

# SOCIOLOGY 3404G – 002

## Modern Sociological Theory

### Winter 2019

Dr Scott Schaffer

Course Meetings: Mon 130pm to 430pm, SSC 5230

Office Hours: Weds 10am to 12pm and 445pm to 6pm, or by Skype appointment

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## FORMALITIES

**Short Course Description:** This course will survey major trends in modern sociological theory.

**Antirequisites:** Sociology 4404f/g.

**Prerequisites:** Sociology 2240e or both Sociology 2270a/b and 2271a/b, and enrolment in third year of Honours Specialization or Honours Double Major in the Department of Sociology.

**Note:** Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This 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.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is dedicated to exploring some of the varieties of social and sociological theory developed in the late 20th century (post-World War II) and early 21st century. Unlike the second-year Sociological Theory course, though, we will not be surveying the field of modern sociological thought in either a chronological or author-by-author way.

Rather, this course is intended to be a focussed examination of a particular contemporary phenomenon — what regularly gets referred to in political speeches, pundit shouting-matches, bar talk, and everyday life as “evil.” Starting with a text designed to tease out the sociological constructions of “evil” — both the phenomena we *call* “evil” and the *construction* of those phenomena and not others as evil — we will wend our way forward and backward through the last seventy years of social thought in an attempt to examine both the causes and the consequences of these constructions of “evil.” Thus, this course will not be oriented to the production and consumption of factoids or bits of knowledge about what the thinkers we will read have said, but rather to the exploration of a question: *What makes “Evil”?*

Because this is a mode of sociological exploration that takes a *longue durée* approach — that is, it takes a longer historical view of phenomena — it necessitates the development of a cer-

tain set of intellectual skills that have not yet been at the core of your university career. In particular, we will be working on three core skills that will benefit you both in the classroom and in your professional life: (1) the ability to track, map, and critically engage with a complete argument; (2) the skill of productively debating with others; and (3) learning how to draw upon multiple texts for the development of your own responses to questions. These things take time, energy, and effort, and while James Baldwin says “Most of us are about as eager to be changed as we were to be born, and go through our changes in a similar state of shock,” I am confident that together we can turn a bunch of books and ideas into an invigorating term of discussion and growth. The readings, workshops, discussions, and presentations we will engage in during the term will enable you to actively develop these skills, and I invite you to pursue this work with vigour.

## COURSE TEXTS

There are seven books that are required for the course. Most, if not all, can be purchased through Amazon.ca, Chapters/Indigo, or other online booksellers, and will be available through the UWO Bookstore. They are listed here in the order in which we will read them.

Michel Wieviorka, *Evil* (Polity Press, ISBN: 978-0745653938)

Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Polity Press, ISBN: 978-1509515325)

Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Beacon Press, ISBN: 978-0807015216)

Alain Badiou, et al., *What Is a People?* (Columbia University Press, ISBN: 978-0231168762)

Wendy Brown and Rainer Forst, *The Power of Tolerance: A Debate* (Columbia University Press, ISBN: 978-0231170192)

Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, ISBN: 978-0822363439)

Giorgio Agamben, et al., *Democracy in What State?* (Columbia University Press, ISBN: 978-0231152983)

As well, every participant in the course should have a good sociological dictionary and a good sociology writer’s manual. If you are in need of either of these, or of identifying secondary examinations of the theorists we’re reading this term, please ask and I can provide you a list.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Weekly Reading Memos

Each week (save for the week in which you give your presentation), you are required to submit a *maximum* two-page memo engaging with the course readings. These memos are meant to be interrogations of the readings -- think pieces of a sort, showing that and how you have engaged with that week's readings. They can be what you found intriguing, interesting, confusing, or downright bizarre in the readings. But most importantly, they should be *what you want to discuss in that week's class session*. **Memos must be sent to everyone in the class by 6pm on the Monday before each week's class. Everyone needs to read through the memos and consider those ideas before the start of class on Wednesday.**

Memos will not be marked on the basis of "quality" -- they don't have to be polished arguments -- but rather on the basis of the seriousness of your engagement with the readings. Since these are intended to serve as the basis of the discussion, no late memos will be accepted after Monday at 6pm. If you have to miss a class, you are still expected to prepare a memo for that week on time.

### Group Discussion Facilitations

Along with one to two other students (depending on enrolment), each student will be asked to facilitate two in-class discussions — one before the end of February, and one between the start of March and the end of the term. These are not intended to be presentations, but rather a provocation to a more in-depth discussion of that week's readings. Groups should prepare a short statement of what they found engaging, fascinating, infuriating about the authors' arguments for that week, as well as discussion questions that are designed to engage the class as a whole about that material. More details and signups will be done in the first week of classes.

### Critical Review Essay

For *one* of the weeks in which you serve as discussion facilitator, you will be asked to write a *maximum* of five (5) double-spaced pages as a Critical Review Essay. This essay, which serves as the basis for your presentation, is meant to be an in-depth examination and interrogation of *one* aspect of the readings you are presenting on. Critical Review Essay submission dates are to be no more than one week after your facilitation; your submission date needs to be declared when you sign up for facilitations, so check your assignment schedules for your other courses and plan accordingly.

### Course Paper

Students will be asked to write a fifteen-page course paper. This is not intended to be a research paper (though you will be asked to do a very small amount of research for it); rather, it should be thought of as a longer and course-level Critical Review Essay, one which is intended to give you an opportunity to dig into one of the forms of "evil" discussed by Wieviorka and to track its development through the course readings. The assignment for this paper will be distributed in the first day of classes. The Course Paper will be due on Apr 5/2019.

### Class Discussion and Engagement

This course is a workshop course — a version of a seminar — meaning that the course will rely primarily on your participation and your contributions to the discussion, as well as your responses to questions and challenges posed to you by me and your colleagues. As well, discussion forums will be created on OWL, enabling you to continue the discussions with your colleagues even outside of class time, and your contributions to these discussion forums will also factor into your participation mark. You should note that merely being physically present in class for every class session is only worth about 40% of the participation mark ("showing up is half the job"); and talking off the top of your head without being prepared or engaging with the texts is not regarded as "discussion." You should come prepared with notes, page references, highlights,

thoughts, insights, and questions, and be ready to share them with others. Even "I don't understand..." is a valuable starting point for our discussions. Please see the guidelines regarding class discussions later in this course outline.

**Important Note:** Attendance does compose a portion of your engagement mark. You need to attend at least 80% of the seminars in order to pass the course. Accommodations from the faculty Counselling Centre are required for excusable absences.

### Grade Breakdown and Grading Guidelines

Evaluation guidelines for written work are listed in the Course FAQ handout, which is available on OWL. You should read them thoroughly, both at the start of the term and prior to submitting assignments as they will provide you with a comprehensive checklist for your work.

I do my best to ensure that the evaluation of your work is as impartial as possible and reflects the quality of what you submit at the due date and time as measured against the evaluation guidelines. As a general rule, if a student completes all of the work with the seriousness appropriate to a graduate seminar, they will pass the course with at least a B.

If you have issues with the evaluation of your work, you may submit to me a one-page statement of how it is that you think your work as submitted was wrongly evaluated *no sooner than 24 hours after I return the work to you*. We will then meet to discuss the issue. Please note that I reserve the right to elevate your mark, maintain the mark as applied, or to lower the mark depending on that re-evaluation.

The weighting of the assignments in the course:

Reading Memos	15% of your course mark
Critical Review Essay	15% of your course mark
Discussion Facilitations	15% of your course mark
Course Paper	35% of your course mark
Active Participation & Engagement	20% of your course mark

Another way of looking at this:

Weekly Active Engagement in Course Facilitation & Critical Review Essays	35% of course mark (Memos, Participation)
Course Paper	30% of course mark
	35% of course mark

Or:

Writing	65% of course mark
Discussion and Discussion Facilitation	35% of course mark

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Below is the preliminary schedule of readings and workshops for the course. Generally speaking, we will endeavour to hold to this schedule, so you should plan your time accordingly.

The workshop model we will be using this term is designed to be flexible, so that some weeks we may discuss the set of readings as a group the entire class; in others we will dig deep into the mechanics of an author's argument; and in still others, there may be more lecture than in other weeks. All of these forms of engagement require that you complete the readings for each week. And if you are left with more questions than answers, that is not a bad thing at all...

As you are reading, be sure that you do not attempt to simply turn pages or skim to get through the texts as quickly as possible. "The answers" are "not there"; they require careful reading, careful thinking, note-taking, idea-jotting, mind-mapping, doodles, and any other number of possible ways for you to sort out your ideas about them. They are here to provoke you, to get inside your head and rattle around until they mesh together with some other thing to create A New Idea. Let that happen.

Please note that the workshop model will result in some flexibility in the readings as they are listed below. Some readings may be moved from optional to required and vice versa. Some may be left on the "cutting room" floor. Depending on current events, other readings may be introduced. What is listed below is the map of the course as it stands at the start of the term, and you should prepare for it as such. I will always let you know at least a week in advance if our readings for a class session will change. Please make sure that you have the readings and your notes on them with you in class. Hard copies are preferred for important pedagogical reasons. Please email me a picture of a dragon to show you understand this.

### Principles for Class Discussions

The idea behind the workshop model for the course is a simple one: To turn our examination of modern sociological thought into a collective and collaborative learning endeavour. However, this simple idea, as past experience has shown, requires that a few basic principles be made explicit.

**1. Readings.** There is often a tendency in seminars to turn every seminar into a general "bull session" where people talk off the top of their head about what they think the texts are about. This is not acceptable in this course. The focus of our work is the readings and your interrogations of them, as well as bringing these to the point of my pedagogical agenda. This is not to say that general discussions of the readings or other materials or issues cannot be brought to bear on our discussions. It is to say that we will constantly be moving back to the texts, so you need to be prepared for that move.

**2. Listen.** Good discussions pick up trains of thought in the room; unsatisfying discussions are collections of things people want to say without reference to anything else said in the class. Be less concerned with figuring out what your brilliant comment will be, and focus more on the collaborative aspect of our learning environment.

**3. Brevity.** Keep your interventions focussed on the issues and texts at hand. Long, meandering, overblown speeches rarely contribute as much as one thinks.

**4. Equity.** I acknowledge that some members of our workshop will have different personalities and different degrees of exposure to the material, and that these will lead to different levels of active participation. However, individually and as a group, we should be aware of these factors and work to ensure as equitable participation as possible and to work to create a classroom environment where all members feel enabled to participate. Discussion facilitators need to be attentive to this and to curtail speeches by people who have dominated the discussion if need be.

**5. Types of interventions.** Not every contribution in class needs to be a brilliant insight. No intervention should be regarded as "too simple" as long as it reflects an attempt to seriously engage with the material and a preparation to do so. It is appropriate to ask for clarifications of readings or previous comments, as well as to make substantive points on the topics at hand. And it is perfectly acceptable to ask for a brief pause or a slow-down in order to catch up.

**6. Discussion tone.** The workshop model is one that has its heart a notion of what I would call *cooperative, collaborative conflict*. That is, it is perfectly acceptable to have disagreements about the materials or course issues, as they can often highlight differences in interpretation that can productively lead to theoretical advances and improvements in our understanding. Those differences, as well as the ways in which they are stated, should be oriented to this goal at all times. Workshop leaders should be attentive to the ways in which discussions are conducted in order to ensure that the discussion is not marked by aggressiveness, competitiveness, or other tricks in what Erik Olin Wright calls "the repertoire of male verbal domination" or Pierre Bourdieu calls "linguistic violence."

**7. Preparation for discussions.** Good seminars depend on serious preparation by students. This means the following:

- a. Doing the readings carefully -- not reading every word necessarily, but studying the readings.
- b. Reading the memos written by other students, as well as writing down any reactions to any you find interesting. This kind of "virtual dialogue" can be very productive for our collective workshop.
- c. Try to discuss the material with at least one other student before each class session, whether in person or online.

Week 1: Weds Jan 9. Introduction to the Course. Today and “Evil.”

**Note:** I will proceed on the first day of class as if you have read the assigned material.

Michel Wieviorka, *Evil*, chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-40; Preface also recommended)

Week 2: Weds Jan 16. Social Exclusion, Terrorism, Racism.

*Reading Memos begin*

Michel Wieviorka, *Evil*, chapters 3-4 (pp. 41-87)

Week 3: Weds Jan 23. Returns to the Past.

*Group Discussion Facilitations begin*

Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia*, Introduction and chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-85)

Week 4: Weds Jan 30. Escapes from the Present.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia*, chs. 3-4 (pp. 86-152)

Week 5: Weds Feb 6. In Chinese, the word for “crisis” includes both “danger” and “opportunity”...

Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Part I; Part II, chs. 1-3, 8, and one of chs. 4-7 (pp. 1-50, 92-94 + 7-11pp)

Week 6: Weds Feb 13. ...but not really...: On the legitimation of systems.

Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Part III (pp. 95-143)

Weds Feb 20. Thanksgiving/Reading Week. Catch up or read ahead.

Week 7: Weds Feb 27. On Halloween weekend, you’re reading about “the people.”

*First-half Critical Review Essays and Discussion must be completed by this date.*

From *What Is a People?*:

Bruno Bosteels, “Introduction: This People Which Is Not One” (*WIP*, pp. 1-20)

Alain Badiou, “Twenty-Four Notes on the Uses of the World ‘People’” (*WIP*, pp. 21-31)

Pierre Bourdieu, “You Said ‘Popular?’” (*WIP*, pp. 32-48)

Week 8: Weds Mar 6. Sovereignty and antisovereignty.

From *What Is a People?*:

Judith Butler, "'We, the People': Thoughts on Freedom of Assembly" (*WIP*, pp. 49-64)

Georges Didi-Huberman, "To Render Sensible" (*WIP*, pp. 65-86)

Sadri Khiari, "The People and the Third People" (*WIP*, pp. 87-100)

Jacques Rancière, "The Populism That Is Not to Be Found" (*WIP*, pp. 101-106)

Week 9: Weds Mar 13. Selves, others, and Others. The role of tolerance.

Wendy Brown and Rainer Forst, *The Power of Tolerance: A Debate*, entire.

Week 10: Weds Mar 20. Being, becoming, and nothingness. Racialism and the construction of "subjects."

Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, Introduction and chapters 1, 3, and 4 (pp. 1-37, 78-128).

Week 11: Weds Mar 27. "Freedom is something people take."

Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, chapters 5-6 (pp. 129-178).

Week 12: Weds Apr 3. "People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them."

*No reading memo due.*

*Second-half Group Discussion Facilitations must be completed by this date.*

From *Democracy in What State?*:

Giorgio Agamben, "Introductory Note on the Concept of Democracy" (pp. 1-5)

Daniel Bensaïd, "Permanent Scandal" (pp. 16-43)

Wendy Brown, "'We Are All Democrats Now...'" (pp. 44-57)

Jean-Luc Nancy, "Finite and Infinite Democracy" (pp. 58-75)

Jacques Rancière, "Democracies Against Democracy" (pp. 76-81)

Kristin Ross, "Democracy for Sale" (pp. 82-99)

*Continued on next page...*

Fri Apr 5, 1155pm EDT: Course Paper DUE to Assignments folder of OWL.

For the purposes of the Course Paper, you need to read the following course readings, as well as **no more** than three (3) additional journal articles. The full assignment will be distributed in the first class session.

Michel Wieviorka, *Evil*, chapter 5 (pp. 88-134)

Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia*, Epilogue (pp. 153-167)

Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, Epilogue (pp. 179-184)

Kevin Olson, "Conclusion: Fragile Collectivities, Imagined Sovereignities," pp. 107-132 in *What is a People?*

## COURSE POLICIES

It is crucial that you read, understand, and agree to these policies. Your continued enrolment in the course constitutes acceptance of these policies and expectations of you during the term. Note that additional information on these policies and other things that might come up during the year can be found in the Course FAQ on OWL.

### Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

UWO promotes the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect for other students, and help maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Violations of academic integrity will be treated very seriously.

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage 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** academic offence (see the Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar), and I take it very seriously.

All required papers *will* be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the 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 UWO and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Students who submit work found to be substantially plagiarised (i.e., work in which plagiarism can be demonstrated in substance) will be subject to the procedures outlined in the Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students section of the Western Academic Calendar. This referral will be done without exception.

### Accessibility.

Please contact me 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 x82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

### **Attendance and Accommodation for Medical Illness.**

Your attendance in class sessions is expected and constitutes part of your mark. If you are unable to attend a class session for medical or compassionate reasons, you must inform me as soon as possible.

The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at [http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://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](http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/medical_accommodation.html).

### **Communications:**

Email is my preferred method of contact. Any professor should tell you this: **Write your emails to me as you would want any letter of recommendation I might write on your behalf written for you.** They should be professionally prepared, spell- and grammar-checked, not written in “text message” or chat format, and have the course number (SOC 3404) in the subject line. They should account for the highest degree the person has (hence, I am “Dr Schaffer” or “Professor Schaffer,” or even “Schaffer,” not “Mr Schaffer”), and they should be respectful of the recipient. Be sure to always sign them; if your email address is “HotKitty642@aol.com” and you don’t sign it, I will presume it is spam and treat it accordingly.

### **Laptop Policy:**

**Laptops are generally prohibited in this course.** This course is not a dictation course, and you cannot expect to learn what this course has to offer simply by taking down every word that is said (or checking your Facebook during lectures). Research has shown that students who take “paper notes” generally perform better in courses than those who take notes with laptops; and laptop usage can be distracting for those seated behind you, reducing their attention in class as well. However, if you believe that your academic performance will be unduly disadvantaged by not being able to use a laptop and can provide a compelling reason for this, please come discuss the matter with me. All students granted leave to use a laptop in class will be required to sit in the last row or in a location to be arranged so as not to distract others. iPads and other tablets, when used for handwritten notes in a horizontal position, are allowed, as is making audio recordings of my lectures for later note-taking.

### **Mental Health.**

Students who are in emotional or mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western ([www.uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](http://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/)) for a complete list of options for how to obtain help.

### **Mobile Phone Policy:**

All phones are to be shut off at the start of class, except if you have a dire emergency that you are having to attend to (such as an immediate family member’s illness or hospitalization, or your spouse’s/domestic partner’s impending delivery), in which case you need to let me know at the start of class. Phones that go off in class will have messages taken and delivered publicly. Text messaging is absolutely prohibited during class times, whether on smart phones or smart watches.

### **Other Important Issues:**

***My Pedagogical Prime Directive is No BS.*** This course outline details what I require of my students, and should you meet those requirements, you can expect an intellectually fulfilling class session and course. If you fail to meet those requirements, I reserve the right to excuse you from the class session, either individually or collectively, as I firmly believe that you cannot adequately benefit from what goes on in my classroom without having put in the necessary preparation before class and the necessary engagement in class. I also have nearly twenty years' evidence for this belief, should you need it. I hope that you will not.

I will actively work to respond to issues that come up in class, either during the term or on a daily basis. To that end, I reserve the right to change, adapt, or amend this course outline, the reading schedule, and other policy issues at any time in order to make possible the improvement of the course; *however, I will only do so with the consent of and input from the class as a whole.* Finally, any issues that you feel are impacting on your ability to do well in the course, whether they are issues inside or outside the classroom, should be brought to me *directly and firstly* as soon as possible. If the issue is not adequately resolved through the discussion with me, you need to follow the Sociology department's protocols for addressing a grievance. I take what goes on in this course very seriously and personally; I hope you will as well.

## **COURSE EXPECTATIONS & LEARNING OUTCOMES**

As with any senior-level course, you are expected to be fully engaged in this course and able to largely direct your own learning. In order to do that, you should be prepared to meet the following expectations:

- ◆ Consistent attendance in class sessions, with you having read the materials prior to class, being prepared to discuss the materials, to pose any questions that you have, and to engage yourself and others in the learning process;
- ◆ Attendance in my office hours whenever you have a question or need help in understanding the materials or issues under discussion;
- ◆ Thoughtful reflection on the course materials and issues prior to coming to class, thoughtful discussion of these materials and issues during class sessions, and further reflection and engagement with them after class;
- ◆ The diligent pursuit of all assignments, with you committed to doing your best work on each one and dedicated to improving the quality of that "best work" throughout the term;
- ◆ And, overall, your commitment to giving us your best work in every class session and throughout the term.

If you engage with and meet these expectations, you can expect that by the end of this term, you will be able to do the following (among other things that you'll be surprised you've learned how to do and discovered about yourself):

- ◆ Engage in a thoughtful manner with the key concepts, theoretical positions, and arguments of the theorists who developed the discipline of sociology;
- ◆ Develop clear, well-thought, and increasingly sophisticated responses to questions, and the capacity to construct refined sociological questions;

- ◆ Display facility in and fluency with sociological and theoretical concepts and utilise them in the development of oral and written arguments;
- ◆ Demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which theory is constructed, operates as a basis for sociological analysis, is refined, and relates to the research process;
- ◆ Build the skills associated with sociological thinking and the deployment of the "sociological imagination";
- ◆ Develop and demonstrate the skills required to do advanced sociological research, both the "hard skills" of theoretical facility and fluency, a willingness to independently seek out knowledge to answer questions, and a work ethic consistent with your level of expertise, as well as the soft skills associated with professional conduct;
- ◆ And understand and discuss the continuing relevance of sociological theory for the future of Canadian sociological research and thereby Canadian society.