SOCI 100: Classical Sociological Theory

Spring 2025, University of California, San Diego
Prof. Tom Medvetz
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will focus on the work of four classical thinkers whose ideas became central to the emergent sociological tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. As the quarter goes on, we will compare these theorists extensively in the hopes of getting a better understanding of sociology's purposes, precepts, and guiding principles; its promise as an intellectual enterprise; and its perils. For the sake of clarity and organization, we will need a unifying theme for the class. Because sociology emerged during the nineteenth century as part of an attempt to understand the nature and functioning of modern industrial society, our theme will be: the *division of labor*.

This is a required class for all sociology majors, but it's also open to students of other majors. Either way, welcome! Please note that I expect you to keep up with ALL the assigned readings and to bring the relevant text(s) with you to each lecture. I will deliver the lectures with the assumption that you are caught up with that day's readings. Please note also that much of the material for this class is quite dense and difficult. What some of the readings lack in length, they easily make up for in complexity! In all likelihood, you'll need to read some of the material multiple times if you want to grasp it at an appropriate level. Classroom discussion will help; please try to come to class with questions and comments about the readings or about previous lectures.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There are four required texts for this class:

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (W. W. Norton & Company; 2nd revised ed.)
Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Free Press)
Émile Durkheim, *Suicide* (Free Press)
Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Talcott Parsons)

I would encourage you to get physical copies of the texts. Even so, I'll make all the readings available, free of charge, through the course's Canvas page.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will have five parts: a section grade (20 percent); two medium length writing assignments (the first due during week 6 and worth 20 percent, the second due during week 10 and worth 30 percent), lecture attendance (15 percent), and a final exam (15 percent). The components of the section grade will be left to the discretion of your TA, but I've encouraged them to keep that score simple and focused on participation.

The written assignments for this course must be handed in electronically through the Assignment module on the course's Canvas page. You may not use outside sources or materials of any kind, including generative AI software, for any of the assignments. If there is any indication that you've violated this rule, your assignment will be forwarded to UCSD's Academic Integrity Office. Once the assignment is in their hands, it's out of my control. Please do not cheat. Here, in summary, is a breakdown of the grading scheme:

20% Writing assignment #1 (due week 6)

30%	Writing assignment #2 (due week 10)
20%	Section grade (as determined by TA)
15%	Lecture attendance
15%	Final exam
100%	Total grade

OTHER POLICIES & RESOURCES

Academic integrity

You may not misrepresent your work in any way or be party to another student's failure to maintain academic integrity. I will refer any suspected cases of cheating, including plagiarism, to the Academic Integrity Office. For the UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, see: https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/process/policy.html. The minimum penalty for violations of academic integrity will be an F for the course.

Students with Disabilities

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive, equitable, and accessible. If you require academic accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities. You are also welcome to discuss your options with me privately.

Classroom conduct

Please refrain from being disruptive to your fellow students and your instructor. Disruptive behavior includes coming to class late, leaving early, text messaging, and not silencing your phone before class.

Writing

The ability to write clearly is very important, and not something that can be reliably distinguished from "good ideas" expressed poorly. In your papers, please pay special attention to grammar, mechanics, syntax, style, and organization. In the past, students have asked me for references on writing advice, and I often point them to these two: the classic *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White and *The St. Martin's Handbook* (St. Martin's Press, 6th edition).

Grievances

If you wish to contest a grade, you must first go to your TA and submit to him/her a one-page statement explaining why you think the grading is unfair. If you are dissatisfied with the response, please come to me. Please note that I will not change a grade without first discussing it with your reader. Also bear in mind that your grade may move upwards or downwards should I decide to re-grade the paper.

Childcare Resources

https://students.ucsd.edu/well-being/wellness-resources/student-parents/child-care.html
https://child.ucsd.edu/resources/options.html
https://child.ucsd.edu/resources/ccampis.html

Student Health and Wellness:

https://vcsa.ucsd.edu/student-success/student-well-being.html
(Basic Needs: https://basicneeds.ucsd.edu)

CLASS SCHEDULE

The **[#s]** below correspond to the numbered file names in the course readings folder.

Part I: Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels
On the workings of industrial society

Week 1 (March 31 – April 4)

[1] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 8-25, p. 635-640

Week 2 (April 7-11)

[2] Marx, *Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association*, p. 512-519
[2] Marx, *Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper*, p. 577-578
[2] Engels, *Working-Class Manchester*, p. 579-585
[2] Engels, *Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx*, p. 681-682
[2] Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, p. 738-740
[2] Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 146, p. 155-188

Week 3 (April 14-18)

[2] Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 189-200
[2] Marx, *Capital, Vol. III*, p. 439-442
[2] Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*, p. 203-217
[2] Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p 700-724
[2] Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 469-483
[2] Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 3-6
[2] Engels, *The Tactics of Social Democracy*, p. 556-573

Part II: Émile Durkheim
On solidarity and moral order

Week 4 (April 21-25)

[3] Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*[*]
"Preface to the First Edition" and "Introduction," p. 32-46
Book 1, Chapters 1-2 and Chapter 3, Part I, p. 49-115
Book 1, Chapter 3, Parts III & IV, p. 122-132
Book 1, Chapter 5, Part V, p. 168-173
Book 1, Chapter 7, p. 200-229

Week 5 (April 28 – May 2)

[3] Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*
Book 2, Chapter II, p. 256-282
Book 3, Chapters I-III & Conclusion, p. 353-409

[*] Please note that the page numbers listed here for the two Durkheim books refer to the electronic editions distributed for this class. Most print editions have different page numbers, which is why I am also listing the chapter and section numbers.

[4] Durkheim, *Suicide*
"Introduction," p. xxxix-lii
Book 2, Chapters 1-2, p. 97-125

Week 6 (May 5-9)
[4] Durkheim, *Suicide*
Book 2, Chapter 3, Part I, p. 126-136
Book 2, Chapter 3, Part VI, p. 167-174
Book 2, Chapter 4, Part I, p. 175-186
Book 2, Chapter 4, Part III, p. 199-200
Book 2, Chapter 5, p. 201-239
Book 3, Chapter 1, p. 261-290
[5] Durkheim, "The Dualism of Human Nature & its Social Conditions," p. 1-7

** 1st WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE **

Part III: Max Weber
On rationalization

Week 7 (May 12-16)
[6] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism*[†]
"Author's Introduction," p. xxviii-xlii
Chapters 1-2, p. 1-38

Week 8 (May 19-23)
[6] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism*
Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Part A, p. 39-80
Chapter 5, p. 102-125

Week 9 (May 26-30)
[7] Weber, "Bureaucracy and Legitimate Authority," p. 17-23
[8] Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions," p. 323-359

Week 10 (June 2-6)
[9] Weber, "Science as a Vocation," p. 1-36

** 2nd WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE **

[†] As with the Durkheim books, these page numbers are specific to the edition that I've distributed electronically. Not only are there multiple editions of this book with different page numbers, but there are multiple translations as well—some of which present the material in different sequences from this version. It's a huge mess.

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS ON HOW TO READ SOCIOLOGY
By *Loïc Wacquant*

Reading sociology is not like reading the newspapers or reading a novel. If you care to get the most out of the materials you are assigned, you have to learn to read sociologically or analytically, that is, to break down an argument into its constituent parts (explanandum, explanans, premises, hypotheses, theorems, laws or mechanisms, evidence, conclusions and corollaries), retrace its major stages and turns, evaluate its strengths, weaknesses, and validity, and grasp, separate out, and assess its implications (empirical, conceptual, theoretical, moral or practical). Here are some practical tips to help you do just that.

-ALWAYS READ WITH A PURPOSE: moving your eyes across printed text is not reading! Reading with a purpose means asking a question (or, better yet, a system of questions) that you keep in mind as you progress and that helps you put the pieces of the puzzle together. So always identify from the outset what the author intends to do in the writing, what question s/he intends to answer, how s/he proposes to do it, and what kind of arguments s/he develops (causal, historical, hermeneutic, etc.).

-SCAN AND SCOPE THE TEXT BEFOREHAND: you'll do a much better job picking up the argument(s) in the text if you know in advance what to look for. For this, always scan the full text beforehand: flip through the pages, grab a few paragraphs here and there, pay attention to titles and subtitles, notice phrases in bold or italics, tables and figures (in particular their captions)—in short get a rough feel for what's going on there. You can also read the first and last sentence or paragraph of every section, just to become familiar with the substance and tone of the argument(s). Then read the text in depth.

-READ IN (SOCIO)LOGICAL MANNER: this means identifying the problem the author is trying to resolve, the concepts s/he uses or develops for that purpose, the evidence s/he brings to bear on the issue, and the social mechanisms invoked. Reflect on the limitations, biases, gaps, and silences of both question and answer. Make an effort to resituate them in the broader constellation of sociological theories and research you are familiar with; never read a text in isolation: always relate it to other cognate texts you know (among them, those assigned for the same and prior weeks). Sociological arguments have a structure; your reading should locate and mimic it.

-READ DIFFERENTIALLY: do not treat all printed text in the same manner; "democratic reading" is analytically inefficient (even unsound); some parts of a text contain critical conceptual distinctions or causal arguments and should be read very cautiously (and repeatedly if necessary); others contain illustrative materials, empirical elaborations, or theoretical digressions and can be read more rapidly (and even sometimes skimmed or skipped). So allocate your time and effort wisely, in proportion to the difficulty and/or significance of the passage.

-ANNOTATE THE TEXT AS YOU READ: read with a pen or pencil in hand and mark the progression, twists, and turns of the argument as it unfolds. You can devise your own stenographic system (arrows, stars, circlings, underlinings, etc.) to highlight in a consistent and economical manner the main names and dates, key authors and references, definitions and logical turning points, salient illustrations, conclusions and implications, etc. But do not defeat your purpose and highlight everything!

-WRITE UP NOTES IMMEDIATELY AFTER READING: if you've read a text with an active analytical intention, you should be able to summarize and reconstruct the main lines of its argument(s). Immediately upon finishing your reading, write, type, or scribble a short recapitulation of what you just absorbed in telegraphic or diagrammatic form. What was the key question posed by the author, what answers were given to it, what concepts or theories were introduced, what evidence adduced, how does this or that

thesis or theory differ from rival views, etc. Use your annotations and marginalia as guides and signposts; if the text introduces new concepts, make a note of them and write down their definition (as given by the author and/or as reconstructed by you); if it contrasts several phenomena or theories, enumerate what makes them different or similar. Use whatever devices (tables, lists, bullets, diagrams, etc.) give you the best synoptic and synthetic view of the piece you've read. Your reading notes will be invaluable self-teaching and learning aids for as long as you study sociology (and beyond).

-REFLECT BACK UPON THE TEXT AND EVALUATE THE ARGUMENT: never close a book or article without evaluating its argument: was it logically consistent and empirically adequate, plausible or convincing and why (not)? What alternative or rival arguments come to mind? Again, relate the text you've read to others you know (or mentioned by the author). Never take an author at face value, no matter how famous and authoritative; there is a lot of bulls—in social science writings, as in every other kind. It's your job to separate sociological wheat from chaff. Also, do not be swayed by emotional appeals and moral exhortation: more often than not, good sentiments hide bad sociology. Forsake the "logic of the trial": the validity of a sociological demonstration has nothing to do with how attractive or repulsive it is ethically or politically.

-DO NOT HESITATE TO READ A TEXT A SECOND, THIRD,... NTH TIME: a common myth among bad readers is that if you've read well a given text, you're done for life. This makes no sense! A text may be "discovered" as many times as there are purposes for reading it. Genuinely complex and rich texts are profitably read several times over as each reading unearths new layers, puzzles, and treasures. (Later you might come to own multiple copies of the important books you've read).

Remember the etymology of the verb to read: it comes from the Middle English, râeden, to advise. So heed this advice and be advised when you read.