

Sociology 475: Classical Sociological Theory

Lecture 2, Monday & Wednesday 2:30-3:45, 6101 Social Science

Contact Info

Peter Brinson

pbrinson@ssc.wisc.edu

Office: 8107 Social Science

Phone: 262-1933

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday after class (3:45-5:00)

Description

Theory is not just philosophy. It is not the province of dead white guys only. Fundamentally, theory is about *explaining* what we observe about the world around us. *Sociological* theory, then, is oriented towards understanding society, with a particular emphasis on how the thoughts and actions of you, the individual, are shaped by interactions, the political and economic systems, your religious and cultural contexts, and other societal institutions. What people do cannot be explained without considering the relations among individuals, groups, and large social structures. This relationship between the individual and the collective is, in a nutshell, what sociological theory is all about. That's the easy part. The hard part is figuring out what those relationships are, how they work, and why.

In this course, our labor will consist in examining three of the most influential such efforts. Hence, we will be studying primarily the writings of three dead white guys: Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. In these writings, we find some of the most powerful and influential theories of the social world ever conceived. It is why we still read them today. At times, the reading will be dry and boring; other times, and I kid you not, it will be beautiful and poetic. The course will not be easy; but an investment of time and energy from you will hopefully make it rewarding.

“But to what end?” you ask. In the humble opinion of Yours Truly, there are two really good reasons for putting forth this intellectual effort, and they will serve as our two goals for the course:

- 1) Dedicated, meticulous reading of these classic texts is its own reward. You will learn much about the world around us that we take for granted: what we often refer to in the abstract as “modernity.” What are the significant features of capitalism, democracy, science, religion, and civil society, and how do they shape the social world? These writers lived long ago, but they can teach us how modern society is different from other societies in different times and places. You will learn important concepts like alienation, rationalization, and the collective consciousness and why they matter. In these readings, you will also learn the ways in which sociologists conduct research, make arguments, and construct theories.

- 2) Reading how other people have attempted to understand and explain the social world around them can help you understand and explain your own world. All of the “classical” sociological theorists passed away by roughly the end of World War I. It is worth considering how these social theories fit in today’s world: in what ways can we follow the old paths through today’s sociological woods, and in what ways might we need to blaze a new trail? In what ways does our post-modern, post-industrial, post-whatever society still resemble the modern societies these authors wrote about, and in what ways has it fundamentally changed? As students of sociology and the social world, the goal of understanding and explaining what we observe around us is an unfinished task.

It is with these two goals in mind that we begin this class, and I have tried to design this course around the pursuit of them. I cannot promise that you will reach the destination, but as with life itself, the reward is in the journey.

Readings

The following texts are on sale in Rainbow Bookstore (426 W. Gilman). These books will also be on reserve in College Library. All texts are required reading, but you do not have to purchase them. If you do decide to purchase them used, in most cases, you do not have to purchase the exact edition that I have ordered. The pagination may be different in some versions, but the content will be more or less the same.

- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. 1966. Harper and Row.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker. 1978. Norton.
- Weber, Max. *From Max Weber*. ed, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. 1958. Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max. *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. 1992. Routledge.
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. 1997. Free Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. 2001. Oxford University Press. (abridged edition)
- Ritzer, George. *McDonaldization of Society*. 2004. Pine Forge Press.

There will also be a course packet available for purchase in the Social Science Copy Center, down the hall. There are only six readings in it, and it should be relatively inexpensive. However, you do not have to purchase it; a copy will also be placed on reserve in College Library. In addition, the sources from which the copies come are widely available in the campus libraries, so you can get these readings in a number of ways.

Requirements

Your grade will be composed as follows. Details are below:

15% Attendance & Participation

10% Weekly Questions/Comments

25% First Exam

25% Second Exam

25% Third Exam

Attendance & Participation I will take attendance every day during lecture. You will get 2 free absences before you are penalized. As for participation, you will be graded on your engagement with the readings and contributions to class discussion. While I could spend each class period lecturing at you, it would be a waste of both your time and mine. The more that you ask questions, make comments, and critically interrogate the readings and ideas, the more you will learn. The readings in this class are very difficult, and the ideas contained in them are even more difficult, so THERE ARE NO STUPID QUESTIONS. If you don't know what's going on, you are probably not alone. I would much rather you speak up than let me ramble on about things you don't understand. The same goes for analyzing and evaluating the readings. Everyone learns more when you don't just accept things at face-value and instead critically examine and question the ideas.

Weekly Questions/Comments Each week, you will be responsible for posting one question or comment that is substantively relevant to the class on the course website on Learn@UW. These questions and comments are intended to be forums for you all to discuss issues that are raised by the class. They are intended to stimulate critical thinking and discussion both online and in the classroom. They will be ungraded; you either get credit for doing it, or you don't (nevertheless, I retain the right to judge comments and questions as being not substantively relevant to the class, and therefore not deserving of credit). Each question or comment should be based on something from the readings, from lecture/discussion, or in response to some other post in the forum.

A question or comment will be required for 12 of the 15 weeks (excepting Week 1, Week 8, and Week 12, the weeks you have exams). You shall have the question or comment posted online on the Tuesday of that week (due by midnight). This will give me a chance to read over them before class on Wednesday.

Here's how to post your questions/comments:

1. Go to <https://learnuw.wisc.edu/>
2. Log in with your UW net ID and password.
3. Click on the link to the "soc475" class under the "Spring '08" heading.
4. Click on "Discussion" in the top left corner.
5. Click on the "Questions & Comments" link for the appropriate week.
6. Click "Add Message" on the right hand side.
7. Type your question or comment, and click "Submit."

Exams There will be three exams in this class, each worth 25% of your grade. The first exam will be in class on Monday, March 10, and will cover everything in the first 7 weeks of class (the philosophical/historical background and the unit on Marx). The second exam will be in class on Monday, April 14, and will cover the unit on Max Weber. The third exam will be at the regularly scheduled final exam time, Friday, May 16, at 2:45 p.m. (location TBA). It will cover the unit on Emile Durkheim ONLY; it will NOT be comprehensive. Hence, all exams are of equal weight. The exams will consist of short answer and essay questions.

Miscellaneous

Class Email List: soc475-2-s08@lists.wisc.edu. I will periodically send out reminders, updates, and information about the course (and probably some miscellaneous junk, too). In order to receive these emails (and be able to send emails to the list), you must be registered for the course. In addition, your current email address must be on file with the Registrar's office. If you do not get an email from me within the first two weeks of the course, you may need to make sure that this information is correct. You can update your email address through MyUW.

Calendar

Philosophical and Historical Background

Week 1 (Jan. 23)—Course Introduction

Week 2 (Jan. 28 & 30)—Modernity & Liberalism

Readings:

- Robert A. Nisbet, "The Two Revolutions," in *The Sociological Tradition*, pp. 21-44. [COURSE PACKET]
- Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Book 1, Ch. 1-3; Book 3, Ch. 1; Book 4, Ch. 2) [COURSE PACKET]

Week 3 (Feb. 4 & 6)—Alexis de Tocqueville

Readings:

- *Democracy in America, Volume 1:*
 - Part 1: Author's Introduction; Ch. 3; Ch. 5 (pp. 61-70, 87-98 only).
 - Part 2: Ch. 3; Ch. 4; Ch. 6; Ch. 9; Ch. 10 (pp. 340-348 only).
- *Democracy in America, Volume 2:*
 - Part 2: Ch. 2; Ch. 4-8
 - Part 3: Ch. 1

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Week 4 (Feb. 11 & 13)—Marx: Early Writings

Readings:

- "On the Jewish Question" (pp. 26-46 only)
- "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction" (pp. 53-54 only)
- "Estranged Labor" (pp. 70-81)

Week 5 (Feb. 18 & 20)—Marx: Historical Materialism

Readings:

- "Marx on the History of His Opinions" (pp. 3-6)
- "German Ideology" (pp. 148-166, 172-174, 189-193 only)

Week 6 (Feb. 25 & 27)—Marx: Political Economy

Readings:

- “Wage Labour and Capital” (pp. 203-217)
- Ch. I: Sections 1, 2, 4 (pp. 302-312, 319-329)
- Ch. VI (pp. 336-343)
- Ch. VII: Section 2 (pp. 351-361)
- Ch. X: Sections 1, 2 (pp. 361-367)
- Ch. XII (pp. 376-384)
- Ch. XXV-XXVI (pp. 419-434)
- Ch. XXXII (pp. 436-438)

Week 7 (March 3 & 5)—Marx’s Legacy

Readings:

- *Communist Manifesto* (pp. 473-491 only)
- V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (Ch. 1, 2, 5) [COURSE PACKET]

Exam 1: next Monday, March 10, in class

Max Weber (1864-1920)

Week 8 (March 10 & 12)—Weber: Politics and the State

Readings:

- *From Max Weber:*
 - “Class, Status, Party” (pp. 180-195)
 - “Politics as a Vocation” (pp. 77-86 only)

*******SPRING BREAK*******

Week 9 (March 24 & 26)—Weber: Rationalization and Disenchantment

Readings:

- *From Max Weber:*
 - “Science as a Vocation” (pp. 129-156)
 - “Bureaucracy” (pp. 196-209; 212-231; 240-244 only)

Week 10 (March 31 & April 2)—Weber: Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Readings:

- *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism:*
 - Author’s Introduction
 - Ch. 1-3; Ch. 4 (pp. 53-80 only); Ch. 5

Week 11 (April 7 & 9)—Weber’s Legacy: Rationalization and Disenchantment

Readings:

- George Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* (Ch. 1, 2, 3, 7)

Exam 2: next Monday, April 14, in class

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Week 12 (April 14 & 16)—Durkheim: Suicide as Social Fact

Readings:

- *Suicide*: [COURSE PACKET]
 - Introduction
 - Book 2: Ch. 2; Ch. 3 (pp. 208-216 only); Ch. 5 (pp. 241-258 only)
 - Book 3: Ch. 1 (pp. 297-300; 321-325 only)

Week 13 (April 21 & 23)—Durkheim: Solidarity and Social Order

Readings:

- *Division of Labor in Society*:
 - Preface to the First Edition
 - Book 1: Ch. 1; Ch. 2 (pp. 38-47, 60-64 only); Ch. 3 (pp. 68-72, 81-87 only); Ch. 5 (pp. 101-106, 118-123 only); Ch. 7 (pp. 172-174 only)
 - Book 2: (pp. 200-205 only)
 - Book 3: Ch. 1; Conclusion

Week 14 (April 28 & 30)—Durkheim: Religion

Readings:

- *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*:
 - Introduction
 - Book 1: Ch. 1
 - Book 2: Ch. 1; Ch. 3; Ch. 7
 - Conclusion

Week 15 (May 5 & 7)—Durkheim's Legacy: Deviance & Social Order

Readings:

- Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans* (pp. 1-23; 67-71; 137-159) [COURSE PACKET]
- Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America." [COURSE PACKET]

Exam 3: Friday May 16, 2:45 p.m. Location TBA