

Classical Social Theory

Spring 2023 • Tuesdays & Thursdays, 18:30–20:00 • 4-Physics Building

Overview

This course introduces “classical social theory” (CST), which is an intellectual practice purporting to explain the origins, internal dynamic, and fate of types of society. CST has emerged in various times and places, most particularly in the ancient and medieval mediterranean world, and in Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We will study four exemplars of CST: Ibn Khaldūn, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. Although each of these thinkers was highly distinctive, they all attempted to understand the social circumstances in which they lived by contrasting those circumstances with what had come before, and what might come after. Thus each offers a “theory of change” and seeks to locate their own version of contemporary society in time. In so doing, CST established an enduring vocabulary of social analysis which continues to inspire current sociological practice.

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Office Hours

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Wednesdays, 13:00–15:00

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Reading

There are seven books for this class. It’s important that you purchase the editions provided by the bookstore so that pagination, translation, and readings are consistent.

Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*.
Translated by W.D. Halls. (Hereafter referred to as DOL).

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religions Life*.
Translated by Carol Cosman. (Hereafter referred to as EFRL).

Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. (Hereafter referred to as TM).

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*. Edited by Lawrence H. Simon. (Hereafter referred to as SW).

Karl Marx, *Wage Labor and Capital, Value, Price and Profit*. Translated by Harriet E. Lothrop. (Hereafter referred to as WLC).

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Stephen Kalberg. (Hereafter referred to as PE).

Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. (Hereafter referred to as FMW).

Grading

Your grade will be based on four pieces of work:

- Quiz (x4) = 40%
- Section = 20%
- Midterm = 15%
- Final (take home) = 25%

The quizzes, midterm, and final will be delivered via BCourses. No incompletes will be given.

Details on how each part of your grade will be determined:

- **Quizzes.** These are designed to assess your understanding of basic concepts. Sociology, like other sciences, rests on a conceptual language that needs to be mastered in order to be useful. Often this involves terms that are relatively common in “lay” or everyday language but have a specific meaning in sociology. Indeed, the relationship between lay language and sociological language is itself a major topic of sociological theory and research. Some terms that you will learn to use differently than how they might ordinarily be defined: alienation, bureaucracy, capitalism, class, rationality, and solidarity. The ability to break with everyday usage, then group phenomena in a new way and identify new relationships, is one major purpose of social theory—quizzes help assess how successful you are in doing this.
- **Section.** This part of your grade will be split into two parts:
 - *Participation.* Half of your section grade depends on this essential part of your work during this course. You need to attend each section and actively participate in the work that goes on there. This mainly means carefully reading the assigned material. Each of the figures we will study has generated oceans of commentary, both in print and on the internet. Your task, however, is to deal directly with the texts you have been assigned, not to do web or library research on the theorists themselves. This is because there is no substitute for reading what they wrote. Only when you directly engage with their work will you grasp their ideas and, just as importantly, their styles of thought.
 - *Reading Responses.* The other half of the section grade will be based on 10 reading responses that you will produce throughout the semester. These responses will be assessed on a three point scale (1, .5, or 0).
- **Midterm.** This will be similar in format to the quizzes, but will also include some slightly longer essay questions. Attending the lectures, going to section, and reading the assigned material will be the best preparation for this exam.
- **Final.** The fourth piece of your grade will be based on this take home exam. You’ll be required to write three tightly structured comparative essays of about 750 words each. The exam will ask you to compare and contrast specific arguments from specific passages of the readings. It will be passed out at the course review on Thursday, April 27 and will be due on Monday, May 10.

Course Schedule

Introduction	
January 17	What is classical social theory? Why should one study it?
Ibn Khaldûn (1332–1406): Civilizational Analysis	
January 19	Ibn Khaldûn. 2005 (1370). Pp. 35–48;. 91–95; 123–142 in <i>TM</i> . What is civilization, why is it necessary, and what are its main types?
January 24	Ibn Khaldûn. 2005 (1370). Pp.231–257 in <i>TM</i> . Why does civilization decline?
January 26	Ibn Khaldûn 2005 (1370). Pp. 297–318 in <i>TM</i> . What is the basis of wealth?
January 31	Ibn Khaldûn 2005 (1370). Pp. 333–337; 339–343 in <i>TM</i> . What is the basis of thought?
February 2	Quiz 1
Émile Durkheim (1885–1917): The Division of Labor/Solidarity/Cognition	
February 7	Durkheim, Émile. 1984 [1893]. "Preface to the First Edition", "Introduction", "The Method of Determining this Function", and "Chapter II. Mechanical Solidarity, or Solidarity by Similarities" Pp. 3–7, Pp. 33–87. in <i>DOL</i> . What is Durkheim's puzzle? What is "mechanical solidarity?" In the Halls translation, the pages are xxv–xxx; 1–67.
February 9	Durkheim, Émile. 1984 [1893]. "Chapter III. Solidarity Arising from the Division of Labor, or Organic Solidarity." Pp. 88–91, 96–103, 158–180 in <i>DOL</i> . What is "organic solidarity?" In the Halls translation 68–72, 77–87; 149–175.
February 14	Durkheim, Émile. 1984 [1893]. "Chapter II. The Causes" Pp. 201–222 and 277–308 in <i>DOL</i> . What are the causes of the division of labor and what are its abnormal forms? In the Halls translation 200–225 and 291–328.
February 16	Durkheim, Émile. 2001 [1912]. "Introduction: The Subject of Study Sociology of Religion and Theories of Knowledge" and "Preliminary Questions" Pp. 3–83 in <i>EFRL</i> . What is Durkheim's question and method of answering it?
February 21	Durkheim, Émile. 2001 [1912]. "Book III. Principal Ritual Conduct." Pp. 221–343 in <i>EFRL</i> . What is the connection between religion and society? Summary of Durkheim.
February 23	Quiz 2
February 28	Midterm
Karl Marx (1818–1883): Historical Materialism	
March 2	Marx, Karl. 1994 [1845]. "The German Ideology." Pp. 103–121 in <i>SW</i> . What is the general mechanism of historical development?
March 9	Marx, Karl. 1994 [1867]. "Capital Volume One (selections)." Pp. 214–243 in <i>SW</i> . What is a commodity, and why are commodities exchangeable?

March 14	Marx, Karl. 1994 [1867]. "Capital Volume One (selections)." Pp. 244–264 in <i>SW</i> . How does commodity exchange work under capitalism?
March 16	Marx, Karl. 1994 [1867]. "Capital Volume One (selections)." Pp. 264–294 in <i>SW</i> . What is the significance of the labor contract under capitalism?
March 21	Marx, Karl. 1933 [1849]. <i>WLC</i> . Pp. 15–21. What is wage labor?
March 23	Marx, Karl. 1933 [1849]. <i>WLC</i> . Pp. 21–48. What is Capital?
March 27-31	Spring Break
April 4	Quiz 3
Max Weber (1864–1920): Rationalization and Charisma	
April 6	Weber, Max. 2011 [1905]. Weber, Max. 2011 [1905]. "Part I: The Problem" and "Part I Chapter II: The 'Spirit' of Capitalism." Pp. 67–98 in <i>PE</i> . What is Weber's question?
April 11	Weber, Max. 2011 [1905]. "Part I Chapter III: Luther's Conception of the Calling" and "Part II Chapter IV: The Religious Foundations of This-Worldly Asceticism." Pp. 99–138 in <i>PE</i> . What is the paradoxical connection between Calvinism and the Spirit of Capitalism?
April 13	Weber, Max 1976 [1905]. "Part II Chapter V: Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism." Pp. 158–179 in <i>PE</i> . What happens to the Spirit of Capitalism in capitalist society? "III Prefatory Remarks to Collected Essays in the sociology of Religion (1920)." Pp. 233–250 in <i>PE</i> . What is rationalization?
April 18	Weber, Max. 1976 [1921]. "Science as a Vocation." Pp. 129–156 in <i>FMW</i> . What is science?
April 20	Weber, Max. 1976 [1921]. "Politics as a Vocation." Pp. 77–128 in <i>FMW</i> . What is politics?
April 25	Quiz 4
April 27	Course review, final exam prompt
May 1-5	Reading, Review, and Recitation week
May 10	Final exam due