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2025 Summer Session: Classical Social Theory

Mondays & Wednesdays 1-4pm, 423 Kent Hall

This course is designed as an introduction to the work of sociology's foundational figures: Karl Marx, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, as well as Georg Simmel and William E.B. DuBois. Sociology is a young discipline, and the canon as we know it today is even younger. At the time these authors published, they were not regarded as the greats – some, not even as sociologists. But over time, a solidifying corpus of texts, concepts, methods and arguments emerged: a stream of thought drawing its path of response, critique, and refinement. With enough material and insight to read more on your own, this class aims to provide you with a foundation for understanding the more diverse landscape of social theory today.

Requirements, grading and assignments

Attendance and participation will make up 20% of your final grade. Attendance is recorded. Another 30% will be made up of the average of 3 handwritten tests I will distribute in class – they will be easy if you've done the reading and paid attention. The final 50% of your grade comes from two short essays, due as a take-home final at 23:59 on July 7th. Prompts will be announced in class.

Session structure

Our sessions will run 1-4pm on Mondays and Wednesdays during summer session A. Come to class having done all the readings for the session that day. We will begin with a lecture, some conversation, and I'll answer your questions. Then it will be my turn to ask you some questions, and I'll let you have some quiet reading time to answer them. We'll end with a second, more open discussion. On each Wednesday for the weeks of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, you'll write a 30-minute quiz on paper at the end of class testing your reading comprehension.

On the use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is going to become more important every month and year to come, and being skilled at incorporating it into any task you complete will be crucial for your success. Think deeply about how to use it best, test different functionalities, get better at prompting, and become faster and smarter with it than you were before. It's up to you whether you let the LLM

take the most creative aspects of study from you or whether you use it to expand what you're capable of. Stay vigilant, take a critical eye to its outputs, and don't let it deskill you. The handwritten tests mean you can't get an A in this class without actually doing the reading. I'm not sure I can catch you "cheating" on the final – if you want to slack off, it's your life. But if you haven't done the work you'll likely not recognize what an A grade final essay is even if you use ChatGPT to write it.

Office Hours

Office hours are by appointment at my office, or via Zoom. Please come with questions or a clear agenda for our meeting.

READING LIST

Introduction (May 28th)

Connell, Robert William. 'Why is classical theory classical?' *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 102(6) 1997: 1511-1557.

Mills, C. Wright. 'The Promise' *The Sociological Imagination*, Chapter 1. (1959).

MARX (June 2nd, June 4th)

Alienation and the materialist conception of history

Marx, Karl. 1844. 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', p. 70-81 & 93-105 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

Marx, Karl. 1844. 'Alienation and Social Classes' p. 133-135 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

Marx, Karl. 1844. 'Theses on Feuerbach' p. 143-145 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

The labor theory of value, critique of capitalism and revolution

Marx, Karl. 1849. 'Wage Labor and Capital' p. 203-217 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

Marx, Karl (Ed. Friedrich Engels). 1887. *Capital*, Volume 1: Ch. 26 'The Secret of Primitive Accumulation' Ch. 27, 'Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land,' Ch. 31 'Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist', Ch. 32 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation.' p. 431-438 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1883. 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', p. 473-483 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

WEBER (June 9th, June 11th)

Rationalization and disenchantment

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Part I and II, Selections.

Weber, Max. *Economy & Society Vol 1*. 'The Definition of Sociology and of Social Action', 'Types of Social Action'.

Power and domination

Weber, Max. *Economy & Society Vol 1*. 'Status Groups and Classes', 'The Types of Legitimate Domination', 'Bureaucracy'.

DURKHEIM (June 16th, June 18th)

Division of labor and anomie

Durkheim, Émile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Introduction, Book I: Ch. 1-3 (1902).

Durkheim, Émile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Introduction, Book III: Ch. 1 (1902).

Social facts and collective representations

Durkheim, Émile. *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 'What is a Social Fact?'

Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 'Conclusion.'

RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY (June 23rd, June 25th)

The Sociology of Race and Racism: W.E.B. DuBois

DuBois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America*. Ch. 1, 2 , 17 (1935)

Relational Sociology: Georg Simmel

Simmel, Georg. *On Individuality and Social Forms*. 'The Problem of Sociology', 'The Stranger', 'On Sociability'.

OUTLOOK AND REVIEW (June 30th, July 2nd)

TBD based on student interest.