

This course introduces the classic works of social theory. By "classical social theory" I mean an explanation of the origins, internal dynamic, and fate of modern society. Marx, Durkheim and Weber reacting to industrialization and the rise of the nation-state all held modern societies to be sharply different from pre-modern ones. They further asked, "What were the causes and consequences of this distinctiveness"? In answering this question, each thinker developed a set of concepts that have proven to be of enduring relevance in grappling intellectually with our present circumstances. These concepts divide into four main clusters: a set of descriptions of key elements of the condition of living in modern society, a set of concepts useful for understanding the role of ideas in modern society, a set of concepts useful for explaining historical change, and a set of concepts useful for analyzing modern systems of stratification. In this class you will learn to understand, contrast, and evaluate these different concepts and their relationship to the broader theoretical visions in which they are embedded.