



The University of Western Ontario
SOCIOLOGY 3404G-001
Modern Sociological Theory
Winter 2019

Class times and location:

Section 001: Monday 1:30-3:30pm, Room SSC 5406

Instructor: David Calnitsky

Office Hours: TBD and by appointment
Department of Sociology, Office: SSC 5402
Email: dcalnits@uwo.ca

TA: Rory Davis (rdavis42@uwo.ca)

TA office hours by appointment

“There’s nothing so practical as a good theory.” — Kurt Lewin

Introductory hype

Turn on your sound and hit play on these:

<https://brorlandi.github.io/StarWarsIntroCreator/#!/AKS3B6ZUqMC9uSCxtqQo>

<https://brorlandi.github.io/StrangerThingsIntroCreator/#!/AL21Pmd4JF2Y7EUTRNP1>

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce and examine some of the foundational ideas in sociological theory. Typically, courses in sociological theory focus primarily or exclusively on the writings of a small handful of thinkers who have come to form the sociological canon. In part this course does not deviate from tradition—we will still be reading some selections from famous modern theorists. It is worth noting, however, that a lot of “sociological theory” courses should really be called “sociological theorist” courses. They are about the ideas of particular thinkers and are organized accordingly around bodies of theoretical work rather than around the ideas as such, their logics and interconnections. Though we will end up reading a good amount of what’s sometimes called primary literature, we focus more closely on the specific problems, questions, and theories they’ve inspired. In addition to becoming acquainted with the work of specific thinkers, we will see how persistent theoretical issues in sociology have been explained and reformulated. This means that readings are selected on the basis of clarity of exposition rather

than place in the canon. My hope is that this approach will balance the investigation into the bodies of thought of particular thinkers with the examination of particular ideas and aspects of social theory.

This course takes the Lewin quote above pretty seriously and aims to survey a wide range of *substantive* theories in sociology (and adjacent social sciences) that I believe to be interesting and challenging—we look at theories of capitalism, theories of inequality, theories of the state, theories of history, theories of collective action, theories of morality & social norms, and theories of belief & ideology. We also introduce what might be called *theoretical perspectives* in sociology; these offer different ways of looking at the social world and go about social inquiry from unique perspectives. Here we will survey rational choice theory, functionalist theories, and feminist social theory.

A note on reading difficult social theory

Though a lot of our readings attempt to convey ideas as clearly as possible, sometimes, inevitably, the readings will be difficult. Hopefully that is because the ideas themselves are difficult, not because the writing is opaque. But for whatever reason, the readings will sometimes be challenging. I have two general pieces of advice on reading difficult social theory, one pragmatic, and the other methodological.

- (1) It is often the case that students spend a considerable amount of time reading, even taking detailed notes, yet they find it very difficult to absorb the central ideas in a text. In these cases re-reading is not always terribly efficient. My suggestion is as follows: Instead of delving into the reading immediately, familiarize yourself with the text first. Skim the conclusions and introduction, scan through the titles of the subsections, and try to get a sense of the subject matter. Once you start reading, if you already have a sense of what the piece is about, how it is organized, and what the main concepts are, you'll be able to identify whether or not particular passages are relevant or secondary. If you spend 15 minutes on this kind of exercise before reading you might have a relatively clear sense of what the piece is about and where the author is going. This way, you may find the reading less challenging and more productive.
- (2) Read generously. The easiest kind of criticism to make is a criticism of underlying assumptions. All theoretical work makes simplifying or seemingly unwarranted assumptions about the world. In my view this is a virtue rather than a defect in theory; assumptions and simplifications are often very useful in drawing out dynamics that are difficult to discover when we try to simultaneously incorporate multiple layers of social reality. This does not mean, however, that assumptions should never be criticized. But to be generous to a work of theory, and to get as much out of it as possible, I suggest the following three steps to reading:

- i. *Think inside the box*: When first going through the ideas try to be as charitable as possible to the author. Instead of trying to find holes, try to see how the thinking fits together. Getting stuck on criticism too early can be a barrier to understanding the general approach and contribution of the piece.
- ii. *Make internal criticisms*: Once you have an understanding of the approach and contribution, then you can focus on criticisms. But, not all criticisms are equal. Try to form criticisms of the argumentation *given* the assumptions. That is, the author proposes a way of thinking about a particular problem—*given* that mode of understanding the problem, do the conclusions follow? (This, incidentally, is how to criticize science fiction. Don't criticize just *The Handmaid's Tale* for implausible assumptions about a fertility collapse; taking the collapse for granted, are the actions of the characters plausible?)
- iii. *Make external criticisms*: The last step comes naturally: criticize the assumptions. Only after the first two steps should you pillory your author for faulty underlying assumptions, an indefensible mode of analysis, the unmotivated categories employed, or an incoherent conceptual apparatus. But even here, be cautious. Assumptions are rarely claims about how the world actually works; instead they often operate as useful heuristics that bring problems to light which are otherwise obscure.

Antirequisites: Sociology 4404F/G

Prerequisites: Sociology 2240E or both Sociology 2270A/B and 2271A/B. Enrolment in third or fourth year in a Sociology Department module on Main Campus.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Required Text:

This class uses one edited volume, one course pack, and three pamphlets, all available at the bookstore. The edited volume:

Michael Hechter and Christine Horne. *Theories of Social Order: A Reader* (Second Edition). Stanford University Press, 2009.

The pamphlets:

Vivek Chibber, *The ABCs of Capitalism* (“Understanding Capitalism”, “Capitalism and the State”, and “Capitalism and Class Struggle”). These are also available here:

<https://jacobinmag.com/store/product/56>

And you will be able to find the volume—called TSO below—online, just ensure you pick up the second edition, not the first. The remaining readings will be in the course pack and I will also put them up on OWL.

Evaluation Breakdown:

Class participation	20%
Pop quizzes	25%
Midterm exam	15%
Compare & contrast 5-page essay (due last day of classes)	15%
Final exam (During final exam period, TBD)	25%

Methods of Evaluation

Reading

All readings listed in the syllabus are mandatory, and they should be completed before class. Completing the readings will take time, which is sad, but they are essential to success in this class. **ALSO:** Bring the readings to class—we will be going through them, and you might need them for a quiz!

Pop quizzes

Nobody likes pop quizzes, but the goal here is motivate everyone to really do the readings. The quizzes will not be difficult. They are not intended to test how deeply you have thought through the text and absorbed the ideas. They are simply meant to assess whether you've done the readings assigned for that day. As long as you've done the relevant readings, and underlined, highlighted, or made notes on what seems to be relevant, you should be able to answer very basic questions about the text. Unless I specify otherwise, they will be open book. And they will take about 10 minutes at the beginning of any given class. If you arrive late and miss the quiz you will receive a zero.

There will be 4-5 quizzes scattered across the semester. As you can see, by not telling you when the quizzes will be there is a real incentive on your part to do all the readings. Everything in this class is geared to get everyone to sit down and read. Also, I will drop your lowest grade.

Attendance

Class attendance is required for success in this course. To receive a passing grade in the course, you must attend at least 80% of the class meetings. This will only be waived in exceptional circumstances, with documentation.

Attendance is not an explicit part of the grading breakdown, but if low, will lower your final grade. If you are unable to attend a class session for medical or personal reasons, you must inform me as soon as possible. See below for UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness.

Participation

Your participation grade is separate from attendance. It is always murky to assess, but you will be given a rough grade on the basis of your contributions to class discussions and level of engagement with the materials. It will be a rough five-point scale: 5 means you participated actively, consistently asking and answering questions, and reflecting directly on the readings; 3 means you opened your mouth and talked off the top of your head but didn't really convince me that you've done any serious engagement with the readings; and 1, no points, means you showed up to snooze. Participation will be important throughout the course, but matters most when we're going through readings together during the back end of each class.

Compare & contrast essay

Students will write a five-page (double-spaced, 12-pt font, 1-inch margins) compare and contrast essay to be submitted in class on the last day of classes. Pick any two readings from the class and reflect on the similarities and differences in the approach to understanding some problem. It will be easiest to select two readings from the same week that approach some issue from different perspectives.

Mid-term exam (Feb 25) and final exam (During final exam period, TBD)

There will be one mid-term and one final exam at the end of the semester held during exam time. They will be closed book. The exams will assess whether you have done the readings, paid attention in class, and thought about the material seriously. They will consist of short answer definition questions and longer form essay questions. More information will be provided as we go along.

Course Schedule and Readings:

Jan 7 – The rise of social theory; the elements of theory [25 pages]

- Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction*, Chapter 1, ISBN: 9780521447805, pp. 1-12; [12 pages]
- Hechter & Horne in TSO, “The problem of social order” pp. 1-5 and “What is theory”, pp. 7-10; Hedstrom in TSO, “Dissecting the social”, pp. 12-15. [13 pages]

Jan 14 – Theories of capitalism [70 pages]

- “Cosmos and Taxis”, Friedrich Hayek in TSO, 140-153 [14 pages]
- “Division of Labor”, Adam Smith in TSO, 166-174 [9 pages]
- Ernest Mandel, "Ch. 1 - The Theory of Value and Surplus Value" pp. 1-6 (6 pages) and "Ch. 2 - Capital and Competition", p.1-4 (4 pages) in *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory*, Pathfinder, ISBN: 0873483154, 1973.
- Vivek Chibber, “Understanding Capitalism”, Catalyst – The ABCs of Capitalism, 2-38 (37 pages)

Jan 21 – Theories of inequality [51 pages]

- Wright, E. O. (1997). *Class Counts*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 0521553873; “Ch. 1 - Class Analysis”, pp. 1-15 (15 pages)
- Wright, E. O. (1994). Interrogating inequality, Verso; ISBN: 0860914089; “Ch. 1 – Inequality”, *Interrogating Inequality*, pp. 21-31 (11 pages)
- Parkin, F. “Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique”, in Grusky, D. B. (1994). *Social stratification*. Boulder: Westview. 4th ed, ISBN: 9780813346717 pp. 193-201 (9 pages)
- Sen, Amartya. (1982). “Just deserts”. *New York Review of Books*, 4. (5 pages)
- Elster, J. (2007). *Explaining social behavior: More nuts and bolts for the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 9781107071186; “Persons and Situations”, *Explaining Social Behavior*, 178-189 (11 pages)

Jan 28 – Theories of the state [63 pages]

- Theda Skocpol, “The State as a Janus-faced structure” in Lemert, C. (Ed.). (2016). *Social theory: The multicultural, global, and classic readings*. Westview Press. ISBN: 9780813350028; pp. 313-315 (3 pp)
- Vivek Chibber, “Capitalism and the State”, *Catalyst – The ABCs of Capitalism*, 2-38 (37 pages)
- J. Cohen & J. Rogers. (1983). *On Democracy*, Penguin; “Structure”, ISBN: 0140067817; pp. 47-67 (21 pages)
- Pamela Pansardi, “Legitimation” in Dowding, K. (Ed.). (2011). *Encyclopedia of power*. Sage; ISBN: 9781412927482; pp. 383-384 (2 pages)

Feb 4 – Functional explanation, explained [52 pages]

- Kanazawa in TSO, pp. 35-40 (6 pages)
- R. Merton – Manifest and Latent Functions; in Lemert, C. (Ed.). (2016). *Social theory: The multicultural, global, and classic readings*. Westview Press. ISBN: 9780813350028; pp. 242-245 (4 pages)
- Bell, D. (1979) “Talcott Parsons: Nobody's Theories Were Bigger”, May 13. *New York Times*.
- Gould, S. J. (1997). Evolution the Pleasures of Pluralism, *The New York Review of Books*, June 26, p. 1-6. (6 pages)
- Kincaid, H. (2011). “Functional explanation and evolutionary social science.” in Turner, S & Risjord, M. (eds.). *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*; ISBN: 9780444515421; pp. 213-248 (33 pages).

Feb 11 – Theories of history [62 pages]

- Huberman, L. (1936). *Man's Worldly Goods*. NYU Press, “Prayers, Fighters—and Workers”, ISBN: 9781406798203; pp. 3-16 (14 pages)
- Wolff, J. (2002) “History” in *Why Read Marx Today?* Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780192805058 pp. 52-66 (15 pages)
- Roemer, J. E. (2009). *Free to lose*. Harvard University Press, ISBN 9780674318762; pp. 108-119 (12 pages)

- Allen, K. (2004). *Max Weber*. Pluto Press. ISBN: 0745322387; “Why didn’t Asia Develop?” 47-67 (21 pages)

Feb 18 – Reading week

Feb 25 – **Mid-term exam**

Mar 4 – Rational choice theory & game theory [65 pages]

- Coleman, J. (1990). *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1-18; ISBN: 0674312260; [18 pages]
- Becker, G. S. (2008). *The economic approach to human behavior*. University of Chicago press. ISBN: 0226041123; pp. 3-14 (12 pages)
- Ryan, A. (1991). “When it’s Rational to be Irrational,” Oct 10, *New York Review of Books*. 1-4 (4 pages)
- R. Axelrod in TSO, pp. 175-184; 186-193 (18 pages)
- H. Gintis & E. Fehr in TSO, pp. 26-32 (7 pages)
- Hechter & Horne in TSO, pp. 17-22 (6 pages)

Mar 11 – Theories of collective action [54 pages]

- Vivek Chibber, “Capitalism and Class Struggle”, *Catalyst – The ABCs of Capitalism*, 2-31 (30 pages)
- Elster, J. (2007). *Explaining social behavior*. Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 9781107071186; “Collective action”, pp. 388-399 (12 pages)
- Schelling in TSO, pp. 154-165 (12 pages)

Mar 18 – Theories of norms, morality, & solidarity [48 pages]

- Du Bois, W.E.B. (2004). “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto.” In Zuckerman, P. *The social theory of W.E.B. Du Bois*. SAGE Publications. ISBN: 0761928707; pp. 45-46 (2 pages)
- Hechter in TSO, “Principles of group solidarity,” pp. 256-250 (5 pages)
- Coleman in TSO, “Emergence of norms,” pp. 261-265 (5 pages)
- Horne in TSO, “Group cohesion and metanorms,” pp. 267-274 (9 pages)
- Centola, Willer, & Macy in TSO, “The Emperor’s Dilemma,” pp. 276-9 (4 pages)
- Pinker, S. (2008). “The Moral Instinct”, *New York Times Magazine*, Jan 13. pp. 1-6 (6 pages)
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2011). *A Cooperative Species*. Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9780691158167. Pp. 1-17 (17 pages)

Mar 25 – Theories of belief, ideology, and subjectivity [53 pages]

- Willis in TSO, “Learning to labor,” 122-133 (12 pages)
- Elster, J. “Belief, Bias and Ideology”, in Eagleton, T. (1994). *Ideology*. Longman. ISBN: 9781317891956; p. 238-255 [18 pages].

- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). "Education and Personal Development" in *Schooling in capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books. ISBN: 9781608461318; pp. 125-141, (17 pages)
- Lorraine, J. "Ideology", in Eds: Bottomore, T., Harris, L., Kiernan, V. G., & Miliband, R. (1991). *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ISBN: 0631164812; Oxford, pp. 247-52 [6 pages]

Apr 1 – Feminist Social Theory [35 pages]

- Beauvoir, S. "Woman as Other" in in Lemert, C. (Ed.). (2016). *Social theory: The multicultural, global, and classic readings*. Westview Press. ISBN: 9780813350028, pp. 339-341 (3 pages)
- Hartmann, H. "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in Grusky, D. B. (2001). *Social Stratification*. Boulder, Westview Press. ISBN: 0813366542. Pp 570-576 (7 pages).
- Sen, Gita. (1980). The Sexual Division of Labor and the Working-class Family. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 12(2), 76-86 (11 pages).
- Himmelweit, S. "Domestic Labour" in Eatwell, J., Milgate, M., & Newman, P. (Eds.). (1987). *Social Economics*. ISBN: 0333495292; London: Macmillan. Pp. 35-38 (4 pages)
- MacKinnon, C. A. (1989). *Toward a feminist theory of the state*. Harvard University Press. ISBN: 0674896467; pp. 1-10 (10 pages).

ESSAY DUE IN CLASS TODAY

Apr 8 - Theories of future societies [52 pages]

- Keynes, J.M. (1930). "Economic prospects for our grandchildren," *Essays in Persuasion*. Springer. ISBN: 9781349590728. Pp. 1-4 (4 pages).
- Frase, P. (2012). "Four Futures," *Jacobin*, Winter. Pp. 27-34 (8 pages)
- Cohen, G.A. (2009) "The Camping Trip" (3-11) and "Is the ideal feasible" (53-79), in *Why not socialism?* Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9780691143613; (36 pages).
- Fromm, E. (1965). "The Psychology of Basic Income", *The Nation*, Dec 6. Pp. 439-442 (4 pages).

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students should improve their ability to:

- Understand key theoretical concepts in contemporary social theory.
- Understand the role of sociological theory both within the research process and the discipline more broadly
- Compare the relative strengths and weaknesses of various theoretical perspectives for particular kinds of sociological research.

- Apply social-theoretical ideas and concepts to current social issues and problems, and evaluate their success and failure.
- Identify a sociological topic of interest, and use scholarly sources to construct an essay contrasting ideas we discuss.
- Give an in-depth oral presentation analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of a particular theoretical contribution.

How to Contact Me:

Email is best. But please come to office hours or set up an appointment. And feel free to approach me before or after class.

Important Policies

A Note on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com).

Policies on Examinations

The final exam is closed book. The pop quizzes will be open book—bring the readings! However, in both final exam and pop quizzes, no electronic devices will be allowed.

Policy on Laptops and other Electronics/Phones in Class:

I do not allow the use of any electronic devices in class, which includes cell phones, laptops, ipads, and other devices. The World Wide Web is just too tempting. Any slides I use will be posted to the course website on OWL, which should minimize the notes you'll need to take. Exceptions will be made for students who require a laptop for accessibility reasons or who see the laptop as essential to their work. Students in the latter group will need to see me in office hours and provide a compelling reason.

Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation:

http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/medical_accommodation.html

Accessibility Options:

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website:

www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Mental Health

Students who are in **emotional/mental distress** should refer to Mental Health@Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.