

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Department of Sociology
Sociology 331.01
Classical Sociological Theory
Fall 2012

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Office hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 11-12:00, or by appointment

Course hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 9:30-10:45

Sociology Department web page: <http://www.soci.ucalgary.ca>

Course objectives:

The course surveys a century of sociological theorists from Auguste Comte through Talcott Parsons. We focus on several texts that define not only the discipline of sociology, but also modernity generally: Marx's "Communist Manifesto", Weber's "Vocation" lectures, Simmel's "Mental Health and the Metropolis" and "The Stranger", and Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (better translated as "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility").

The course emphasis is threefold.

First, we will read theorists as participants in a developing conversation about both the problems of modernity and the discipline of academic sociology. We will attend to who listens to whom. What are the continuities of concerns as this conversation develops; what issues drop out and which ones change form? How unified is the enterprise of social theory from Comte to Parsons?

Second, we study social theory to study *modernity* as a particular historical formation that includes the distinctive forms of self-reflection known as sociology. Each theorist seeks to understand what Max Weber called the "fate of our times", which leads to two other questions: how are the times of the theorist *not* the early 21st century, but also, how does the theorist provide a model for systematic reflection on the fate of living in the early 21st century?

Third, we will consider the multiple meanings of the dense word *theory*. *Theory* denotes forms of argument that are informed by empirical observations but rarely can be proven. Theory in social science cannot be verified through experiments, but a theoretical argument does test of a world view. Theories are more or less based on distinctive *concepts* that: mix description and explanation, sometimes have prescriptive implications, and are more or less cohesive as formal arguments. We will ask:

- How is a theoretical argument more than an opinion, but less than a proof?
- How does a theoretical argument seek to *compel* its readers' assent?
- In different theories, what are readers being asked to assent to?

Skills to be developed or enhanced:

- Reading skills: Students will read secondary sources written by noted scholars writing at an advanced level. Primary sources were written for readers who shared different assumptions about the social world and who expected different forms of argument.
- Writing skills: Assignments will require careful prose exposition of ideas. Knowing the material will be equated with being able to express it clearly in four “notes” assignments and a final essay.
- *Sociological imagination*: Many people imagine the social world: journalists, philosophers, historians, novelists & filmmakers, bureaucrats, and so forth. The course presents writings that seek to exemplify the distinct form of imagination known as sociology. By the end of the course students still may not be able to define this imagination, but they should have an enhanced capacity to recognize it. Students should also have an enhanced capability to use theory to interpret empirical research.
- Historical and conceptual knowledge: Students will learn what a variety of major thinkers had to say, and they will learn about the period in which it was said. They will also learn to engage *ideas*, and what *forms of argument* are appropriate to the expression of ideas.
- *Critical thinking*. This cliché phrase is given substance by theorists who refuse to accept stock, off-the-shelf understandings of their worlds. Critical thinking involves asking *what conditions lead people to understand the world as they do, and where does such thinking lead?* Who thinks differently? How is the contest between alternative ways of thinking being played out in diverse fields (e.g., armed conflicts, judicial disputes, market choices, elections, claims for lifestyles, norms of public behavior, acceptance of authorities, and so forth)?
 - By interrogating and demystifying what is commonly said and believed, critical thinking opens the way to alternative understandings and courses of action.
 - “Why does everyone think it has to be *that way*?” is the core of critical thinking, and this question is the beginning of anything new, whether that is an entrepreneurial opportunity or a demand for social justice.

Required Texts:

- George Ritzer, editor. *The Blackwell Companion to Major Classical Social Theorists* (Wiley-Blackwell).
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford World’s Classics).
- Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Hackett).
- Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Penguin, Great Ideas series).

Course Requirements:

Final grades will be: 50% based on four sets of notes on the assigned reading; 50% based on a final essay.

Due Dates:

- Notes will be due, in class, on September 27 (Comte and Marx), October 23 (Durkheim and Weber), November 20 (Simmel, Schutz, and Mead), and December 6 (Parsons and Benjamin).
 - *All four* assignments must be completed with a passing grade in order to pass the course.
 - *Revision* of the first two notes assignments will be allowed, with a new grade no higher than a C. Revised notes will be due by the third class after the assignment is returned to students.
- Final essay will be due Friday, December 7, no later than 4:00 p.m.
 - Papers can be slid under the instructor's door, SS 916.
 - *Include a mailing envelope large enough for both the final essay and the final notes assignment*, if you want these returned. Depending on the season, protect work in an envelope, but no covers on papers, please.
 - Note that the Dec. 6 and 7 deadlines are firm. The instructor is leaving Calgary for a conference in mid-December, and late submissions may not be graded until the end of January (students will receive an "Incomplete" until then).

Missed examinations: N/A, as there are no examinations in this course.

Late submission of the notes (Sept 27, Oct 23, Nov. 20) will have *one* grade/day deducted (e.g., C+ to C). Late submission of the Dec 6 notes and the final essay will have three grades deducted (e.g., C to D), regardless of when the work is submitted.

- See University policy for acceptable excuses for lateness.

Notes assignments:

For each theorist studied in the course (N=9), students will write 1-3 pages of analytic notes, following the prescribed format.

The format includes the following sections:

1. Three to five most important concepts, each defined by a quotation from the reading (with citations to assigned-reading page numbers) or the student's composite definition (also requiring citation);
2. One or two most significant and most memorable quotations (cited), following each with a paragraph stating why you choose this quotation (e.g., for its importance for understanding modernity, or its significance in the evolving conversation of social theory, or its relevance to current sociological issues); grades based on *specificity* of argument;
3. How the theorist grasps the "fate of the times". In point form, but written in complete sentences, discuss: (a) for that theorist, what were the core issues that sociology needed to explain or elucidate? (b) how do those issues remain relevant today? Include quotations as relevant.

4. Give one or two examples of how the theorist exemplifies critical thinking; specifically, what does the theorist refuse to accept, and how does he imagine an alternative?
5. A concluding couple of paragraphs addressing the question: How did the theorist shape or contribute to the conversation of social theory; what did he add, and what would be missing without this theorist? *Be selective and specific*; the primary grading criteria will be how well your writing displays an insightful reading of the theorist.

A template example of notes on the theorist Norbert Elias (whom I regret we are not reading), will be posted on the course Blackboard site.

Note: *All quotations and citations* must be from assigned readings and lecture notes (cited by date) only. Read whatever is useful in understanding the material, but for the written assignments, non-assigned sources are not to be included.

The final essay should compare two theorists, exploring their divergence and/or complementarity on a single issue; that issue might be empirical (how the world works) or theoretical (how theory should address the world). Use discussion of a specific issue to get at how these theorists display different sociological imaginations; what is the distinctive quality of vision that each exemplifies, and how is the contrast between the two useful for understanding sociology?

See *Format and Writing Advice*, below.

Final essay format: The final essay should each be about 1,250 words and absolutely no longer than 1,500 words. Spelling, syntax, and the organization of ideas will count in the grade. Careful editing is crucial.

All written work should be typed or printed,

- double-spaced in 12-point font,
- with pages numbered and stapled together.
- Printing pages two-sided is preferred.
- The student's name and ID# should appear in the upper corner of the first page.
- Please do not put papers in covers.

Grades and Return of term work: Final essays and notes will be returned *by mail only*. Papers will *not* be returned through the Sociology Department Office, nor will grades be posted by the instructor (due to FOIP rules). Students who want their papers returned by mail should attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please do not telephone the departmental office asking for your grade.

Keep a copy: As in every course, my friendly advice is to keep a printed copy of all work you submit. At some point you should have printed at least one draft to edit on paper; keep that too. Students who might want a letter of recommendation should keep copies of their written term work (again, good advice in all courses).

Lecture schedule and readings:

- due-dates for notes are marked with an asterisk *

September 11, 13 – Course introduction; the idea of modernity. Read chapter on Comte in the *Blackwell Companion* (BCCT).

September 18, 20 – Marx in BCCT

September 25, 27* – Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*

October 2, 4 – Durkheim chapter in BCCT

October 9, 11 -- Weber chapter in BCCT

October 16, 18 -- Weber: Owen and Strong's Introduction, "Science as a Vocation"

October 23*, 25 – Weber, "Politics as a Vocation"; Schutz in BCCT

October 30, November 1 -- Simmel in BCCT

November 6, 8 – Simmel, "Mental Health and the Metropolis" and "The Stranger"

November 13 (Reading Day, no lecture), 15 – Mead in BCCT

November 20*, 22 -- finish Mead; Parsons in BCCT

November 27, 29 – Parsons in BCCT; Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (pp. 1-50)

December 4, 6* -- finish Benjamin; conclusion.

Writing advice, especially for final essay.

- Almost any idea is a potentially good paper; it all depends on how you write it. Many of sociology's greatest works have been on topics that most people would have regarded as marginal or uninteresting. The imagination in "sociological imagination" is the ability to demonstrate the importance of aspects of social life that had seemed uninteresting in their marginality.
- The opening paragraph should do two tasks: engage the reader (make him/her want to continue reading) and tell the reader what the essay will accomplish or contribute.
 - A friend told me that academic papers should be structured like detective stories. A murder mystery begins with the discovery of a corpse; the reader knows that what follows will progressively solve who did it.
 - Any essay should open by "discovering the body"; that is, discovering whatever is consequentially troublesome and requires some kind of solution.

- The most difficult part of writing may be learning to read what you have written as if you were someone else, remembering that this someone else does not know what you mean to express—and that you have to make this person care about what you’re trying to say. Writing requires G.H. Mead’s idea of taking the role of the other.
- Writing begins in revision. The first draft is an opening offer; then you get to work.
- As you edit, concentrate on continuity: does each sentence and each paragraph lead into the next, or does the reader have to ask why you are suddenly talking about this? Writing requires meeting a reader’s expectations, but without becoming predictable and thus boring. Each paragraph should do what the reader expects, but do it in a way that is unexpected.
- The old rule of “one idea, one paragraph” remains a reliable guide. In general, the first sentence states the idea of the paragraph. The next one or two (or three if necessary) sentences expand and refine this idea. The final sentence is a transition to the next paragraph. It puts the idea back in the context of the whole argument by suggesting what needs to be said next (maybe not explicitly, but enough for the reader to think “Of course!” at the start of the next paragraph).
- Never write, “in my opinion.” If what you are saying needs this qualification (i.e., disclaimer), you should do more research until you can present it as more than your own opinion. The point of sociology is to present arguments that are compelling because they are more than the “opinion” of the writer—that’s science.
- A conclusion should be more than a summary. The conclusion should notch up the importance of the argument, giving the reader perhaps the best reason why the essay matters. In a truly fine conclusion, the reader will realize that s/he could not have understood this final reason without having read the essay. The reader will feel surprised, yet the conclusion will make perfect sense.
 - A film critic once wrote that audiences will forgive anything during the movie’s first 30 minutes, but nothing in the last 30 seconds.

Mandatory Information

Emergency evacuations:

In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom/lab, please proceed to the assembly point by [*check link to find assembly point for your building*] -- <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/node/75>

Deferrals:

If at all possible you must provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to take a test or pass in an assignment or essay on time. All requests for deferral of a course component due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as

outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the physical or emotional problem rather than after recovery. Deferrals will be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferral. Deferrals will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

If you have missed a test for a legitimate reason, the instructor can require you to write a “make up” test as close in time to the original test as possible or can choose to transfer the percentage weight to another course component. If the instructor schedules a “make up” test for you, its date and location will be at the convenience of the Department of Sociology.

Deferred Final Exam Form:

Please note that requests to defer a Registrar-scheduled final exam are dealt with through the Registrar’s Office. Further information about deadlines, and where paperwork should be taken, is available on the form, which can be found at:

http://ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/APP%20FOR%20DF%20EXAM_0.pdf

Deferred Term Work Form:

Deferral of term work past the end of a term also requires a form to be filled out. It’s available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/defTW.pdf>

Once an extension date has been agreed between instructor and student, the form should be taken to the Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (SS 110) for approval by an Associate Dean (Students).

Ethics Research: Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism, cheating and other academic misconduct are regarded as serious academic offences. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct.

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor’s office or the Department main office. Written assignments must be returned

to students individually, during class, or during the instructor's office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.

Safewalk: The University of Calgary provides a "safe walk" service to any location on Campus, including the LRT, parking lots, bus zones, and campus housing. For Campus Security/Safewalk call 220-5333. Campus Security can also be contacted from any of the "Help" phones located around Campus.

Academic Accommodation: Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, phone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. It is a student's responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.

Handing in papers outside of class, return of final papers, and release of final grades:

1. When students are unable to submit papers in class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant. Papers will not be accepted in the main Sociology Department office.
2. Final papers will not be returned through the main Sociology Department office. The Freedom of Information and Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place (i.e. outside an instructor's office, the department office etc.) Students who want their final papers returned by mail must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the paper. Otherwise final papers will be available for pick-up only during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or at the beginning of the next term.
3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology Department. They are available only online.