CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Overview

“De te fabula narratur!”
— Karl Marx, quoting Horace, Preface to the first German edition of Capital, 1867

This course provides an introduction to three national traditions of social theory: French, German, and American. We will examine each of these traditions through the works of key theorists who shaped it and exemplified its major concerns from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. This is the classical period of sociology, when the fundamental ideas of the discipline first took shape. Those ideas were a response to the upheavals that shook Western societies during the long nineteenth century from 1789 and 1914, including democratization, modern industrial capitalism, and urbanization.

The course has two main objectives. The first is to investigate the nature and meaning of modernity. The chief task which classical sociology set for itself was to interpret and explain the modern world of which sociology itself was a product. The classical theorists asked, What is distinctive about the modern societies in which we now live? What distinguishes them from the pre-modern societies of the past? The second objective of the course is to familiarize you with some of the key concepts that the classical theorists created or redefined in order to answer these questions: democracy, capitalism, bureaucracy, and so forth. These concepts are important to learn because they still form part of the vocabulary of contemporary sociology; it is hard to speak the language of sociology without them. To the extent that we still live in a modern society and still use the concepts developed by the classical sociological theorists to understand it, classical sociological theory remains relevant for us today.

Course requirements and grades

An introductory sociology course (SOC 140, 181, 210, or 211) is a prerequisite for this course.

Section 003 will be taught at the Honors level but is unrestricted (open to all students).

The course involves intensive reading of primary sources. You are required to do a heavy amount of reading (roughly 80 pages per week) and to complete all required reading assignments before the class meeting in which we discuss them. To pass the course, you must be prepared to complete the reading assignments consistently throughout the semester. If you are unable or unwilling to do this much reading, you should drop the course now. Since we will refer to the assigned readings in class, please bring them with you each day. Please complete the reading(s) before the class in which we discuss them.

Requirements include:

1. **Attendance and participation:** Class time will be devoted to a combination of lecturing and discussion. You are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, and be prepared to participate actively and thoughtfully in class discussions based on the readings. You are encouraged to raise questions, which counts as participation. Perfect attendance will earn you at most the equivalent of a B for this portion of the grade; active (i.e., talking) participation is
required to earn more points. Frequent absences, tardiness, early departures, or lack of participation will reduce this portion of your grade.

2. **Three exams:** You are required to take three closed-book, in-class exams that focus on main concepts and arguments from the required reading assignments. The exam format is short-answer and essay questions. Blue books will be provided. There is no final exam during exam week. Students who miss an exam for verifiable reasons beyond their control may be given an opportunity to take a make-up exam at the instructor’s discretion. The date, time, location, and format (oral or written) of the make-up exam will also be at the instructor’s discretion.

3. A 1-2 page **prospectus** for a term paper on a course-related topic of your choice is due no later than the beginning of class on April 26. Please submit your prospectus through the dropbox in Learn@UW. The prospectus must indicate the question your paper will address (worth up to 2 points), its thesis (worth up to 2 points), the sources of textual evidence you will likely use (2 points), and how you plan to organize your paper (2 points).

4. A concise **term paper** of 5-7 pages, following the plan of an approved prospectus, is due no later than May 10, 2016, at 12:05 PM. Your paper must be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and paginated. Please upload a computer file of your paper to the designated dropbox in Learn@UW. Unless you have requested and received an extension before the due date, late papers will be penalized as follows: The paper will be marked down one letter grade for each day that it is late (e.g., A to AB for one day, A to B for two days, etc.); papers more than five days late will receive a failing grade; and late papers will be returned without written comments or feedback. Before submitting your term paper, I strongly recommend that you read the following documents (all available through Learn@UW): “Guidelines for Writing Term Papers” (includes grading criteria); Roseann Giarusso et al., *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*, pages 16-20, 118-141; the UW Writing Center’s handout on “**Acknowledging, Paraphrasing, and Quoting Sources**”; and the American Sociological Association Quick Style Guide.

Your overall grade for the semester will be calculated on a 100-point scale as follows:

- Attendance and participation: 18%
- Three exams: 18% each (54% total)
- Prospectus: 8%
- Term paper: 20%

A = 93-100, AB = 88-92, B = 83-87, BC = 78-82, C = 70-77, D = 60-69, F = 59 or below.

**Accommodations**

You may be eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course if English is your second language or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments and/or exams without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify. Please provide a copy of your accommodations request (VISA) to me by the end of the second week of class.

If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, please send an email by the end of the second week of the course stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation. Campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university’s web page for details.
Academic honesty

You are expected to follow the university’s rules pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the Office of the Dean of Students. Academic misconduct is defined as:

• seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
• uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
• forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
• intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
• engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
• assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the university’s standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students website. If you have questions about the university’s rules pertaining to academic honesty and integrity, please ask the instructor. You are expected to be familiar with these rules before you submit any written work. Lack of familiarity with these rules does not constitute an excuse for acts of misconduct.

Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights

The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the department chair, 8128 Social Science (Pamela.oliver@wisc.edu).

Department learning objectives

Beyond the specific content covered in this course, it is designed to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

• Critically Evaluate Published Research. Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.
• Communicate Skillfully: Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.
• Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes: Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the "why" and "how" of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.

Reading assignments

Six books are required: Émile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society; Émile Durkheim, Suicide: A Study in Sociology; Émile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life; Robert C. Tucker, ed., The Marx-Engels Reader; Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology; and Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Textbook information (ISBN, publisher, etc.) is available online through MyUW. The six required books will be on reserve at College Library and may be purchased at the University Book Store.

All other required reading assignments will be available through Learn@UW.

If there is a problem with any of the reserve readings, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.
INTRODUCTION

Jan. 19: Introduction to the course

Jan. 21: The two revolutions

Recommended:

THE FRENCH TRADITION

Jan. 26: The French Revolution

Jan. 28: Tocqueville’s critique of democracy

Feb. 2: Social solidarity and the division of labor
Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, 1-8, 24-29, 38-44, 60-64, 68-72, 83-86, 101-109, 118-123.

Feb. 4: Social solidarity and the division of labor (cont’d)
Durkheim, Division of Labor, 154-165, 200-205, 208-212, 291-294, 301-308, 310-316, xxxi-xxxix (please read in that order).

Feb. 9: The social logic of suicide

Feb. 11: The social logic of suicide (cont’d)
Durkheim, Suicide, 217-234, 241-258, 276 (footnote 25).

Feb. 16: Religion in its elementary form
Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 1-18, 33-44. NB: Page numbers are for the Fields translation; if you are using a different edition, please consult with the instructor.

Feb. 18: Religion in its elementary form

Feb. 23: The principles of 1789 and sociology
Feb. 25: Exam on the French sociological tradition

### THE GERMAN TRADITION

**Mar. 1: The early Marx and the critique of idealism**
Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction,” in Marx-Engels Reader, 53-54 (first six paragraphs only).

Recommended:
“Introduction” in MER, xix-xxxvii.
Marx, “For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,” in MER, 12-15.
Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in MER, 143-145.

**Mar. 3: The materialist theory of history**
Marx, selections from The German Ideology” (available through Learn@UW).
Marx, “Pre-Capitalist Property and Production” in MER, 261-276.

Recommended:
Marx, MER, 319-329 (on commodity fetishism), 388-415 (on manufacture and mechanization).

**Mar. 8: Marx’s revolutionary program**

Recommended:
“Introduction” in MER, xxxii-xxxvii.

**Mar. 10: The revolutionary program derailed**

**Mar. 15: Marx’s critique of capitalism**
Marx, Capital, vol. 1, in MER, 302-308, 329-343, 350-358 (start with “Let us now return to our would-be capitalist,” end with “The trick has at last succeeded”), 419-424.

Mar. 17: Bureaucracy as rationalization
Weber on legitimate authority, status, and class, in FMW, 294-301 (start with “All ruling powers…”).

Recommended:
Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in FWM, 77-128.

*** MARCH 19-27 SPRING RECESS ***

Mar. 29: Modern science as rationalization

Mar. 31: Religion and economic rationalism


Apr. 5: Modern capitalism as rationalization
Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, 13-20 (end with “In this case the causal relation…”), 39-50, 53-74 (end with “The drain of asceticism…”), 100-101 (start with “It is our next task…”). NB: Page numbers are for the Routledge Classics edition; if you are using a different edition, please consult with the instructor.


Apr. 7: Modern capitalism as rationalization (cont’d)

Apr. 12: The sociology of money

Apr. 14: Exam on the German sociological tradition

THE AMERICAN TRADITION

Apr. 19: Migration, disorganization, and reorganization

Apr. 21: The city
Apr. 26: The divided self

Term paper prospectus due


Recommended:


Apr. 28: Immigrants in urban America


May 3: Immigrants in urban America (cont’d)


May 5: Exam on the American sociological tradition

Term paper due May 10, 2016, at 12:05 PM