

SOCL 202: CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY THEORY, FALL 2009

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Getting ready

Getting ready for a social theory course requires getting your expectations in order. Reading social theory is not easy, nor should it be. Your professors expect you to write clearly when you submit research and analytical papers. They usually want to be able to read easily what you wrote and understand it. They do not want to have to read your paper four times, write question marks in the margins and wonder what it all means. And yet, this is what we tend to do (what we expect and should do) when we read the texts of social theorists. Why?



Theorists often write in what we perceive to be a dense manner for a number of reasons. Some theorists argue that it is important to be precise when theorizing, and precision requires a lot of words, long sentences, and multiple readings. Others do not believe it their role to tell the reader directly the content of their theories. Instead, their role is to write in such a way that the reader is persuaded of the theorists' points, that the reader, in fact, does some thinking on his own so that he reaches the same, but not-directly-stated conclusions of the theorists.

My point: try not to get frustrated with what you read in this course. One way to stave off the frustration is to think of theory as *a way of organizing one's attention*. As you read these texts, think about *what* in the social world the theorist notices, in what issues he invests his mental energy, as well as what he conveniently ignores. Also realize that much of what we struggle with when reading social theory is a certain rhetorical style. Think about that style carefully. *How* a theorist says something is often just as important—if not more so—as *what* he actually says.

I do not expect you to memorize a list of theorists and theoretical “schools” in this course. Although we will certainly discuss many theorists and many schools in our time together, this course is not intended to survey all of social theory, since this would be impossible in thirteen weeks. Instead, I expect you to struggle with just a few theorists, old and new, who have attempted to shape the ways we think about the social world. My hope is that you will learn more by struggling than you will by doing anything else.



But struggling should not take place in isolation. Although we will already be meeting together as a class once a week to discuss the material, I highly recommend that you meet with some of your classmates outside of the scheduled course time. Talking through the texts with someone else will help you prepare for our class meetings, as well as write the required papers. DO THIS, PLEASE!

Course policies

Coming to class is not required, but since I will not accept daily assignments unless you are in class, missing many classes will severely impact your grade.

We will be using Moodle for this class (<http://bowtie.cc.trincoll.edu/login/index.php>, or just type “Moodle” into the URL of your web browser from a campus computer). You are responsible for checking Moodle for announcements and for submitting all assignments through this system.

“Computer problems” is not an excuse for a late assignment. I will not accept daily assignments if they are late. Longer papers received late will receive a letter grade deduction for each day they are late.

Plagiarism on any paper will automatically cause you to fail the assignment and possibly the course. “I didn’t know that was plagiarism” is not an excuse. More than three consecutive words taken from a source without proper attribution (quotation marks, parenthetical citation) constitutes plagiarism.

Course suggestions

Come to class on time. I take note when you do not.

Do not pack up your bags before 9:15. I take note when you do.

Plan for the possibility of an emergency. Start the semester off strongly: come to class, participate in discussion, ask questions during lecture, and turn assignments in early if at all possible. If a crisis hits you later in the semester, I’ll be much more sympathetic to your plight, if I remember your initial engagement with the course.

Visit me in my office hours to talk about class or simply just to talk. We can talk about your other classes, your possible career plans, etc. In other words, make yourself memorable!

Google things. It would be stupid not to Google the theorists before coming to class.

Course assignments

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| Mandatory | Every class meeting, by 8:10 am, in hard copy | Pick one quote (include the page number) from one of the readings for that day. Discuss how this quote illuminates the larger point of the reading. <i>Note: This should be about one page, double-space. I do not accept these assignments from students who not in class the day they are due.</i> |
| Mandatory | Two classes for each student, by the end of the day, digitally via Moodle | Sign up for two classes where you will be the official minute-taker for everything that happens in class that day. Be sure to take notes on what I say, as well as how your classmates respond. You will be sharing these notes with the class, so take this seriously! |
| Pick two of the three | Sunday, October 25, by 4:00 pm, digitally via Moodle | Find an article in a scholarly sociology journal ¹ that uses Marx, Durkheim, Weber, or Simmel as the core theoretical basis for the empirical research it describes. Describe the intent of the article (what is it trying to prove or demonstrate?) and then explain how its empirical findings illuminate or discount the ideas of the theorist in question. <i>Note: This should be about four pages, double-spaced, and you should reference specific quotes from our primary Kavisto text.</i> Required filename: [lastname_theory_oct25] |
| | Sunday, November 8, by 4:00 pm, digitally via Moodle | Pick two of the four “schools” about which we have recently read: functionalism, conflict, symbolic interactionism, structuralism/post-structuralism. Analyze an introductory textbook’s characterization of these schools. <i>Note: This should be about four pages, double-spaced, and you should reference specific quotes from our primary Kavisto text.</i> Required filename: [lastname_theory_nov8] |
| | Sunday, December 6, By 4:00 pm, digitally via Moodle | Pick one of the articles from our list of “other classics.” Find another article written by the same author either before or after the classic we read. How does the article you found reflect the theoretical ideas described in the article we read as a class? <i>Note: This should be about four pages, double-spaced, and you should reference specific quotes from the article you pick.</i> Required filename: [lastname_theory_dec6] |
| Mandatory | Sunday, December ____ By 4:00 pm, digitally via Moodle | Take home exam! Required filename: [lastname_theory_takehome] |

¹ Try *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Sociological Forum*, or *Sociological Quarterly*.

Reading Calendar

Introduction

Tuesday, September 8
- Reading: None

Thinking about theory

Thursday, September 10
- Reading: Connell: “Why is Classical Theory Classical?” [course pack]
Tuesday, September 15
- Reading: Wolfe: “The Two Faces of Social Science” [course pack]
- Reading: Merton: “The Uses and Abuses of Classical Theory” [course pack]

Karl Marx

Thursday, September 17
- Reading: Marx: “Alienated Labor” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Marx: “Manifesto of the Communist Party” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
Tuesday, September 22
- Reading: Marx: “Commodities” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Marx: “The General Formula for Capital” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Emile Durkheim

Thursday, September 24
- Reading: Durkheim: “On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Durkheim: “What is a Social Fact?” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
Tuesday, September 29
- Reading: Durkheim: “Anomic Suicide” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Durkheim: “The Human Meaning of Religion” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Max Weber

Thursday, October 1
- Reading: Weber: “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science & Social Policy” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Weber: “The Spirit of Capitalism” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
Tuesday, October 6
- Reading: Weber: “Bureaucracy” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Weber: “The Nature of Charismatic Domination” [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Georg Simmel

Thursday, October 8

- Reading: Simmel: "Conflict as the Basis of Group Formation" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Simmel: "The Philosophy of Money" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Tuesday, October 13 – TRINITY DAYS. NO CLASS.

Classical theory applied to modern times

Thursday, October 15

- Reading: Walsh & Zacharias-Walsh: "Working Longer, Living Less" [Kavisto, *Illuminating...*]
- Reading: Ritzer: "The Weberian Theory of Rationalization" [Kavisto, *Illuminating...*]

Tuesday, October 20

- Reading: Hornsby: "Surfing the Net for Community" [Kavisto, *Illuminating...*]
- Reading: Staudenmeier: "Alcohol-Related Windows..." [Kavisto, *Illuminating...*]

Functionalism

Thursday, October 22

- Reading: Merton: "Unanticipated Consequences of Social Action" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Alexander: "After Neofunctionalism" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Conflict theory

Tuesday, October 27

- Reading: Coser: "The functions of Social Conflict" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Collins: "The Basics of Conflict Theory" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Symbolic interactionism

Thursday, October 29

- Reading: Blumer: "Society as Symbolic Interaction" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Goffman: "Performances" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism

Tuesday, November 3

- Reading: Bourdieu: "Structure and the Habitus" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]
- Reading: Foucault: "Panopticism" [Kavisto, *Social Theory*]

Other classics

- Thursday, November 5
 - Reading: Becker (1953): “Becoming a Marihuana User” [course pack]
- Tuesday, November 10
 - Reading: Granovetter (1973): “The Strength of Weak Ties” [course pack]
- Thursday, November 12
 - Reading: Dimaggio & Powell (1983): “The Iron Cage Revisited” [course pack]
- Tuesday, November 17
 - Reading: Gieryn (1983): “Boundary-work and the Demarcation of Science” [course pack]
- Thursday, November 19
 - Reading: Swidler (1986): “Culture in Action” [course pack]
- Tuesday, November 24
 - Reading: Chambliss (1989): “The Mundanity of Excellence” [course pack]
- Thursday, November 26 – THANKSGIVING
- Tuesday, December 1
 - Reading: Hayes (1994): “Structure & Agency & the Sticky Problem of Culture” [course pack]
- Thursday, December 3
 - Reading: Brekhus (1998): “A Sociology of the Unmarked” [course pack]

Theory and method

- Tuesday, December 8
 - Reading: Burawoy (2002): “Revisits” [course pack]
- Thursday, December 10
 - Reading: Abbott (1991): “History and Sociology” [course pack]