

**ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

**Sociology 2033 B – Classical Sociological Theory
Fall 2017**

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-11:20, JDH G5

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:20-12:00 and 4:00 to 5:00 or by appointment

Description

Sociological theory is a conversation about the rise and development of the type of society we live in today, marked by powerful industrial and political forces and cultural ideals such as individual self-fulfilment, authenticity and anxiety about conformity. Our goal is to develop an understanding of this conversation, to recognize it in current events and everyday life. Students will also want to participate in the conversation – as scholars, but also as individuals, interested in the outcome of their own lives and in reflecting on how and why the lives we live look and feel the way they do. This class is designed to explore some of the key themes of classical sociological theory, with the intent of providing students with a better sense of the discipline's origins and its orientation to modern society. At the same time, we will be critical of this story. It is a European story, and glosses over its foundational conditions: colonialism, slavery, imperial wars and exploitation.

Sociology emerged as a discipline against the backdrop of significant social transformations in the 19th century. On the one hand, a nascent sociology was nourished by the ideals of the French Revolution of 1789, of the 18th Century Enlightenment, and of the new forces of science and technology which provided seemingly endless possibilities for the liberation of humanity from tyranny and material want. On the other hand, it emerged as part of a reaction against the excesses of the French Revolution (The 'Terror') and the human costs of industrialisation (The Pauper Question), the loss of meaningful worldviews and the rise of new forms of human oppression associated with bureaucracy, the factory and machine production. For the most part, classical sociology ignored the problems colonialism and slavery – though W.E.B. Du Bois in the United States provided keen insights on their lasting legacies.

We will flush out a fuller understanding of these developments and the on-going conversation about them in two broad brushstrokes. First, we will obtain a fuller appreciation for the historical formation of our discipline, one that will be of use to us in our reading of and engagement with contemporary theory (to say nothing of other specific interest areas within sociology, from education to social policy). As you will see, understanding where sociology came from will also help you make sense of a lot of other subject matter. Who knows, you may find you are much more passionate about the present than you ever really knew! Secondly, we will use the ideas discussed by the thinkers below to interrogate ourselves and the world in which we live, so that we may better understand where modern society came from and where it might be going. At this moment in history, there is no task that is more important.

Assignments

4 concept assignments (5% each): 20%

One full page in length, these are due on Tuesdays before lecture and focus on key concepts in the readings. These assignments are unstructured – they are designed to keep you engaged with the readings. All you need to do is to reflect on something in the reading for that week – it does not have to be a correct understanding of the reading. Your reading will improve over the semester.

YOU ARE HIGHLY ENCOURAGED TO GET THESE DONE IN THE FIRST 8 WEEKS OF CLASS

Mid-term exam: 20% (in class, November 7th)

The mid-term will focus on your understanding of key concepts in Marx, Durkheim and Weber.

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Theory Analysis Paper: 20% (due November 23rd)

This assignment will require you to select a concept or concepts developed in the course and apply it to a piece of contemporary artistic expression. Film and music try to say something about our lives. So too does sociological theory. Your task is to reflect on the similarities and perhaps differences between the theorists you have studied in the class, and musicians and film makers you may already be familiar with (or not familiar with). Some choices:

- “Modern Man,” Arcade Fire (2010) *The Suburbs*
- “Fake Plastic Trees,” Radiohead (1995) *The Bends*
- Revolutionary Road* (2008) Same Mendes, USA/Great Britain
- “Helplessness Blues,” The Fleet Foxes (2011) *Helplessness Blues*
- “I, Daniel Blake,” (2016) Ken Loach, Great Britain
- “Shrei nach Liebe,” die Ärzte (1993) *Die Bestie in Menschengestalt*

Do the ideas of classical sociological theorists resemble some of the ideas that contemporary artists are thinking about? What themes are expressed in the film or music similar to the ones that preoccupied theorists? How is this art connected to our contemporary experience of social change? What is it trying to express? What is the relationship between key course concepts and these contemporary experiences?

Your essay must be 1,000 to 1,250 words in length (word count should appear on the cover page). Your grade will be based on the quality of your writing, your engagement with the course material and with the music/film, and your ability to draw insightful connections between the theory and the music/film.

Final take home exam: 30% (due, Thursday, December 14th, noon)

Course Material

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Week 1: The Emergence of Sociology (September 7)

No reading

The lecture gives an outline of where sociological theory is coming from, what social and historical conditions it emerged from, and what its principle problems and concerns were. Emphasis is placed on the Enlightenment ideal of societal rationalisation, a process marked by technological improvement and increasing human freedom. Sociological theory is ambivalent towards the development of modern society, recognising the loss of standards of value, and the problems this loss poses. At the same time, sociological theory recognises in modernisation the potentialities of greater human freedom, particularly freedom from arbitrary authority, tradition, and religion.

Week 2: Karl Marx (September 12 and 14) – NOTE: these classes will be guest-lectured by Professor Kristi Allain

Readings (from package posted online):

1. Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, p. 16.
2. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, pp. 20-29.
3. Wage Labour and Capital, pp. 30-35.

Dr. Allain will guest lecture this week, and focus on Marx's method for understanding social change, as well as his critique of the condition of wage labour. Readings are provided on moodle.

Week 3: Karl Marx (September 19 and 21)

1. A Critique of the German Ideology, (from Week 2 readings package), pp. 5-15.
2. Marx, Karl and Engels Friedrich (1988) [1848], 'Bourgeois and Proletarians,' *The Communist Manifesto*, Bender (ed), New York: W.W. Norton & Co, pp. 54-66.

This week's reading will focus on how society is historically composed around a struggle between social classes. We will look at how Marx views class struggle, class consciousness, as well as ideology and the more recent Marxist concept of 'hegemony.' This latter is from the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, but is used frequently in Marxist sociology.

Week 4: Karl Marx (September 26 and 28)

Readings:

1. McNally, David (2011) 'Manic Depression: Capitalism and Its Recurring Crises,' in *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance*, Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, pp. 61-84.
2. Harvey, David (2014) 'Technology, Work and Human Disposability,' in *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University press, pp. 91-111.

Optional: Other chapters from David Harvey's *17 Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*

These lectures apply Marx's historical materialism to the historical developments of the postwar period. These Marxist thinkers draw our attention to what Marx called the 'contradictions' of contemporary historical development: a world system and global society dependent upon continuous capitalist growth that is increasingly difficult to achieve given the overdeveloped state of capitalist forces of production within contemporary relations of production. Readings are from more contemporary texts, since one of the things we will try to do is show how Marx's theory of capitalism might help us understand the tendencies in our own society.

Week 5: Max Weber (October 3 and 5)

Readings:

1. Weber, Max (1992) [1904-05] 'Author's Introduction' and 'The Spirit of Capitalism' in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. xxviii-xlii; 13-38.

These lectures focus on Weber's theory of capitalism. It deals in particular with Weber's attention to culture and his theoretical engagement with the work of Karl Marx and his followers and discusses his theory of the rise of capitalism, as well as some of its unique problems.

Week 6: Max Weber (October 10 and 12)

Readings:

1. Weber, Max (1992) [1904-05] 'Luther's Conception of the Calling' and 'Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism' in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 39-50; 102-125.

Optional: Weber, pp. 56-80 (if you want to understand American culture, I recommend these pages on Calvinism).

These lectures focus on Weber's theory of societal rationalisation and his critique of modern society, particularly of bureaucracy. The first lecture will finish our discussion of the emergence of capitalism in Weber's work, and connect it to his overriding theoretical concern with societal rationalisation, and with its implications for human freedom. While the readings for this week will deal principally with material from the first lecture, a second lecture will extend them into other aspects of Weber's work. We will discuss concepts such as rationalisation, disenchantment, and bureaucracy to get a broader sense of Weber's work.

Weeks 7 and 8: Emile Durkheim (October 17, 19, 24, and 26)

1. Durkheim, Emile (1966) [1895] "What is a Social Fact" in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, New York: Macmillan, pp. 1-13.
2. Durkheim, Emile (1984) [1893] "Preface to the Second Edition" *The Division of Labor in Society*, Coser (ed). New York: The Free Press, pp. xxxi-xlvi.
3. Durkheim, Emile (1968) [1912] "Origin of the Idea of the Totemic Principle or Mana" in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 206-223.

The readings for this week focus first on Durkheim's theory of the transformation of society from a traditional to a modern one. We will identify the problems Durkheim sees in modern society, and analyse the development of the modern division of labour and its pathologies

using his conceptual framework.

Week 9: Modernization and Early Feminist Sociology (October 31 and November 2)

1. Gilman, Charlotte Perkins (1913) "The Waste of Private Housekeeping," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 48: 91-95.
2. Coolidge, Mary Roberts (1912) "The Conventions of Girlhood," in *Why Women Are So*. New York: Henry Holt, pp. 3-18.

This week looks at women's reactions to industrialism, and to the potentialities of a more rational organization of the workplace and the private home. It also looks at the beginning of the women's movement, the Suffragettes, and the attempt by early women sociologists to shed light on the particularities of the condition of women in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Week 10: In-class Exam (November 7th)

The exam will be a sit-down exam composed chiefly of short-answer questions on main concepts from Weber, Durkheim and Marx.

Week 10: Film (November 9th)

Koyaanisqatsi (1983) Godfrey Reggio, USA

The film provides an artistic frame for viewing modern society, and will enable us to explore some of the key concepts of sociology. It will also help us to see how modern art is often also a reflection on our modernity, one that can sometimes be enhanced, critiqued or understood with knowledge of sociological theory.

Weeks 11 & 12: Sigmund Freud and the Unconscious (November 14, 16, 21 and 23)

Freud, Sigmund (1930) *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

The lectures will be an introduction to the work of Freud and will situate him within sociological thought. Better known as the founder of psychoanalysis and an important thinker in psychological theory, Freud has also provided some important insights to sociologists, particularly feminist and gender approaches, as well as Marxist and critical cultural approaches in the latter half of the 20th century. We will spend some time discussing Freud's view of the development of society and its particular pathologies, and we will place these into dialogue with other theorists discussed in the course.

Week 13: W.E.B. Du Bois (November 28 and 30)

DuBois, W.E.B. (1994) [1903] 'Of Our Spiritual Strivings,' in *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York: Dover Publications, pp. 1-7.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1969) [1935] "Back Toward Slavery" and selection from "The Propaganda of History," *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*. New York: Atheneum, pp. 670-710; 727-728.

This week we look at African American intellectual and activist W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois

was largely ignored by American sociology in the 1940s to the 1990s, but was an important forerunner of the Civil Rights movement, and has been reclaimed, since the 1990s, as a canonical figure of American Sociology. Lecture and discussion will focus on two main contributions that Du Bois made to the sociology of race. First, we will overview his concepts of double consciousness and the veil, which he says shapes the identity and interaction of African Americans. Secondly, Du Bois also realized that race would be the main issue for the United States in the 20th century, especially given the ‘return to slavery’ initiated at the end of Reconstruction in the U.S. South with the Jim Crow system of racial segregation in the U.S. South, a trauma from which the United States has not yet emerged. Race and racial inequality has now become a global issue, all while remaining central to the reaction against the Obama presidency and the rise of Donald Trump and American neo-fascism in the United States.

Week 14: Conclusion to the Course (December 5)

The craft of sociology in turbulent times.