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Investigation and Application

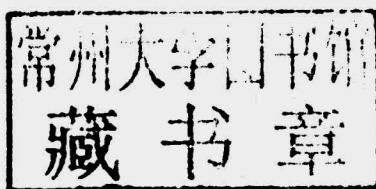
TIM DELANEY

Classical and Contemporary Social Theory

Investigation and Application

Tim Delaney

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Printer/Binder: Courier
Cover Printer: Courier
Text Font: Minion Pro, 10/12

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Delaney, Tim.

Classical and contemporary social theory : investigation and application / Tim Delaney, Ph.D., State University of New York at Oswego.

pages cm

ISBN-13: 978-0-205-25416-3 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-205-25416-0 (alk. paper)

1. Sociology—History. 2. Sociology—Philosophy. 3. Social sciences—Philosophy. I. Title.

HM435.D45 2014

301—dc23

2013017919

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PEARSON

ISBN 10: 0-205-25416-0
ISBN 13: 978-0-205-25416-3

Dedication

This book is dedicated in fond memory of Professor Herman Loether, Professor of Sociology at California State University at Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). Herm served the California State University system for forty years, ten at Cal State Los Angeles, and thirty at CSUDH. During those years he was awarded the Distinguished Professor award three times: once at CSULA and twice at CSUDH. Herm wrote several books and was known primarily for his social statistics textbook. But Dr. Loether was also an outstanding social theory professor. I met Dr. Loether while contemplating my own path in life after a near-fatal car crash on the 91 Highway near the 605 intersection in Los Angeles in 1988. Living in Redondo Beach, I decided to visit the nearby campus of CSUDH. Herm was the graduate coordinator of sociology at that time. He strongly encouraged me to attend graduate school and begin my studies by taking his social theory course. I loved it! In fact, I developed a passion for social theory that continues today. To Herm, thanks for the much-needed encouragement, and may you rest in peace. I will always remember you and our talks about social theory and life in general.

PREFACE

The study of sociological theory is a requirement of nearly all sociology majors across North America and around the world. Social theory tells the story of sociology. Social theory courses are designed to impart sociological knowledge and stimulate a student's ability to think critically and abstractly. *Classical and Contemporary Social Theory: Investigation and Application* provides extensive coverage of the major classical social theorists and the major sociological schools of thought in the contemporary era. The primary purpose of tackling such an enormous project in one text is an effort to address the growing number of social theory courses that cover both classical social theory and contemporary social theory.

Classical and Contemporary Social Theory: Investigation and Application is divided into three parts. Part I, "The Classical Period of Sociological Theory," consists of seven chapters that describe the early giants of sociological thought. Chapter 1 provides highlights and insights to the earliest roots of sociological thought, including the influence of the Enlightenment, social and political revolutions, and such early social thinkers as Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Claude-Henri Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and Herbert Spencer. Chapters 2–5 and 7 are centered on specific sociological social thinkers who have distinguished themselves in the field. In each of these chapters, discussion begins with a biographical review of the theorist. The biography of a person provides the reader with valuable insights into that theorist; such insights often foreshadow and predict the future ideology of that individual. As students read about the biography of famous social thinkers, they cannot help but wonder how their current life choices and decisions will influence who they become in the future. The biographies of social theorists also reveal that they are, after all, just human, and that they are/were just as capable of failings and misdeeds just like any one of us. In the world of reality TV and social networking, where the biographies of people draw the curiosity of millions, it should be clear then just how relevant the discussion of the biographies of social theorists is. A clever professor might teach this material as if it were current-day tabloid fodder: Now that would make a social theory course exciting. The major academic influences on each theorist will also be examined. This examination will help to reveal the social chain of knowledge that exists. In addition, it should be obvious that students need to be exposed to the key concepts and contributions of each theorist. Each chapter provides ample examples of specific concepts and ideas of the social theorist. The material is presented in a clear but academic manner. It is the discussion and analysis of each theorist's ideas and concepts that address the "Investigation" aspect of the title of this text. We will investigate the concepts and their sociological meanings. In Chapter 6, "Contributions from Women to Classical Social Theory," a number of significant social thinkers and their ideas are presented. Chapter 6 also explains how women have had to fight for equality in all spheres of life for centuries, and these struggles include the academic realm. It is worth noting that this is one of the very few texts on social theory that provides coverage of women's contributions to classical social theory.

Perhaps the most important goal to teaching social theory, or any class for that matter, is demonstrating the relevance of the materials taught in course to the students' daily lives. The word "Application" in the book title addresses the ideal of demonstrating the relevancy of sociological concepts. When students learn how to apply the ideas of classical social theorists to their own worlds, the concepts become more real to them. Before long, they will learn to apply any

and all sociological concepts to their daily lives. The application of concepts and social thought is a primary goal of this text, and ample examples of the relevancy of these theoretical constructs appear in all 16 chapters.

Upon successful completion of Part I, students should be able to describe and explain who the founders of and early thinkers of sociology were, as well as their contributions to the discipline and to social thought in general; demonstrate an understanding of classical sociological theories; demonstrate an ability to utilize these theories to analyze social phenomena; and think about past and contemporary social problems and social issues critically and analytically.

In Part II, "The Contemporary Period of Sociological Theory," the major schools of sociological thought are discussed. The contemporary period of sociological theory is notably different from the classical era. The classical period, which includes, more or less, the first 400+ years of social theory, was characterized by significant individual theorists, or grand theorists. The contemporary era of social theory, which begins roughly in the mid-twentieth century, is highlighted by the ideas of a collection of like-minded social thinkers whose combined efforts led to the formation of a "school of thought." In most cases, these schools of thought were influenced by social thinkers from the classical period, but old concepts were modified or replaced and a vast array of new concepts introduced. There are, in fact, so many new sociological concepts and social theories that it would be literally impossible to chronicle them all. As lofty of a goal put forth in this text (a text supported by approximately 900 bibliographic references), it was certainly not the intent of this author to attempt to chronicle every single social theory or sociological concept in existence today. Instead, the focus is on the "major," or the most popular, contemporary schools of thought.

This "schools of thought" approach to sociological social theory is easily understood when one realizes that in the social sciences, and sociology in particular, the disciplines have become very broad, while areas of specialty among individuals have become very narrow. Consequently, contemporary sociological theory has become dominated by "schools of thought" rather than by single theorists. In *Classical and Contemporary Social Theory: Investigation and Application*, coverage of the major schools includes a review of the intellectual roots of each theory and the early theorists who contributed to the theory (e.g., Marx's influence on the development of conflict theory and George Herbert Mead's influence on symbolic interactionism). This is provided to show the continuity from the classical period and to highlight the reality that nearly all contemporary ideas are influenced, at least in part, by past ideas. Next, discussion centers on the leading proponents of each of the major social theories. In fulfillment of the "Investigation" theme of the text, each school's major concepts are examined and the significant contributions of each theory to sociological thought are also discussed. Once again, the application of each theory to contemporary society is presented in an effort to demonstrate its relevancy. A brief review of the criticisms of each school of thought and a summary are provided at the conclusion of each chapter.

Upon successful completion of Part II, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the sociological perspective, demonstrate an understanding of current sociological theories and schools of thought, think about problems critically and analytically, and apply sociological understanding to real-world social issues.

Part III, "Consistent and Significant Themes in Sociological Theory," is applicable to the study of both classical and contemporary social theory. Chapter 16 provides a synopsis of several social themes of sociological significance that have revealed themselves as we study classical, contemporary, or both classical and contemporary social theory. These themes include a general

belief in progress and cultural evolution; technological growth; scarce resources; threats associated with overpopulation; capitalism and globalization; the development of a universal language; the dominant role of religion in society; and social injustice and the imbalance of power. Not only have past and present sociological social thinkers concerned themselves with these eight themes, but it is likely that future social thinkers will also have to contend with them. After all, any theme that has existed for 500 years is likely to extend itself into the future.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the folks at Pearson who helped with this project in production and editing, in particular, Mayda Bosco, Karen Hanson, and Nancy Roberts. I appreciate the assistance of the copy editors at Pearson and the helpful comments provided by reviewers: Lilli Downes, Polk State College; William Lugo, Eastern Connecticut State University; Allen Richardson, Cedar Crest College; Sharon Sarles, Austin Community College; and Catherine Solomon, Quinnipiac University.

As always, a very special thanks to my continued inspiration, Christina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Delaney has taught both classical and contemporary social theory courses along with combined classical and contemporary social theory courses for the past two decades. Regularly teaching social theory courses has kept Delaney focused on the presentation of the key concepts and ideas of classical theorists and contemporary “schools of thought.” In addition, Delaney also realizes that social theory is often abstract, and as a result, the application of theory to everyday life presents many opportunities for new and inventive ways of interpretation of theoretical perspectives. Teaching social theory courses on a regular basis has allowed Delaney to maintain a close connection with students and the material they find interesting and relevant. With these important points in mind, *Classical and Contemporary Social Theory: Investigation and Application* provides a thorough review of important theorists and their concepts while doing so in a student-friendly manner.

Delaney holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Nevada Las Vegas (1994) and an M.A. in sociology from California State University Dominguez Hills (1991). He is currently teaching at the State University of New York at Oswego, where he serves as an Associate Professor and Department Chair of Sociology. Delaney has published numerous books, chapters in books, encyclopedia articles, journal articles, and book reviews. Among his published books are *Classical Social Theory: Investigation and Application* (2004), *Contemporary Social Theory: Investigation and Application* (2005), *American Street Gangs* (2006), *Shameful Behaviors* (2008), *The Sociology of Sports: An Introduction* (2009) (co-authored), *Environmental Sustainability* (2011) (co-authored), *Connecting Sociology to Our Lives: An Introduction to Sociology* (2012), and *American Street Gangs, 2nd edition* (2013).

Delaney regularly presents papers at regional, national, and international conferences. His commitment to scholarly activity allows him to travel the world and learn first-hand the great diversity, and similarity, found among people from different cultures. Delaney maintains membership in more than a dozen academic associations and has twice served as President of the New York State Sociological Association.

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