

Sociology 320

Sociological Theory

Spring 2004

Course Syllabus

I. **General Information**

Professor: Dr. S.K. Sanderson

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30-1:00; Wednesdays, 11:00-1:00

II. **Required Reading Materials**

1. John A. Hughes, Peter J. Martin, and W.W. Sharrock, ***Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx, Weber, Durkheim***. London: Sage Publications, 1995.
2. Randall Collins, ***Four Sociological Traditions***. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
3. Packet of lecture outlines and partial class notes. (Available at Pro-Packet in the University Square Mall.)
4. Two articles on electronic library reserve.

III-A. **Course Content**

This course is an introduction to sociological theory and will take an historical approach. It will survey the leading classical thinkers and contemporary schools of sociological theory from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. I will spend a good deal of time talking about the major classical theorists – Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber – and

showing their impact on the development of the sociological theory of the past 50 years. In the past I have talked about the classical theorists at the beginning of the course and followed them with contemporary theory. I now feel, however, that it is best to integrate the classical and contemporary materials as we go along.

Our primary concern throughout the semester will be to gain a coherent understanding of the most important approaches or perspectives that have been vying for the attention of sociologists and other social theorists over the last century and a half. Since I believe that theoretical work of considerable importance to sociology has been produced by people calling themselves anthropologists, we shall investigate certain theoretical developments within that field as well. In looking at the major approaches in social theory, we shall explore their major assumptions and premises, compare and contrast them with each other, and attempt to assess the extent to which each provides adequate answers to the long-standing questions that have preoccupied social theorists. In assessing each approach, we must ultimately ask how it advances our basic understanding of the operation of the social world. My own thinking is that some approaches advance our understanding much more than do others.

III-B. Course Structure

This will be a lecture course, and I will lecture every class period. Students are expected to keep up with their reading assignments and to keep a good set of notes. Students are encouraged to ask questions or make pertinent observations, and discussion and debate are welcomed.

IV. Examinations

There will be four major examinations. The first three consist of multiple choice and true-false questions. The final exam, which is partly comprehensive, includes multiple choice, true-false, and matching questions.

V. Term Paper

Each student is required to write a paper for the course. Your project is this: Select those two theoretical strategies (not theories) that have impressed you the most, and then those two that have impressed you the least. Write a paper of not less than 2,500 words in which you explain your reasoning as to why you have selected the strategies that you have. Then, within each theoretical strategy, choose one representative theory and explain why you think this theory demonstrates that the strategy is persuasive or unpersuasive.

You will be graded on how well you support your choices, not on the choices you make!! Your reasoning should not be a matter of pure personal opinion, but of actual thinking about the theoretical perspectives. Do not choose a strategy simply because you “like” (or “dislike”) it, but because you think it has real explanatory content (or lacks explanatory content).

Your paper will be graded on both content and structure. It should conform to the standard rules of English grammar, spelling, and punctuation. (See the accompanying handout for details.) Final papers should be neatly typed without any typographical errors. They should contain a cover page with a creative title – I give a best title award of 5 extra points – your name, the name of the course, my name, and the date. Number all of your pages and provide a precise word count at the bottom of the last page. I also give a best paper award of 5 extra points.

Every paper must reflect your own original work. You may use other sources, but they must be appropriately cited and a bibliography attached at the end. You must use your own words, or, if quoting, put the quoted material in quotation marks and provide a page number.

The paper will be due on the final Friday of the semester. This is to allow you to learn about all of the approaches before your paper is finalized.

VI. Grading

Your final grade is determined by your performance on the four exams and the term paper. The exams and the term paper count 100 points each. I use the following grading scale: 85% and above = A; 75-84% = B; 65-74% = C; 50-64% = D; Below 50% = F.

VII. My Educational Philosophy

I am a rather old-fashioned, no-nonsense professor. I have a reputation on this campus as one of the more demanding instructors and harder graders. I expect my students to work hard and to put forth a strong effort. A great deal of information is given out in class, and you must pay close attention all the time. In the classroom I am often weaving together complex arguments, some of which take a fair amount of time to develop. You have to stay focused and keep your mind from wandering. Once it starts to wander, you are in trouble. If you miss an essential piece of an argument, you miss the whole thing.

For me, the most important purpose of education is to expand the powers of the mind and increase the amount of knowledge at your command. Becoming an educated person is hard, but it is a terrific accomplishment. It is one of the most important things a person can do. Education is not simply about learning things you will need on a job. In fact, very little of

what you learn in college has any direct relevance for that. This may surprise you, but it's true nonetheless. Education is for life, not just for a job.

If you do the things I ask of you, you may very well earn a high grade. But even more importantly, you will learn a great deal, and the two together should give you a strong sense of pride and satisfaction.

VIII. *A Few Course Rules*

1. **Stay focused and listen to me.** Don't talk to your neighbor.
2. **Please do not get up and leave the room during class.** I have noticed in recent years that some students do this. Apparently they go to get a drink, go to the bathroom, etc. Getting up and moving around can be distracting to me and your fellow students. Get your drinks and make your bathroom trips before and after class, not during.
3. **Food and drink are prohibited in classrooms in McElhaney Hall!** If our classroom is in another building, please limit your eating and drinking in class to minimal proportions. One semester a few students in one of my classes ate their dinner in class, and in another semester some students practically had a picnic during the break! This is not appropriate, no matter what the circumstances.
4. **Be on time for class!** Class begins right on time every day. I will be here, and you be here, too.
5. **Attendance is required.** You cannot be successful in this course unless you attend it regularly. I will give you no more than 2 unexcused absences. Once you have 3, you lose a letter on your final grade (and lose 2 letters for 6 absences, etc.). Naturally, if you have a good reason for missing – illness, family problem, IUP sponsored event requiring your participation, etc. – I will give you an excused absence, but you must document it. Scheduling a doctor's appointment or some other appointment during class time will not count as an excused absence, unless this is absolutely the only time you could make the appointment, and the appointment is absolutely necessary.

IX. *Course Outline and Reading Assignments*

Class

Meeting Topic & Reading Assignment

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| 1 | Course Introduction |
| 2 | The Nature and Logic of Social Theorizing (Collins, Prologue; Hughes, Martin, and Sharrock, chapter 1) |
| 3 | Emile Durkheim (Collins, chapter 3; Hughes, Martin, and Sharrock, chapter 4) |
| 4 | Durkheim (cont'd) |
| 5 | Functionalism (Collins, pp. 194-203) |
| 6 | Functionalism (cont'd) |
| 7 | Functionalism (cont'd) (Gans, "The Positive Functions of Poverty") |
| 8 | EXAM 1* |
| 9 | Karl Marx & Classical Marxism (Collins, pp. 47-81; Hughes, Martin, and Sharrock, chapter 2) |
| 10 | Marx & Classical Marxism (cont'd) |
| 11 | Marx & Classical Marxism (cont'd) |
| 12 | Neo-Marxism |
| 13 | Neo-Marxism (cont'd) |
| 14 | Neo-Marxism (cont'd) |
| 15 | EXAM 2* |
| 16 | Max Weber (Collins, pp. 81-92; Hughes, Martin, and Sharrock, chapter 3) |
| 17 | Weber (cont'd) |
| 18 | Neo-Weberianism (Collins, pp. 92-112) |

- 19 Neo-Weberianism (cont'd)
- 20 Social Constructionism (Collins, chapter 4)
- 21 Exchange & Rational Choice Theory (Collins, chapter 2)
- 22 Exchange & Rational Choice Theory (cont'd)
- 23 **EXAM 3***
- 24 Cultural Materialism
- 25 Cultural Materialism (cont'd)
- 26 Sociobiology
- 27 Sociobiology (cont'd)
- 28 Final summing up/Make-up day

Exam 4 is during finals week.

Be sure to read the article on reserve by me, "Eclecticism and Its Alternatives," an outline for which can be found near the end of your lecture packet. Also, read the discussions of the Sanderson-Ellis study and the Lord-Sanderson study, both found at the end of the class packet.

*Exam dates are provisional and subject to change.