

Syllabus for Classical Theory, Undergraduate\*  
Sociology 20005. Winter 2024  
Harper Memorial Library Room 140  
TuTh 12:30 – 1:50 AM

*Instructor:*

John Levi Martin  
[jlmartin@uchicago.edu](mailto:jlmartin@uchicago.edu)  
312 Social Sciences Building  
Office Hours Thursday 2:00 – 3:00 and by appt.

*Teaching Assistant:*

So Yoon Lee  
Sofia Butnaru  
Office hours TBA

Description: This class attempts to present key contributions to sociological theory (as the “classical” invented tradition was formulated) as part of a historical development that begins with political philosophy. We will see the different starting points, often turning on what people were hoping to *do* with sociological knowledge, leading to somewhat separable traditions, but ones that entered into dialogue.

Caveat: Because of the schizophrenia of the social sciences core sequence, we are in an awkward position of having some but not all in the class coming in with familiarity with some of the work of the political philosophers whose work is vital for understanding the evolution of this intellectual history. Not treating them at all is confusing for some; going over in depth is tedious for others. Every year I have revised to go more quickly over the first pre-sociological figures. This year, I am revising more radically to focus more on early sociologists.

Requirements

There are five main requirements to this course. 1) You must keep up with the reading. 2) You must attend class. You won't be able to make much of the readings otherwise. 3) You must take an in-class mid-term. 4) You must take an in-class final. 5) You must participate to do well.

Note: this mid-term/final idea is new. The temptation of using Large Language Models to write small papers for large classes is too great, and it means that it isn't a good way of evaluating students' engagement with and mastery of the material. The exams will be focused on trying to determine your engagement with the materials.

**Note on Accommodations:** If you need an accommodation for an in-class exam, you need to let me know by the **end of week 2**. The exam will be via blue-book—if you need to use a laptop because of (e.g.,) dysgraphia, we will supply you with an internet-disabled computer for the exam. *If you know that you cannot be on campus for the time at which either exam is scheduled, do not take this class.* The exception is scheduled official intercollegiate competitions.

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\*. This course is closely based on one created by Jim Stockinger of the University of California at Berkeley/UC Child Care. I wish to thank him for allowing the additional use of his lectures and other printed materials when I first prepared it.

**BOOKS:** All readings are now online—if you want to only read the selected sections. If there is a \* by the reading, it means that a pdf (in some cases, possibly a word file) is in the FILES section of the CANVAS site. If there is a \*\*, you will find it under library reserves. But...if you want to read more, these are where I have taken our selections from.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Penguin edition.  
Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Washington Square Press.  
Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Norton  
Tarde, *Gabriel Tarde on Communication and Social Influence*  
Durkheim, *The Division of Labor*, Free Press  
Durkheim, *Moral Education*, Free Press  
Durkheim, *Suicide*, Free Press  
Weber, *From Max Weber*, Oxford  
Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*  
Simmel, *Sociology of Georg Simmel*

Sort of Recommended book: I have not assigned a secondary source, but I have examined some, and once concluded that Irving Zeitlin's *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory* was the best in terms of putting sociological theory in the context of the questions first raised in the enlightenment, which is what you might want to do, coming from the core. It's probably no easier than class time, but might repay the time. However, I also note that my reorganization this year relies on the idea of national traditions, which is best expressed in Donald Levine's *Visions of the Sociological Tradition*. All hail Don!

Grades are computed as follows: 25% mid-term; 40% final; 20% daily attendance (collected perhaps by a sampling procedure to be announced), 10% participation, 5% pop quizzes, 5% magic and .1% sodium benzoate to preserve freshness.

**Meeting #1** (Thursday, January 4): Introduction and beginning of **Hobbes**.

Required Reading: If you haven't ever read Hobbes, start on in before today, just for the fun of it. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*.\* If you are using a relatively recent version of the book, my page numbers here might work for you. But if they don't, I'll explain the parts you should read....: Part I, Chap 6 [118-; can skip starting mid 119 and just read paragraph starting 120, resume top 123, can skip mid 124-mid 126, resume with "contempt," can skip mid 128 on, resume last paragraph 129], Chap 8 [center two paragraphs on p. 139, end of chapter p. 146-147 ("Insignificant Speech")], Chapter 11 [160-162 (until "causing a new shuffle" ], Chap 13 [183-188], Chap 14 [189-192, 198-199 (through first paragraph)]; Chap 15 [201-203; until "it is then that propriety begins"]. Part II, Chap 17 [223-225, end of continuing paragraph (until "I shall speak of a commonwealth by institution"), 227-228], Chap 18 [233-234, , the sixthly and seventhly points, 238-239, last paragraph], Chapter 20 [251-253], Chapter 21 [261-265 (leave off when he gets to Uriah)], Chapter 22 [274, first paragraph].

We can without too much distortion propose that sociology is the science of the unmade laws that guide, check, or determine the laws we can (deliberately) make. Political philosophy had (since Aristotle) long proposed something like this, but in the nineteenth century, there was a conviction that a new form of empirical or historical study could unveil this kind of lawfulness. But sociological *theory* emerged as a set of competing forms that could be put upon such studies. We are going to explore the most influential formal traditions that arose.

Today we will sketch the main directions of the course, but we can also use the work of Thomas Hobbes (like Plato, Aristotle and Machiavelli, “the” founder of political science) as a way of examining what it means to have a particular formal approach. The notion of modeling action by treating agents as fundamentally similar and decision-makers could then be used to derive very different results, not only by Locke, but by Smith.

**Meeting #2** (Tuesday, January 9): **The General and the Particular.** Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Prefatory note, Book I, Chs 1 – 9, Book II, Chs 1-6 (pp. 3-41); Book III, Chapter 9 (pp. 87-88).\*\*

Rousseau also locates interdependence as the key to society—but we also see Rousseau proposing a more fundamental socialization of the personality. The replacement of the freedom of the state of nature with an unfreedom of interdependence, but a moral freedom elevating us above the animals. We can be good, if we act socially, that is, generally. This opposition between the social and the individual, the general and the particular, becomes one of the core theoretical orientations for developing a sociological theory.

**Meeting #3** (Thursday, January 11): **Comte**

Required Reading: Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, Chapter 1, pp. 8-61\*\* (though if your eyes begin to unfocus around page 37 that’s okay so long as they snap back into focus by page 44). Auguste Comte was the official founder of sociology, but that’s really only because he had wanted to call his study “social physics,” but he was beaten to it by Adolfe Quetelet. Comte began with a brilliant rethinking of the nature of scientific knowledge, one that initiated “positivism” as a predictive and, in some ways, antihumanist theory of knowledge. However, Comte himself did an about-face and developed a sappy religion of humanity that inspired followers and irritated everyone else.

Basically independently, (lunatic) positivism develops in England and France on the part of two really weird and influential thinkers. Here is the birth of sociology as we now think of it.

**Meeting #4** (Tuesday, January 16): **Spencer**

Required Reading: Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, Chapters 1 and 3.\*

Okay, really, it would be more consistent to have this follow Hobbes and perhaps lead to Mill but because we don’t really have a big British section, and because Durkheim is so clearly responding to Spencer, let’s squeeze this in here....

**Meeting #5** (Thursday, January 18): **Durkheim: Dependence and the Division of Labor**

Required Reading: Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor*.\*

If you are using the book, read 1-7,11-12 (till section I begins), 16 (begin with section II)-17 (end when he starts talking about marital relationships), 21(begin first full paragraph)-24 (end where III begins), 38f (start at the bottom of the page and read the long paragraph that runs over to page 39). Now turn to page 60. Durkheim describes the “mechanical” solidarity of simple societies where “everyone is the same” (because there’s no division of labor). Read the paragraph at the bottom of page 60 and carrying over to the next page. Now turn to 83. Durkheim here starts discussing the other type of solidarity (organic solidarity) that you find in a “modern” society with a high division of labor. Start reading where section IV begins, and read to the end of the chapter on page 86. Read from the last paragraph on page 122 till the end of the next page. Read 126-127; stop near the bottom of 127 where Durkheim writes “What is more, they sustain...”. Read 132-133, stop after “The history of these two types...”. Read 149-155 (stop after the first two lines on 155), read from “summing up (middle of page 162) to the middle of 163 (end with “upset in another”). Read 173 (start with the third line and ignore “Consequently”) to the end of 174, 291-292 (stop where I begins), read 301 (start with III) – 305 (just the first three lines) (and note on page 304 that when Durkheim says “these examples”, he means examples of nasty, exploitative division of labor, like hereditary slavery). Read 306 (From “The foregoing...”) to the end of 308, 323-328, 331-337 (end where III begins).

Comte and Spencer’s use of the organismic metaphor led to a new take on the division of labor. Durkheim picks up from here, and revisits the Kantian question of autonomy. All the Rousseauian critics think that modern society, via the dependence produced by the division of labor, has made us unfree, immoral, and unhappy. Durkheim sets out to prove them wrong! Yay, society! Back to the organismic metaphor.

### **Meeting #6 (Tuesday, January 23): Durkheim: Social constraint**

Required Reading: Durkheim, *Moral Education*, selections as below.\* Durkheim then asks, what is morality? It involves rules, he says, but he dismisses the idea that there has to be **one** formula for how to generate these rules, like Kant’s categorical imperative.

Pick him up page 26, second full paragraph, “Thus, it is not necessary...” and read till end of chapter (p. 32). The next chapter begins with Durkheim reviewing what came before, I strongly suggest you read this beginning, but you may also skip to page 37 and pick up there with “In the first place” and read to end of the chapter (46). Start with “In sum, “ on page 54 (1<sup>st</sup> full paragraph) and read to page 69, stopping at the end of the first full paragraph (end with “out behavior”). Read 71 (from third line) to the end of 73 (stop at “Up to this point”); then read from the last paragraph on page 85 (“We have just shown”) to the first line on page 87 (end with “social product”). (I suggest you read to the middle of page 90, but you don’t have to. Similarly, you might want to take a look at Durkheim’s discussion of Kant 108-110.) Then read 111-122 (stop where there’s a break in the text). You’re done!

Having saved society’s rep, Durkheim answers Kant’s basic question—yes, we’re free only so long as we’re not animal-free, but society-free...which sounds a lot like being unfree. Hobbes without the cynicism.

**Meeting #7** (Thursday, January 25): **What brings us together and what happens when it ain't there.**

Required Reading: Durkheim, *Suicide*.\*

First of all, we start after Durkheim defines suicide (guess what—it's when you kill yourself). Pick him up on page 46, section II, read to page 53. Then Durky finds that religion can lower the suicide rate. Now read 171-173, but just the first paragraph on page 173. Then 179-189 (stop at III), 197 (start at IV)-202 (stop at V). Then Emile examines national crises (we skip this), now pick up at "These facts" on page 208, and read to 216. Then 241-257. The next section is hard and a bit tricky, but have a go anyway...it's interesting. That's 321-325. Now read 378 (start at III)-384. You're done!

Okay, maybe it doesn't sound too convincing, that we're free when society bosses us around, but think about what happens when society doesn't boss us around! It's even worse, isn't it!

**Meeting #8** (Tuesday, January 30): **Tarde: Influence and Individuals**

Required Reading: Gabriel Tarde, *On Communication and Social Influence* Ch 1 ("Sociology"), pp. 73-105; Ch 3 ("Sociology, Social Psychology, Sociologism"), Part I, pp. 112-125; Ch4 ("A Debate with Emile Durkheim,"\* pp. 136-140), Ch 5 ("Basic Principles), Pp. 143-148; Chs 8-10, 12 (*Laws of Imitation*), pp. 177-191, 209-221.\*

**Meeting #9** (Thursday, February 1): **Marx—dialectical materialism#1**

Required Reading: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (in Tucker) 149- 166 (you can skim 151-153), 172-175, 184-186, 189-193, 196 (bottom)-200.\*

Strongly Recommended: Marx, *Preface to the contribution to the critique*, (in Tucker) pp. 4-5 (feel free to read "all" of 3-6). This was a whole class, eliminated to make space for the midterm.

Any explanation must start from real material needs, and the way those needs are satisfied. The social organization of how we go about satisfying those needs is the most important thing going on, and from that develop all our ideas.

**Meeting #10** (Tuesday, February 6): **IN-CLASS MIDTERM.**

**Meeting #11** (Thursday, February 8): **Simmel and The Dialectic of Structures**

Required Reading: Georg Simmel, *Sociology*, 3-11, 40-44, 190-213, 224-234, 250-267.

Here we follow Simmel as he examines the core impulse to sociation, and trace how it can lead to the development of social structures and institutions and...dunno...whatever....

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\* Bruno Latour seems to have re-created this debate, filmed it, and posted it online! In his version, Tarde wipes the floor with Durkheim.

**Meeting #12** (Tuesday, February 13): **Simmel and Social Objects**

Required Reading: *Sociology* (The Stranger), & Metropolis: 402-424; Georg Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, 59-62, 128-130, 146-152

In some ways, Simmel clings tight to the insight of Hegel's and Marx's that objects are relations. But what then are relations?

**Meeting #13** (Thursday, February 15): **Weber: Politics/Science as a vocation**

Required Reading: Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," selections\*

Weber's stuck with the same problem, but he doesn't have to prove society is god, so he can emphasize the rigorous discipline and constraint required by the modern ethical dude with no illusions. This is a guy who liked to march by himself.

**Meeting #14** (Tuesday, February 20): **Weber: Types of orientations and their conflicts**

Required Reading: Continue "Politics as a Vocation," start Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World," selections, in *From Max Weber*.\*

Okay, but maybe the rest of the world was marching with him—off into separate corners. The separation and purification of spheres of value—an irreversible change in modern history... "rationalization!" We use this to get at Weber's way of conceiving of social institutions as if they were designed to carry out some ideal type of action, or motivation.

**Meeting #15** (Thursday, February 22): **Weber: Conflicting Conflicts**

Required Reading: Max Weber, selections from *Economy and Society*.\* From this orientation to the individual actor, Weber derives an approach to sociology; indeed, the same basic patterns that describe individual action can be used to describe important aspects of huge groups. Coincidence? Pattern? ....Mur-der? You be the judge.

**Meeting #16** (Tuesday, February 27): **The Lost Generation: DuBois**

Required Reading: W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Study of the Negro Problems," and "Sociology Hesitant," Pp. 77-98 and 272-284 respectively in *The Problem of the Color Line*; "The Atlanta Conferences." Pp. 53-60 in *On Sociology and the Black Community*.

**Meeting #17** (Thursday, February 29): **The Lost Generation: Thomas**

Required Reading: W. I. Thomas, "Social Personality: Organization of Attitudes" and "Family and Community," Pp. 11-36 and 61-86 in *W. I. Thomas on Social Organization and Social Personality*, edited by Morris Janowitz; *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, Volume III*, pp. 6-37. Note that the first two chapters are *also* actually from *The Polish Peasant*. Just spreading out the joy...so the library doesn't object....

The same is true for W I Thomas. While one sees continuity here to others in the Michigan-Chicago school (such as Charles Cooley), it is difficult to recreate his theory in a way comparable to the Europeans. (There is still no biography of Thomas, so far as I know.) It was easy, for this reason, for the post-war generation to forget those like Thomas and DuBois (and they had other reasons to want to forget them!) and reconstruct a narrative that linked them to previous European theorists. When the quarter was longer, we ended with Talcott Parsons, Part II, Ch 19, "Tentative Methodological Implications," Pp. 727-775 in *The Structure of Social Action*.<sup>\*</sup> He's the one who invented the idea of classical sociological theory, in part by sidelining people like DuBois and Thomas and all the other Americans....

### **Other little things....**

\* Office hours "by appointment" are usually best for you, though you are always welcome to drop by during my scheduled hours. The way to do it is to email me a set of times you can meet in order of preference, and then I'll choose the one I can do. This shortens the number of back-and-forth emails and allows us to set something up quicker.

\*\* Of course we run on the honor system here, but the internet has changed the nature of academic misconduct in such a way as to lead to more "borderline cases." As you are responsible for knowing where this line is, if you have any doubts, definitely talk to me and advisors here.

\*\*\* Please take care of your life before grades are attached to work; I am remarkably flexible before grades are assigned and remarkably inflexible afterwards. If you need more guidance on my policies regarding difficult situations, you can always consult my webpage for my answers to *Frequently Asked Questions*.