

University of Colorado, Boulder  
SOCY 5201: Seminar in Sociological Theory  
Fall 2019  
Thursday 3:00-5:30pm, KTCH 1B40  
Mathieu Desan  
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Office Hours: 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)

[The Gift](#) (W.W. Norton & Company edition)

[On Individuality and Social Forms](#)

## 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 September 5, a student will present a critical summary (no more than 15 minutes) of the assigned texts (excluding the biographical readings) at the top of class and pose several (at least 2) discussion questions of their own to stimulate class discussion. You may write up and share your presentation with the class, but the written text should not exceed 4 single-spaced pages. However, you are not required to provide a written text for your presentation. These presentations do not need to be comprehensive summaries—it is ok to focus on a couple critical points that most interest you, so long as you engage with the main thrust of the texts as well. Please do not simply outline the readings. The point is for you to say something *about* them.

All those not presenting on a given week are required to email at least one discussion question to *both* me and the presenter by the Wednesday before class. The presenter will then be responsible for synthesizing and presenting these questions as part of their presentation.

Each student will be responsible for *two* such presentations during the semester. **(20%)**

*Response Papers:* Students are required to write *four* short response papers (3-5 pages double spaced) 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. **(40%)**

*Class Participation:* This being a seminar, students will be expected to participate actively and consistently in class. **(40%)**

*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?**

##### **Thursday, August 29**

- Swedberg, Richard. 2012. "Theorizing in sociology and social science: turning to the context of discovery." *Theory and Society* 41(1): 1-40. (Canvas)
- Abend, Gabriel. 2008. "The Meaning of 'Theory.'" *Sociological Theory* 26(2): 173-199. (Canvas)
- Connell, R.W. 1997. "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6): 1511-1557. (Canvas)
- Collins, Randall. 1997. "A Sociological Guilt Trip: Comment on Connell." *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6): 1558-1564. (Canvas)
- Collins, Randall. 1985. *Three Sociological Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-46. (Canvas)

#### **Week 2—Marx: Alienation**

##### **Thursday, September 5**

- Coser, Lewis. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 42-87. (Canvas)
- 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—Movie: *The Young Marx***  
**Thursday, September 12**

**Week 4—Marx: The Materialist Conception of History**  
**Thursday, September 19**

- 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. 1852. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 594-617.

**Week 5—Marx: The Critique of Capitalism**  
**Thursday, September 26**

- 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. (Canvas)

**Week 6—Weber: Capitalism, Culture, and Historical Explanation**  
**Thursday, October 3**

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

**Week 7—Weber: Science and the Interpretive Method**  
**Thursday, October 10**

- 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. (Canvas)
- Weber, Max. 1921. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 3-62. (Canvas)

**Week 8—Weber: Power and Politics**  
**Thursday, October 17**

- 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. (Canvas)

## **Week 9—Du Bois: The Sociology of Race**

### **Thursday, October 24**

- 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.
- 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. (Canvas)
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1920. "The Souls of White Folk" in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, pp. 15-27 (Canvas)

## **Week 10—Du Bois: Race, Class and Historical Agency**

### **Thursday, October 31**

- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1935. *Black Reconstruction in America*, Chapters 1-4, 9, 14, 17.
- Hartman, Andrew. "Black Reconstruction and the Eclectic Marxism of W.E.B. Du Bois." [U.S. Intellectual History Blog](#) (Canvas)

## **Week 11—Durkheim: Solidarity and the Division of Labor**

### **Thursday, November 7**

- Coser, Lewis. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 128-174. (Canvas)
- 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. (Canvas)
- 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. (Canvas)

## **Week 12—Durkheim: The Object of Sociology**

### **Thursday, November 14**

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

## **Week 13—Durkheim: The Social and the Symbolic**

### **Thursday, November 21**

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

## **Week 14—Fall Break NO CLASS**

## **Week 15—Mauss: The Gift**

**Thursday, December 5**

Mauss, Marcel. 1925. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*.

## **Week 16—Simmel: Individuality and Social Forms**

**Thursday, December 12**

Coser, Lewis. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 176-215. (Canvas)

Simmel, Georg. 1908. "How is Society Possible?" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 6-22.

Simmel, Georg. 1908. "The Problem of Sociology" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 23-35.

Simmel, Georg. 1910. "Sociability" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 127-140.

Simmel, Georg. 1908. "The Stranger" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 143-149.

Simmel, Georg. 1908. "Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 251-293.

Simmel, Georg. 1904. "Fashion" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 294-323.

Simmel, Georg. 1903 "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 324-339.

Simmel, Georg. 1908. "Social Forms and Inner Needs" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 351-352.

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

### **Accommodation for Disabilities**

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](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or [dsinfo@colorado.edu](mailto: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.

### **Classroom Behavior**

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. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

## **Honor Code**

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code ([honor@colorado.edu](mailto:honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

## **Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation**

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct intimate partner abuse (including dating or domestic violence), stalking, protected-class discrimination or harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or [cureport@colorado.edu](mailto:cureport@colorado.edu). Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

## **Religious Holidays**

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. Please let me know if you foresee any scheduling conflicts due to religious observances.

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.