

University of Colorado, Boulder
SOCY 5201: Seminar in Sociological Theory
Spring 2018
Monday 3:00-5:30pm, HUMN 335
Mathieu Desan
mathieu.desan@colorado.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-5:00pm or by appointment

The purpose of this course is to provide you with an introduction to classical sociological theory. Our focus will be on canonical texts in the history of sociology. These texts are foundational to the discipline, and as such, all practicing sociologists should be familiar with them. Of course, whether or not the canon, such as it is, is relevant to current sociological research is an open question we will discuss during the semester. I thus encourage students to read these texts critically. However, I also encourage students to approach these texts in good faith, and to be attentive to the ways in which the concerns and theories of the disciplinary founders might endure.

Substantively, this course will examine major theoretical approaches to core issues and problems in sociology, including the nature of society and social order, the relationship between society and the individual, the role of culture and social structure, the sources of social power, the processes of social reproduction and change, and the production of sociological knowledge itself. Many contemporary debates in sociology build on—or at the very least are informed by—the ideas, concepts, methods, and approaches of the writers covered in this course.

This course will feature intensive reading and extended discussion of classic texts. We will contextualize these texts by considering their significance in the historical development of sociological knowledge, but we will also consider what potential these texts may have for explaining social life in the 21st century. The texts can sometimes be dense and abstruse, but my hope is that by struggling through them students will begin to learn what it means to think theoretically. Whether or not you think of yourself as somebody who's interested in theory, theorizing is central to all sociological research and writing. One goal of this class is to encourage students to think more explicitly about their theorizing. Furthermore, theory is also necessarily a collective endeavor. As such, we will share our own sociological knowledge, perspectives on the reading, and research interests and projects with each other. When you finish this class, you should be able to use the major concepts and frameworks of social theory in your own research and writing, and pursue further theoretical reading on your own as your work requires.

Required Texts

You must acquire the following books (please make sure to acquire the correct editions of each book, linked below). If acquiring any of them poses too much of a financial hardship, please speak to me about other ways of getting hold of the books. Used and electronic copies are fine. Other readings (articles, book chapters, etc.) will be posted on D2L.

[The Marx-Engels Reader](#)

[From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology](#)

[The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism](#) (Version translated by Talcott Parsons)

[The Rules of Sociological Method](#)

[The Division of Labor in Society](#)

[The Elementary Forms of Religious Life](#) (Abridged version translated by Carol Cosman)

[The Scholar Denied](#)

[The Souls of Black Folk](#) (Penguin Classics edition)

[Black Reconstruction in America](#) (Free Press edition)

[Outline of a Theory of Practice](#)

Expectations

Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend and participate in class. If you are unable to attend class (for health, family obligations, religious observance, etc.), please let me know in advance. Each *unexcused* absence will result in a 10% reduction of your final grade.

I am aware that students enter graduate school with different levels of experience and comfort with discussions. Being able to contribute to academic discussions is a crucial aspect of becoming a scholar, and this class is one of the places you will practice this skill. Please do not hesitate to ask questions, make mistakes, or disagree with others.

Readings: This is a doctoral seminar. As such, the reading load is substantial. You are expected to read all assigned material before coming to class. We will devote most of our class time to exploring the readings.

Please note that the readings can be difficult. If you are struggling to understand something in the reading, do not be discouraged. The important thing is to move forward and try to grasp the big picture. Often times, something that was unclear will only become clearer in hindsight, after you've read more. You are not expected to understand 100% of what you read, especially on the first pass. With that said, it is helpful to briefly look up any words, names, events, etc. with which you are unfamiliar in the course of your reading. What Marx, Weber, Du Bois, Durkheim, etc. took for granted about their readership will not always apply to you, so look things up when you need to.

As graduate students, you will be tempted to be critical of everything you read. This is great...so long as you also make a good faith effort to engage with the texts on their own terms. In my experience, it takes more work to be a generous reader than it does to be a critical reader.

Cultivating a habit of generosity in engaging with other people's work is something that will make you a better scholar and serve you well in your careers. Your first instinct in reading a text should not be to find something to criticize, but to try and understand why the author wrote what they did in the way they did. What were they responding to? What questions were they trying to answer? Who were they in conversation with? What, given the epistemic and social contexts in which the authors wrote, was sayable and unsayable? In short, even if you find a particular text problematic or otherwise objectionable, I want you to make an honest effort to understand why many scholars consider these texts to be classics.

Respect: There are many ways to interpret the course readings and many competing views on the topics we will discuss, and I hope we will debate many contrasting viewpoints during the course of the semester. To facilitate good discussion, please keep in mind that we are debating ideas, not each other as individuals. This type of debate might take the form of "I disagree" instead of "you're wrong." Please keep the difference in mind so that we can engage in useful and vigorous discussion.

In the context of a graduate seminar, respect takes on an additional, specific meaning. In graduate seminars, there is a tendency to try to "show off" by "name dropping" (or, put more sympathetically, to make exciting intellectual connections to material outside the immediate scope of the class). This tendency can lead to stifled discussions and alienation as students who are unfamiliar with a particular thinker or concept are forced out of the conversation. Thus, as a rule, if you want to introduce a term or author that we have not explicitly discussed in the class, you must fully explain who the author is/was or the meaning of the concept, and then why that theorist or concept is relevant to our discussion. The goal here is not to prevent bringing in outside material, but to make sure that we can have a productive conversation by building a shared vocabulary—incidentally, one the central purposes of learning classical theory.

Evaluation

Presentations: Each week, starting on January 29, a student (or two depending on the week) will write and share a short critical summary (2-5 pages) of the assigned texts (excluding the biographical readings). The student will present this summary at the top of class and pose several questions to stimulate class discussion. All those not presenting on a given week are required to email at least two discussion questions to *both* me and the presenter by the Friday before class. The presenter(s) will then be responsible for synthesizing and presenting these questions. **(10%)**

Response Papers: Students are required to write *four* short response papers (3-5 pages) over the course of the semester. They are due any time before the end of the semester. However, the first must be a comparison of Marx and Weber, the second a comparison of Du Bois and Marx and/or Weber, and the third a comparison of Durkheim and Marx and/or Weber. The fourth can be on anything else covered in class. The responses must demonstrate that you have done close and critical readings of the assigned texts. They do not need to be fully developed papers, but they also must not simply be summaries of the readings. **(60%)**

Class Participation: This being a seminar, students will be expected to participate actively and consistently in class. **(30%)**

This class uses the standard Sociology Department grading rubric for graduate classes:

- A Consistently performed well above expectations for the course.
- A- Performs above expectations
- B+ Meets expectations for the class
- B Occasionally performed below expectations for the course
- B- Consistently performed below expectations for the course
- C Unsatisfactory work for a PhD student (incomplete or late work, missed classes, lack of participation in discussions, etc.)

Schedule (Subject to change)

Week 1—What is Theory?

Monday, January 22

- Swedberg, Richard. 2014. *The Art of Social Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 1-28. (D2L)
- Abend, Gabriel. 2008. "The Meaning of 'Theory.'" *Sociological Theory* 26(2): 173-199. (D2L)
- Davis, Murray S. 1986. "'That's Classic!' The Phenomenology and Rhetoric of Successful Social Theories." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 16(3): 285-301. (D2L)
- Connell, R.W. 1997. "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6): 1511-1557. (D2L)
- Collins, Randall. 1997. "A Sociological Guilt Trip: Comment on Connell." *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6): 1558-1564. (D2L)
- Collins, Randall. 1985. *Three Sociological Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-46. (D2L)

Week 2—Marx: Alienation

Monday, January 29

- Coser, Lewis. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 42-87. (D2L)
- Marx, Karl. 1844. "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 12-15.
- Marx, Karl. 1843. "On the Jewish Question" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 26-46.
- Marx, Karl. 1844. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 66-93.
- Marx, Karl. 1845. "Theses on Feuerbach" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 143-145.
- Marx, Karl. 1845-1846. "The German Ideology: Part I" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 146-200.

Week 3—Marx: The Materialist Conception of History

Monday, February 5

- Marx, Karl. 1859. "Marx on the History of His Opinions (Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*)" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 3-6.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1848. "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 469-500.
- Engels, Friedrich. 1880. "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 683-717.
- Marx, Karl. 1850. "The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 586-593.
- Marx, Karl. 1852. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 594-617.
- Marx, Karl. 1871. "The Civil War in France" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 618-652.

Week 4—Marx: The Critique of Capitalism

Monday, February 12

- Marx, Karl. 1847. "Wage Labour and Capital" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 203-217.
- Marx, Karl. 1867. "Capital, Volume One" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 294-438.
- Dalla Costa, Mariarosa and Selma James. 1972. *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*. Bristol: FallingWall Press, pp. 21-56. (D2L)

Week 5—Weber: Capitalism, Culture, and Historical Explanation

Monday, February 19

- Coser, Lewis. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 216-260. (D2L)
- Weber, Max. 1905. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge, pp. xxviii-125.

Week 6—Weber: Science and the Interpretive Method

Monday, February 26

- Weber, Max. 1919. "Science as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber*, pp. 129-156.
- Weber, Max. 1904. "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy" in *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Edward Shils (ed.). New York: Free Press, pp. 49-112. (D2L)
- Weber, Max. 1921. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 3-62. (D2L)

Week 7—Weber: Power and Politics

Monday, March 5

- Weber, Max. 1919. "Politics as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber*, pp. 129-157.
- Weber, Max. 1921. "Class, Status, Party" in *From Max Weber*, pp. 180-195.
- Weber, Max. 1921. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 212-254, 941-955. (D2L)

Week 8—Du Bois: The Sociology of Race

Monday, March 12

- Morris, Aldon. 2015. *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press, pp. 1-99, 149-167.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters 1, 3, 4, 13, 14.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1898. "The Study of the Negro Problems." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 11: 1-23. (D2L)
- Itzigsohn, José and Karida Brown. 2015. "Sociology and the Theory of Double Consciousness." *Du Bois Review* 12(2): 231-248. (D2L)

Week 9—Du Bois: Race, Class and Historical Agency

Monday, March 19

- Lanham, Andrew. "When W.E.B. Du Bois Was Un-American." [Boston Review](#) (D2L)
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1935. *Black Reconstruction in America*, Chapters 1-4, 9, 13, 14.
- Hartman, Andrew. "Black Reconstruction and the Eclectic Marxism of W.E.B. Du Bois." [U.S. Intellectual History Blog](#) (D2L)

Week 10: NO CLASS (Spring Break)

Week 11—Durkheim: Solidarity and the Division of Labor

Monday, April 2

- Coser, Lewis. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 128-174. (D2L)
- Durkheim, Emile. 1893. *The Division of Labor in Society*, Book I Chapters 1-3 and 5-6, Book II Chapters 1 (first two pages only), 2, and 5, Book III Chapter 1, Conclusion.
- Lukes, Steven. 1969. "Durkheim's 'Individualism and the Intellectuals.'" *Political Studies* 17(1): 14-30. (D2L)
- Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields. 2012. "Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation Between Emile Durkheim and W.E.B. Du Bois" in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, pp. 225-260. (D2L)

Week 12—Durkheim: The Object of Sociology

Monday, April 9

- Durkheim, Emile. 1897. *Suicide*. New York: Free Press, Introduction, Book 2 Chapters 1 and 5. (D2L)
- Lehmann, Jennifer M. 1995. "Durkheim's Theories of Deviance and Suicide: A Feminist Reconsideration." *American Journal of Sociology* 100(4): 904-930. (D2L)
- Durkheim, Emile. 1895. *The Rules of Sociological Method*, pp. 34-84, 119-163.

Week 13—Durkheim: The Social and the Symbolic

Monday, April 16

Durkheim, Emile. 1912. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Introduction, Book I Chapters 1 and 4, Book II Chapters 1-7, Conclusion.

Durkheim, Emile and Marcel Mauss. 1902. *Primitive Classification*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 3-9, 42-66, 81-88. (D2L)

Week 14—Pragmatism: An American Tradition

Monday, April 23

Gross, Neil. 2007. "Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Twentieth-Century American Sociology" in *Sociology in America*. Craig Calhoun (ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 183-224. (D2L)

Cooley, Charles Horton. 1902. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, pp. 136-178. (D2L)

Mead, George Herbert. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 135-163, 173-177. (D2L)

Mead, George Herbert. 1913. "The Social Self." *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* 10: 374-380. (D2L)

Hamington, Maurice. "Jane Addams." [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). (D2L)

Addams, Jane. 1902. *Democracy and Social Ethics*. New York: Macmillan, pp. 1-70, 137-177. (D2L)

Week 15—Bourdieu: A Synthesis of Classical Traditions?

Monday, April 30

Brubaker, Rogers. 1985. "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu." *Theory and Society*, 14(6): 745-775. (D2L)

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1972. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 1-30, 72-95, 159-197.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. "The Field of Cultural Production, or the Economic World Reversed." *Poetics* 12(4-5): 311-356. (D2L)

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Disability Accommodations: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/students) (www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/students). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website and discuss your needs with your professor.

Religious Observances: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. *In this class, it is important that if the date of an exam is during a religious holiday you observe that you let me know immediately at the beginning of the semester so that we can decide what to do. In fact, it is helpful if you let me know in writing, by email, at the beginning of the semester any days you will miss due to religious observances, so that the proper accommodations can be made.* See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Learning Environment and Salutations: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Discrimination and Harassment: The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. CU's Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibits sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking or related retaliation. CU Boulder's Discrimination and Harassment Policy prohibits discrimination, harassment or related retaliation based on race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct under either policy should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127. Information about the OIEC, the above referenced policies, and the

campus resources available to assist individuals regarding sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/institutionalequity/>

Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [academic integrity policy](http://www.colorado.edu/policies/academic-integrity-policy) (available here: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/academic-integrity-policy>). Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, resubmission, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code Council as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at honorcode.colorado.edu.

Student-Athletes: It is the student's responsibility to notify each instructor—in the first week of the semester and in writing—about any known conflicts between academic requirements and intercollegiate varsity athletic events. For conflicts that arise during the regular term, instructors have full authority to decide whether and/or how to accommodate those conflicts. While an instructor has the right to refuse to allow make-ups or other accommodations, he or she is permitted to provide such accommodations. Intercollegiate varsity athletics events during final exams, which are normally forbidden by university policy, must be approved in writing by the BFA Intercollegiate Athletics Committee well in advance of the event. Students involved in these events must then work with their instructors in regard to any missed work, as required above.

Club Sports: It is the student's responsibility to notify each instructor—in the first several weeks of the semester and in writing--about any known conflicts between academic requirements and sport club events. For conflicts that arise during the regular term, instructors have full authority to decide whether and/or how to accommodate those conflicts. While an instructor has the right to refuse to allow make-ups or other accommodations, he or she is permitted to provide such accommodations.