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press. Chapter 8 ("The Scientific-Technical Revolution and the Worker"), pp. 169-183.

**6 Labor in (advanced) capitalist system (II) (Sept 29)**

Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Post-Modernity*, pp. 125-140.

Excerpts from *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides, pp. 94-102

Sheehan, Susan. 8/26/2006. "Moving Pictures: Tear, Slap, Clack." *The New Yorker*.

### **7 The critique of capitalism: a revolutionary program (Oct 1)**

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1848 [1978]. "Manifesto of the Communist Party," pp. 473-491 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton.

## **MAX WEBER**

### **8 The rise of capitalism: material conditions or ideas? (I) (Oct 6)**

[\*] Weber, Max. 2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Third edition. Roxbury Publishing. Chapters 1, 2.

### **9 The rise of capitalism: material conditions or ideas? (II) (Oct 8)**

[\*] Weber, Max. 2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Third edition. Roxbury Publishing. Chapters 3, 5

### **10 Bureaucracy (I) (Oct 13)**

Weber, Max. 1968. "Bureaucracy," in *Economy and Society*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster Press. Pp. 956-958, 973-975, 987-989, 998-1001, 1002-1003.

### **11 Bureaucracy (II) (Oct 15)**

Feldman, Stephen M. 1991. "An Interpretation of Max Weber's Theory of Law: Metaphysics, Economics, and the Iron Cage of Constitutional Law." *Law and Social Inquiry* 16(2): 205-248.

[\*] On *Ricci v. DeStefano* [the text will be distributed in class]

## **EMILE DURKHEIM**

### **12 Social solidarity (Oct 20)**

[\*] Durkheim, Emile. 1984. *Division of Labor in Society*. Free Press. Book I, chapters 1-3.

### **13 What is God? (I) (Oct 22)**

[\*] Durkheim, Emile. 2001. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Introduction (pp. 1-18); Book I, chapters 1, 4.

#### **14 What is God? (II) (Oct 27)**

[\*] Durkheim, Emile. 2001. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Book II, chapters 6, 7; Book III, Conclusion

Fitzgerald, Frances. 12/3/2007. "Annals of Religion: Come One, Come All." *The New Yorker*.

#### **15 Post-structuralist view on religion (Oct 29)**

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field." *Comparative Social Research*.

### **GEORG SIMMEL**

#### **16 Networks (I) (Nov 3)**

Simmel, Georg. 1964. "The Isolated Individual and the Dyad," pp. 118-144, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, edited by Kurt H. Wolff. Glencoe: The Free Press.

Gladwell, Malcolm. 1/11/1999. "Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg." *The New Yorker*.

#### **17 Networks (II) (Nov 5)**

Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78:1360-1380.

[\*] Hu, Winnie. 7/29/2007. "More Than a Meal Plan." *New York Times* [the text will be distributed in class].

#### **18 The urban (Nov 10)**

Simmel, Georg. 1971 [1903]. "The Metropolis and Mental Life," pp. 324-339 in *Georg Simmel On Individuality And Social Forms*, edited by Donald N. Levine. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Pp. 17-80.

#### **19 The foreigner (Nov 12)**

Simmel, Georg. 1971 [1908]. "The Stranger," pp. 143-149 in *Georg Simmel On Individuality And Social Forms*, edited by Donald N. Levine. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

**20 Me and others (I) (Nov 17)**

[\*] Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor. Pp. 17-76.

**21 Me and others (II) (Nov 19)**

Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Pp. 1-62.

**22 REVIEW of ESSAYS (Nov 24)**

**23 HAPPY THANKSGIVING (Nov 26)**

**24 REVIEW of ESSAYS**

**25 REVIEW for EXAM**