

Fall 2015

SOC 5086

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Sociological Theory

Sociology 5086
Professor Baxter
Fall, 2015

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Office Hours: Mon, 12-2, Tu-Th., 11-12, 2-3, and by appointment

Course Description:

The purpose of the course is to provide students a survey of classical and contemporary sociological theory. The course examines social theory as both a set of propositions that guide research and as a framework to help diagnose and understand pressing social issues like war and peace, exploitation and resistance, suicide and solidarity. It was the seriousness of the latter effort that led classical theorists to develop general explanations which we regard as sociological theory. The harnessing of theory to professional research asks theory to define problems and point the way to empirical data and ways to make sense of those data.

We begin with a brief introduction to the history of modern social theory and what has come to be known as classical sociological theory before we move on to questions and answers posed by the "classical" theorists (Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim). These writers helped define theoretical traditions that subsequent scholars embrace, refute, and extend. We attempt to grasp concretely how these writers explain social phenomena like capitalism, legitimate authority, and totemism. Each developed general conceptual systems to understand, diagnose (and find ways to "cure") what they perceived as the pathologies of the time in which they lived.

Today, the task of critically describing modern society is as important as it was a century ago. Modern economic, political, cultural and psychological systems are in crisis. To understand issues that confront us as individuals and as a society we examine a variety of contemporary theoretical approaches; including structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, feminism, globalization, and post-colonial theory.

Learning Objectives:

Students who complete the course will demonstrate comprehension of the major sociological theorist's ideas and concepts as measured through examinations and class discussion. Students will make progress in the development of analytical skills required to conceptualize and understand complex social issues and turn that understanding into empirical research. Students will demonstrate the ability to apply sociological concepts and theories through several writing assignments designed to sharpen ability to formulate and critique abstract ideas. Graduate students will achieve advanced knowledge of core theoretical ideas in sociology and their application in extensive writing assignments.

Required Books:

George Ritzer, Sociological Theory. Boston: McGraw-Hill (I have 7th edition, bookstore has 9th edition –any recent edition is fine).

Peter Kivisto, Social Theory: Roots and Branches. New York: Oxford University Press (5th edition is on order, earlier edition will have most selections assigned).

A number of required articles and book chapters will also be made available for students to read on-line and through Moodle which is available on the UNO web page.

Exams and Grading:

Attendance and participation in class discussion are required and count 10% of the final grade (40 points). Once during the semester, each student must submit (via e-mail) at least two days before class discussion a short reaction paper (about 1-2 pages) and discussion questions (4 or so) on required readings and then lead small group discussion (10% final grade, 40 points). There will also be a mid-term examination (25% final grade, 100 points) and a final examination (25% final grade, 100 points), both planned as in class exams. I shall provide review sheets for each exam.

Additional Requirements for Graduate Students:

An important goal of the course is to sharpen your analytical and writing skills. Final grades for graduate students will be based in part on two papers (8-9 pages each) that will count 30% of the final grade (60 X 2= 120 points). Graduate students are required to schedule meetings with Dr. Baxter in his office hours to discuss each required essay both before and after it is written.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is required and counts 10% of the final course grade (40 points).

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the UNO Judicial Code for further information.

Accommodations for Student with Disabilities:

Students who qualify for services will receive the academic modifications for which they are legally entitled. It is the responsibility of the student to register with the Office of Disability Services (1st floor Science Building) each semester and follow their procedures for obtaining assistance.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments:

August 20-25: Introduction: History of Sociological Theory (Moodle, topic 1)

Read: George Ritzer. 2008. Sociological Theory. Boston: McGraw-Hill, chapter 1, "A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory: The Early Years," pp. 1-33 (hereafter, Ritzer). Note: all chapter citations and page numbers are from my 7th edition of the text.

August 27- September 8: Theories of Karl Marx (Moodle, topic 2)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 2, "Karl Marx," pp. 43-73.

Read: Karl Marx. "Alienated Labor," selection 1 in Peter Kivisto, Social Theory: Roots and Branches (hereafter, Kivisto). Note, all selection numbers are from 5th edition of the text.

Read: Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," selection 3 in Kivisto.

Read: Karl Marx. "Commodities," selection 4 in Kivisto.

9/8: Class discussion of readings from Marx.

September 10- 17: Emile Durkheim on Solidarity and Social Order (Moodle, topic 3)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 3, “Emile Durkheim,” pp. 74-111.

Read: Emile Durkheim. “Anomic Suicide,” selection 8 in Kivisto.

Read: Emile Durkheim. [1915] 1965. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. “Origin of the idea of the Totemic Principle or Mana,” Book II, chapter 7, pp. 235-45 (Moodle reserve).

9/17: Class discussion of readings from Suicide and The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.

September 22- 29: Max Weber on Social Action (Moodle, topic 4)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 4, “Max Weber,” pp. 112-40 and 147-57.

Read: Max Weber. “Class, Status, and Party,” selection 15 in Kivisto.

9/29: Class discussion on “Class, Status, and Party.”

October 1: Introduction to 20th century social theory (Moodle, topic 6)

No new reading assignment, catch up and prepare for mid-term exam.

October 6: Mid-term Examination, in class *****

October 8-20: Neo Marxism (Moodle, topic 7)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 8, only sections on “Antonio Gramsci,” pp. 280-81; “Critical Theory,” pp. 281-89; “Fordism and Post-Fordism,” pp. 300-02; “Historically Oriented Marxism,” pp. 302-08; and “The Production of Space,” pp. 308-11.

Read: Walter Benjamin. “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” selection 61 in Kivisto.

October 13: First essay due, in class *****

October 15: No class, mid-semester break *****

October 20: Class discussion of critical theory and neo-Marxism

October 22- November 3: Self, Society, and Symbolic Interactionism (Moodle, topic 8)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 10, "Symbolic Interactionism," pp. 347-86.

Read: W.E.B. DuBois. 1903. "Double Consciousness and the Veil." From The Souls of Black Folks. Pp. 166-71 in C. Lemert (ed.), Social Theory (Moodle reserve)

Read: Erving Goffman. 1967 "On Face Work, pp. 5-45 in Interaction Ritual (Moodle reserve).

11/3: Class discussion of "Double Consciousness and the Veil," and "On Face Work."

November 5- 12: Identity and Social Theory: Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory (Moodle, topic 9)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 13, "Contemporary Feminist Theory," pp. 450-85.

Read: Candace West and D.H. Zimmerman. "Doing Gender," selection 51 in Kivisto.

Read: Dorothy Smith. "Sociology From Women's Experience," selection 54 in Kivisto.

Read: Michael Omi and H. Winant. "Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race," Selection 56 in Kivisto.

Read: Patricia Hill Collins. "Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology," Selection 53 in Kivisto.

11/12: class discussion of West and Zimmerman, Hill-Collins, and Smith readings

November 17 -19: Late Modernity Theory and Globalization (Moodle, topic 10)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 15, “Contemporary Theories of Modernity,” pp. 547-59.

Read: Ritzer, chapter 16, “Globalization Theory,” read only pp. 573-78 and 587-89.

Read: Anthony Giddens. “The Reflexivity of Modernity,” selection 68 in Kivisto.

Read: Arjun Appadurai. “Disjunction and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” selection 78 in Kivisto.

November 26: No class, Thanksgiving break *****

November 24 -December 3: Post-structural and Postmodern Theory (Moodle, topic 11)

Read: Ritzer, chapter 17, “Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Postmodernism,” pp. 600-32.

Read: Pierre Bourdieu. “Correspondence of Goods Production and Taste Production,” selection 71 in Kivisto.

Read: Michel Foucault. 1980. Discipline and Punish, pp. 3-31 (Moodle reserve).

12/3: class discussion: Readings from Bourdieu and Foucault.

December 1: Second Paper due, in class *****

***** The Final Examination will be held in class from 10:00 am to 12 noon on Thursday, December 10. *****