



The University of Western Ontario
SOCIOLOGY 3404G - 200
Modern Sociological Theory
Winter 2023

DRAFT

Class times and mode:

Monday 9:30-12:30pm

Hybrid: In-person in room **UCC-60** & four virtual synchronous classes on Zoom

Instructor: David Calnitsky

Office Hours by appointment
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TA office hours by appointment

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

Technical Requirements:



Stable internet connection



Laptop or computer



Working microphone



Working webcam

The hybrid mode:

This is a 200, hybrid designated class – this means that most of the classes will be in-person, but four will be done over Zoom. The Zoom mode has worked really well in the past because the class is small and participation can work easily. Attendance at synchronous Zoom sessions is required, and *webcams must be on*, because participation is a big part of the class.

There are four scheduled Zoom classes:

- (1) Feb 6 – Functional explanation;
- (2) Feb 13 – Theories of belief ideology, and subjectivity;
- (3) Mar 20 – Theories of norms, morality, & solidarity
- (4) Mar 27 – Theories of history

Otherwise, class is in person.

Zoom invite:

David Calnitsky is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: SOCIOLOG 3404F 200 FW22

Time: This is a recurring meeting:

(1) Feb 6 – 9:30am; (2) Feb 13 – 9:30am; (3) Mar 20 – 9:30am; (4) Mar 27 – 9:30am

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://westernuniversity.zoom.us...> TBD

Meeting ID: TBD

Introductory hype:

Turn on your sound and hit play on these:

<https://starwarsintrocreator.kassellabs.io/?ref=redirect#!/BLTTTDRqAx6FZVtKYcc0>

<https://strangerthingsintrocreator.kassellabs.io/#!/AMHI8AWYOw5leemp58pZ>

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

Prerequisite(s): 0.5 courses from [Sociology 2263A/B](#), [Sociology 2270A/B](#), [Sociology 2271A/B](#) OR 1.0 [Sociology 2240E](#).

Unless you have either the prerequisites 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.

Anti-requisite(s): Sociology 4404F/G

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

The object 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 and functionalist theories.

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.

Policy on laptops and phones during in-person classes:

For our non-Zoom classes: I do not allow the use of any electronic devices during in-person classes, which includes cell phones, laptops, ipads, and other devices. The World Wide Web is just too tempting. And all the current research shows that laptops reduce learning outcomes for in-person classes. Your cell phones should be off, not just set to vibrate. I promise this is not meant to be mean or punitive. Even if you are trying hard to pay attention, devices will distract you and your classmates around you. In exchange for this, I will post 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 get in touch with me and provide a compelling reason.

Course Material:

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 available as a free ebook here: <https://jacobinmag.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=b7db5951d33a061da219ae2c8&id=05656e7027>

And print copies are available for purchase 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. Note: If you find an old course pack it will have some, but not necessarily all, of the readings. It may also have other out of date syllabus details.

Communication:

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<http://owl.uwo.ca>) on a regular basis for updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

Method of Evaluation:

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course.

Evaluation Breakdown:

Class participation	20%
Weekly reading memos	20%
Midterm exam	20%
Compare & contrast 5-page essay (due last day of classes)	20%
Final exam (During final exam period, TBD)	20%

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: Have the readings with you during class time—we will be going through them.

Weekly memos

Every week you will submit a short, paragraph long memo on the readings that week. The weekly memo—three sentences or so, and yes that means full sentences—is basically there to convince me you've done the reading. You don't have to cover each specific reading (although you can, and you can comment on differences between them), but you have to write something thoughtful about what you've just read. This can be a reflection directly on readings, an objection to a claim that is made, or something stated by the author that you agree with.

These will be graded, each week, on a very rough three point scale: 3 points means you clearly did the reading and engaged with it directly and thoughtfully in your comment, and 1 point means you wrote something down that's highly general, not specific to reading, and didn't really persuade me that you've engaged with the material. 2 points is somewhere in between.

To get marks for the memo it must be submitted in dropbox on OWL *BEFORE* class starts each week. Also note that this will help with your participation grade because I will be asking about the readings each class and you will get a chance to express some reflections verbally.

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.

Note that readings will be more directly relevant for weekly memos and participation (especially at the top of each class), where exams will focus more directly on lecture material.

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.

Other essay details: You don't need to cite articles other than the ones you are comparing; reference style doesn't matter, just pick one (APA, Chicago, etc) and be consistent. Submit via Dropbox on OWL. Mainly I'm interested in how precise your description is and how compelling your comparison is. And above all else I'm interested in the strength of your argumentation and evaluation. If you think author A is more compelling than author B, or if you think they're in fact complementary, you need to persuade me why that's the case.

Mid-term exam (Feb 27) 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 paid attention in class, and thought about the material seriously. The content will cover lecture material. Exams will not be cumulative.

The mid-term will happen in class time on Feb 27th and we will have the full three hours of class time, 1:30-4:30pm. The final exam will be during the exam period. Both will consist of short answer definition questions and longer form essay questions. More information will be provided as we go along.

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning:

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Student Absences:

If you are unable to meet a course requirement due to illness or other serious circumstances, please follow the procedures below.

Assessments worth less than 10% of the overall course grade:

For work worth less than 10% of the total course grade, in this case, the memos, I will offer a make-up opportunity for one memo. Additionally, the lowest memo grade will be dropped.

Assessments worth 10% or more of the overall course grade:

For work totaling 10% or more of the final course grade, students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to their Home Faculty Academic Counselling Office as soon as possible. In the case of valid medical or supporting documentation I will offer a make-up opportunity for exams.

Absences from Final Examinations:

Students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to their Home Faculty Academic Counselling Office as soon as possible. Academic Counselling will determine eligibility to write a Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam). You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

Note: missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty of Social Science Academic Counselling Office.

Course Schedule and Readings:

Jan 9 – Introduction

Jan 16 – The rise of social theory; the elements of theory

- 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 23 – Theories of capitalism

- V. Chibber, “Understanding Capitalism”, Catalyst – The ABCs of Capitalism, 2-38
- 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.
- “Cosmos and Taxis”, Friedrich Hayek in TSO, 140-153 [14 pages]
- “Division of Labor”, Adam Smith in TSO, 166-174 [9 pages]

Jan 30 – Theories of the state

- V. 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)
- Engels in TSO, “The origin of the state” pp. 99-102. [4 pages]

Feb 6 – **ON ZOOM** – Functional explanation, explained

- Kanazawa in TSO, pp. 35-40 (6 pages)
- R. Merton – Manifest and Latent Functions; in Lemert, C. (Ed.). (2016). *Social theory*. Westview Press. ISBN: 9780813350028; pp. 242-245 (4 pages)

- Bell, D. (1979) “Talcott Parsons: Nobody's Theories Were Bigger”, May 13. *New York Times*. (2 pages)
- Gould, S. J. (1997). Evolution the Pleasures of Pluralism, *The New York Review of Books*, June 26, p. 1-6. (6 pages)
- Harris, M. (1974, 2007). “India’s Sacred Cow.” in Macionis, J & Benokraitis, N. (eds.). *Seeing Ourselves*; ISBN: 9780132819008; pp. 51-54 (4 pages).

Feb 13 – ON ZOOM – Theories of belief, ideology, and subjectivity

- Willis in TSO, “Learning to labor,” 122-133 (12 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)
- Elster, J. (1986). “Marxist Critique of Ideology,” *An Introduction to Karl Marx.*; pp. 168-184. (17 pages)
- Hechter & Horne in TSO, “Solutions to the problem of social order” pp. 41-45. [5 pages]
- Marx in TSO, “The production of consciousness” pp. 46-48. [3 pages]

Feb 20 – Reading week

Feb 27 – Midterm exam, in class

Mar 6 – Rational choice theory & game theory

- Becker, G. S. (2008). *The economic approach to human behavior*. University of Chicago press. ISBN: 0226041123; pp. 3-14 (12 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 13 – Theories of collective action

- V. Chibber, “Capitalism and Class Struggle”, *Catalyst – The ABCs of Capitalism*, 2-31
- 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 20 – ON ZOOM – Theories of norms, morality, & solidarity

- 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)
- Sloan Wilson, D. (2011). “The Evolution of Selfless Behaviour,” *New Scientist*. 211(2824). Pp. 1-8.

Mar 27 – ON ZOOM – Theories of history

- 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. 28-35 & 108-119 (20 pages).

- **ESSAY DUE TODAY BEFORE MIDNIGHT (Apr 3)**

Apr 3 – Critical theory, postmodernism, and scientific objectivity

- Benton, T., & Craib, I. (2010). *Philosophy of social science: The philosophical foundations of social thought*. Palgrave Macmillan. Ch. 10; ISBN: 9780230242609; pp. 160-172 (13 pages)
- Sokal, A and Bricmont, J. *Fashionable Non-sense*, "Epistemic relativism in the philosophy of science," 49-95
- Enoch, D. (2014). Why I am an objectivist about ethics (and why you are, too). *The ethical life*, 1-6.
- Ryan, A. (1993). Foucault's Life and Hard Times. *New York Review of Books*. April 8. Pp. 1-7.

Important Policies

Academic Consideration for Missed Work: Students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation in order to receive accommodation for missed work worth 10% or more of the final grade in the course. All required documentation for absences must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty. Individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds or for other reasons.

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf. The student medical certificate is available at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Religious Accommodation: When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at <https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.

Accessibility Options: Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html), which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: www.registrar.uwo.ca/academics/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: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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.

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 (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

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

Please visit the Social Science Academic Counselling webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters: [Academic Counselling - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#).

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.