

Sociology 475: Classical Sociological Theory

MWF 2:25-3:15, 6228 Social Science

Contact Info

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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 the University Bookstore. 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. Be warned, though: I will be referring to quotes in class by page number when we go over the readings, so it will be helpful to have the edition that is on sale at the bookstore or in the library.

- 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 four 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 10 of the 15 weeks. You do NOT have to turn in comments this week (Week 1), the weeks in which you have an exam (Weeks 8, 12, and 15), and you get one additional free week of your choice. You shall have the question or comment posted online on the Thursday of that week (due by midnight). This will give me a chance to read over them before class on Friday.

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 "Fall '09" heading.
4. Click on "Discussion" in the top left corner.
5. Click on the "Questions & Comments" link for the appropriate week.
6. Click "Compose" on the left hand side.
7. Type your question or comment, and click "Post."

Exams There will be three exams in this class, each worth 25% of your grade. The first exam will be in class on Monday, October 19, 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, November 16, and will cover the unit on Max Weber. The third exam will be in class on Friday, December 11. 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: soc475-4-f09@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—Introduction & Modernity

- W 9/2 Introduction (No reading for today)
- F 9/4 Robert A. Nisbet, “The Two Revolutions,” in *The Sociological Tradition*, pp. 21-44. [COURSE PACKET]

Week 2—Liberalism & Conservatism

- M 9/7 NO CLASS (Labor Day)
- W 9/9 Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Book 1, Ch. 1-3; Book 3, Ch. 1; Book 4, Ch. 2) [COURSE PACKET]
- F 9/11 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume 1*: Author’s Introduction. Also check out <http://www.tocqueville.org/chap4.htm>. See especially “Tocqueville and Beaumont’s Itinerary” and the links to their journal entries.

Week 3—Alexis de Tocqueville

- M 9/14 *Democracy in America, Volume 1*: [Part 1: Ch. 3; Ch. 5 (pp. 61-70, 87-98 only)] & [Part 2: Ch. 3; Ch. 4; Ch. 6]
- W 9/16 *Democracy in America, Volume 1*: [Part 2: Ch. 9; Ch. 10 (pp. 340-348 only)]
- F 9/18 *Democracy in America, Volume 2*: [Part 2: Ch. 2; Ch. 4-8] & [Part 3: Ch. 1]

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Week 4—Marx: Early Writings

- M 9/21 *Marx-Engels Reader*: “Introduction” by Robert Tucker (pp. xxvii-xxxii only)
“Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction” (pp. 53-54 only)
- W 9/23 *Marx-Engels Reader*: “On the Jewish Question” (pp. 26-46 only)
- F 9/25 *Marx-Engels Reader*: “Estranged Labor” (pp. 70-81)

Week 5—Marx: Historical Materialism

- M 9/28 *Marx-Engels Reader*: “Marx on the History of His Opinions” (pp. 3-6)
“German Ideology” (pp. 148-155 only)
- W 9/30 *Marx-Engels Reader*: Continue reading “German Ideology” (pp. 155-166, 172-174, 189-193 only)

F 10/2 *Marx-Engels Reader*: “Wage Labour and Capital” (pp. 203-217)

Week 6—Marx: Capital

M 10/5 *Marx-Engels Reader*: Ch. I: Sections 1, 2, 4 (pp. 302-312, 319-329)
Ch. VI (pp. 336-343)

W 10/7 *Marx-Engels Reader*: Ch. VII: Section 2 (pp. 351-361)
Ch. X: Sections 1, 2 (pp. 361-367)
Ch. XII (pp. 376-384)

F 10/9 *Marx-Engels Reader*: Ch. XXV-XXVI (pp. 419-434)
Ch. XXXII (pp. 436-438)

Week 7—Marx’s Legacy

M 10/12 *Marx-Engels Reader*: *Communist Manifesto* (pp. 473-491 only)

W 10/14 V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (Ch. 1, 2, 5) [COURSE PACKET]

F 10/16 Conclusion & Review (No reading for today)

Exam 1: next Monday, October 19, in class

Max Weber (1864-1920)

Week 8—Weber: Politics and the State

M 10/19 **EXAM: MARX**

W 10/21 *From Max Weber*: “Class, Status, Party” (pp. 180-195)

F 10/23 *From Max Weber*: “Politics as a Vocation” (pp. 77-86 only)

Week 9—Weber: Bureaucracy and Rationalization

M 10/26 *From Max Weber*: “Science as a Vocation” (pp. 129-156)

W 10/28 *From Max Weber*: “Bureaucracy” (pp. 196-209; 212-216 only)

F 10/30 *From Max Weber*: “Bureaucracy” (pp. 216-231; 240-244 only)

Week 10—Weber: Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

M 11/2 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: Author’s Introduction, Ch. 1-2

W 11/4 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: Ch. 3, Ch. 4 (pp. 53-80 only)

F 11/6 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: Ch. 5*

Week 11—Weber’s Legacy: Rationalization and Disenchantment

M 11/9 George Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society*, Ch. 1-2

W 11/11 George Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society*, Ch. 3, 7

F 11/13 Conclusion & Review (No reading for today)

Exam 2: next Monday, November 16, in class

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Week 12—Durkheim: Solidarity and Social Order

M 11/16 **EXAM: WEBER**

W 11/18 *Division of Labor in Society*: Introduction by Lewis Coser

F 11/20 *Division of Labor in Society*: Preface to the First Edition; Book 1 [Ch. 1]

Week 13—Durkheim: Division of Labor in Society

M 11/23 *Division of Labor in Society*: Book 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)

W 11/25 *Division of Labor in Society*: Book 3 (Ch. 1); Conclusion

F 11/27 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Week 14—Durkheim: Religion

M 11/30 *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: Introduction; Book 1 (Ch. 1)

W 12/2 *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: Book 2 (Ch. 1, 3, 6)

F 12/4 *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: Book 2 (Ch. 7); Conclusion

Week 15—Durkheim’s Legacy: Crime and Deviance

M 12/7 Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans* (pp. 1-23; 67-71; 137-159) [COURSE PACKET]

W 12/9 Conclusion & Review (No reading for today)

F 12/11 **EXAM: DURKHEIM**