

Sociology 103: Contemporary Social Theory (Fall 2020)  
Wednesdays, 2-5 pm  
John Lie, [johnlie@berkeley.edu](mailto:johnlie@berkeley.edu)  
Office Hours: by appointment

In the year 2020, the world is in the grip of the Covid-19 crisis. Yet there is a much more devastating disaster on the horizon: the global climate crisis. Some of its consequences are apparent already, including fire and flooding (and the proliferation of pandemics). This course will consider these two crises – and disasters in general – from the standpoint of knowledge and action. Put differently, how aware are we about looming disasters, how do we assess their consequences, and what do we do about them. That is, the course is about knowledge, risk, and action (or ignorance, denial, and inaction).

### Requirements

Participation (20%)  
Examination (40%)  
Final project (40%)

### Readings

All the reading assignments will be available on the Internet except for David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019).

### Schedule

2 September: Introduction

9 September: The Covid-19 Crisis

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/06/us/coronavirus-us.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/18/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-response-failure-leadership.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/13/upshot/coronavirus-response-fax-machines.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/13/opinion/us-coronavirus-trump.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/how-white-house-coronavirus-response-went-wrong/613591/>  
[https://apple.news/AS9aOP-nLRHObQLZFW\\_kwyQ](https://apple.news/AS9aOP-nLRHObQLZFW_kwyQ)

16 September: The Global Climate Crisis

David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019)

Recommended: <https://on.ft.com/2B001ka>

<https://apple.news/A2D-Mvda4QsO-68snwrxoCg>

23 September: Knowledge and Science

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 1991, chaps.1-2

<https://www.google.com/search?q=bruno+latour+we+have+never+been+modern+pdf&oq=bruno+latour&aqs=chrome.0.69i59l2j69i57j0l2j69i60l3.11344j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

30 September: Knowledge and Relevance

Immanuel Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*, chaps.3-4

[http://pages.ucsd.edu/~rfrank/class\\_web/ES-200A/Week%201/Gulbenkian.pdf](http://pages.ucsd.edu/~rfrank/class_web/ES-200A/Week%201/Gulbenkian.pdf)

7 October: Understanding Risk

Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, 1921, chaps.6-7

[https://cdn.mises.org/Risk,%20Uncertainty,%20and%20Profit\\_4.pdf](https://cdn.mises.org/Risk,%20Uncertainty,%20and%20Profit_4.pdf)

14 October: Risk and Disaster

Judith N. Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice*, 1990

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm3gp>

21 October: Understanding Action

Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1968 (orig. 1922), chap.1

[https://books.google.co.jp/books?hl=ja&lr=lang\\_en&id=MIL0ksrhgrYC&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=max+weber+economy+and+society+pdf&ots=oAGxDld9sM&sig=G9vsve2QRQgEcT8tZszvjxmqTI#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.jp/books?hl=ja&lr=lang_en&id=MIL0ksrhgrYC&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=max+weber+economy+and+society+pdf&ots=oAGxDld9sM&sig=G9vsve2QRQgEcT8tZszvjxmqTI#v=onepage&q&f=false)

28 October: Habit and Inaction

Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1782, chap.71

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25717/25717-h/25717-h.htm#Flink712HCH0001>

4 November: Living the Present, Anticipating the Future

Karl Mannheim, Knowledge and Utopia, chap.3

[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL17967775M/Ideology\\_and\\_utopia](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL17967775M/Ideology_and_utopia)

**11 November: HOLIDAY**

**18 November: EXAMINATION**

**25 November: Thanksgiving Holiday**

**2 December: PROJECT PRESENTATION**

**4 December: PROJECT DUE**