

## INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY

Canons are not born, they are fabricated historical products. So it is true for sociology. Our canon, itself subject to change and dispute, includes the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. In modern times the sociological canon was largely created by Talcott Parsons in his *The Structure of Social Action*, published in 1937, which argues that Marshall, Pareto, Weber and Durkheim, unbeknownst to one another, were converging on a novel theory of social action -- Parsons' so-called voluntaristic theory of action -- around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of the four theorists two stuck -- Weber and Durkheim. Over time Parsons was attacked by conflict theorists, many of whom invoked the writings of Marx and Engels as offering deeper insights into the turbulent times of the 1960s. So Marx became part of the canon. There have been other candidates, too, from Georg Simmel to W.E.B. Du Bois, from Karl Polanyi to feminism, from Michel Foucault to Pierre Bourdieu. There is nothing static about the canon. Even as we confine ourselves to these three or four figures, we notice how each generation reads them differently. Today we read Weber and Durkheim in very different ways than Parsons did. Furthermore, as we shall see in the writing of Raewyn Connell, there are those who are opposed to the very idea of a canon.

The canon may be a historical product but it is not arbitrary. Canonical sociologists were in some way pioneers in developing sociology. Their theories of society embraced an understanding of differences between and within nations. At the same time the theories had to have a historical dimension, which, in turn, rendered the possibility of a future at odds with the present. They were, in some sense, utopians. Their theories had to be grounded in original empirical research, itself based on a sophisticated understanding of methodology and science. They were philosophers, researchers, and historians as well as theorists of society -- its components, its integration, its perpetuation, its transformation. Marx, Weber and Durkheim fit these criteria but they are not the only ones to do so.

Canonical theories not only satisfy certain individual requirements, they are also connected to one another in some unifying way. Thus Parsons saw in his canonical theories a convergence on a rather abstract theory of social action. Others have seen the canon as sharing an engagement with industrialization, with modernity, with particular types of social change or consensus, the relation between individual and society, assumptions about human nature, etc. In this course we will focus on the idea of division of labor -- what it means, its origins, its different forms, its conditions of existence and development, its past and its future, and its consequences for individuals and society. But we shall also ask how each theorist thinks of his or her own place in the division of labor and how that affects his or her theory. We will turn their theories onto themselves. As an expression of the realm of beliefs we will study the relation of religion to the division of labor in Marx, Durkheim and Weber.

There are different ways of teaching an introductory course on social theory. One way is to read extensively to get a broad sense of the classics and the issues they raise, while another way is to read intensively and mine texts for their meaning and contradictions. We will take the second road, what I call the ethnographic approach to social theory.

To underline the importance of careful reading every week you will write a no-more-than-250 word commentary on the readings to be posted on bcourses. They will lay the basis of class discussion. I will give you questions to consider each week to help focus your commentaries which will be due midnight Wednesday. At the end of the semester I will require a 10 page paper, reflecting on the course.

The readings are from:

- Robert Tucker (edited), *Marx-Engels Reader* (1971)
- Durkheim, *Division of Labor in Society* (translated by W.D. Halls)(1984)
- Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (translated by Karen Fields) (1995)
- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* (translated by Talcott Parsons)
- Hans Gerth and C Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* (1946)
- Max Weber, *Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949)
- Raewyn Connell, "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 102 no. 6, 1511-57 (1997)

## SCHEDULE

August 25

- INTRODUCTION

September 1

- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*. What is the division of labor? Where are its origins? What are its different forms? What are the conditions of its development? What is its future? What are its consequences? What role does the state play in the division of labor? How does Smith understand the gender division of labor? What about slavery?

September 8

- Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (pp.26-52). How do Marx and Bauer differ in their proposals to abolish religion? What are their understandings of the difference between Christianity and Judaism? What is the difference between political and human emancipation?

September 15

- Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (pp.146-65; 172-5;189-200)What is the German Ideology? What are the Premises of all History? What are the two components of the division of labor? What is the division of labor in the family?

What are the natural and voluntary divisions of labor? What are classes? What is Communism?

September 22

- Marx, *Wage Labor and Capital* (pp.203-18). What is the capitalist mode of production? What is the source of profit?
- Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (pp.700-717, 718-724) What are the origins, dynamics and future of capitalism?

September 29

- Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (pp.469-83). What are the dynamics of class struggle under capitalism? What is the state? What is the relation of classes to the state? (pp.186-8, 711, 713, 475).
- Marx, *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (pp.3-6). What are the (7) postulates of Historical materialism?

October 6

- Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. Preface to the First Edition (p.3-7) and Introduction, pp.33-38). What is the science of Sociology? Is the division of labor pathology or normal?
- Book I, chapter 1 (pp.41-56). What are the two notions of solidarity? How to measure solidarity? What is the relation between division of labor and solidarity?
- Book I, chapter 2 (pp.57-87). What is a crime? What is the function of punishment? What is the form of punishment? Mechanical solidarity and the state.

October 13

- Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* Book I, chapter 3 (pp.88-91, 96-100), chapter 5 (pp.131-35) and chapter 7 (158-80). What is organic solidarity? Restitutive Law. Durkheim's criticism of Spencer. Organic solidarity and the state. What happens to the collective consciousness under organic solidarity? What are the non-contractual elements of contract?

October 20

- Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* Book II, chapter 2 (pp.201-222). What are the origins and impetus behind the development of the division of labor?
- Book III, chapter 1,2,3 (pp.277-308). What are the abnormal forms of the division of labor?
- Conclusion (pp.309-319). What is the place of sociology in society?
- Preface to the Second Edition (pp.8-29). What is Durkheim's vision of the future of the division of labor?

October 27

- Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Introduction (pp.1-18); Conclusion (pp.418-448). How should one study religion? Where does it come from? What is the difference between science and religion? What happens to religion over time?

November 3

- Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Introduction (pp.13-31). What does Weber mean by rationalization? What is the Spirit of Capitalism (pp.47-78); What is the Protestant Ethic? The difference between Luther and Calvin? (pp.79-128) What is the connection between Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism? What is the difference between the origins and the reproduction of capitalism? (pp.155-183)

November 10

- Weber, *Bureaucracy*. What is bureaucracy (pp.196-204)? What are the origins, conditions of bureaucracy (pp.204-209, 224-228, 230-232)? What is the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy? Between power and knowledge (pp.232-235, 240-244)? Why is bureaucracy so permanent? What threatens bureaucracy? (pp.214-216, 228-30, 220-1).

November 17

- Objectivity essay

November 24

- HOLIDAY

December 1

- Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*. What is politics? What is the state? What are the types of politicians? How do political institutions differ in England, US and Germany? What is the vocation of politics? What are the qualities of the ideal-type politician? What are the dangers of politics? What is the relation between an ethic of absolute ends and an ethic of responsibility? What is the relation between science, politics and religion?
- Weber, *Science as a Vocation*. What are the conditions of the scientist qua teacher? What is the role of the teacher? What is science? What is the vocation of science? What is the relation between values and science? What are functions of science?

December 8

- Raewyn Connell, ““Why is Classical Theory Classical?” How was the canon created? How did it develop? What historical forces have shaped the canon? What has been neglected? Why is there a canon? What is the alternative to the canon?