

## **SOC6328 Classical Social Theory – Fall 2025**

**Thurs 6-8.50pm**

**Sociology Conference Room and online**

Prof Denis O’Hearn

Old Main 201 and online

Office Hours: Thursday 11-12am and by appointment, in person or online

### ***Land Acknowledgement***

*As members of the University of Texas at El Paso community, we acknowledge that we are meeting on unceded Indigenous land. We would like to recognize and pay our respects to the Indigenous people with long ties to the immediate region: Lipan Apache, Mescalero Apache, Piro, Manso, Suma, Jumano, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Piro/Manso/Tiwa Indian Tribe of the Pueblo of San Juan de Guadalupe, and Tortugas Pueblo. We also acknowledge the nations whose territories include present day Texas: the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, and the peoples of Chihuahua and northern Mexico from whom most/many of our students descend, such as the Rarámuri, Tepehuan, Wixarrika and Nahuatlaca peoples. Finally, we recognize all of the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories here in Paso del Norte, on Turtle Island. The University of Texas at El Paso honors your history and cultures and we seek greater awareness of the myriad ways in which your legacy can guide us in fruitful partnerships and mutually fulfilling relationships.*

Welcome to Soc. 6328, our core PhD course in classical social theory. Social theories are the ways we look at the world. They should not be seen as static things but, rather, as dynamic bodies of thought that are modified and updated as we study the real world. We never change the facts we observe to fit our theories – as in “alternative facts” – rather we challenge and adapt our theories as they fail to fully explain what we observe. Social theories are idealized pictures of how the world works, meaning that they cannot be applied directly to any research project or problem, but they give us guidance for our research and for our understanding of the world.

This course concentrates on “classical” sociological theory. Thus, we will be reading the “founding fathers” of the discipline (yes, they were practically all *men* and *white* men at that). The second half of the course, however, will introduce early analyses of race, ethnicity, and gender, much of which has been disregarded at least partly because their authors were women and people of color.

We will read these works with the understanding that they are the basis of many of our contemporary approaches to studying societies. Therefore, throughout the course, we will be thinking about (1) how theories guide our understanding of the real world, and (2) how the theories have changed since they were first introduced. Especially with regard to Karl Marx and Max Weber, I will introduce some of the controversies and real-world changes that have led to “*neo-Marxism*” or “*neo-Weberianism*”.

We will also read work by the eminent sociologist WEB DuBois to see how theories of class and race have been reconciled. In the process we will talk about “critical race theory” and examine how it has been misconstrued and attacked in an attempt to deny the true impact of race and racism in contemporary society. The main coverage of critical race theory, however, will be in the second part of the social theory sequence, Contemporary Social Theory. Finally, we will read the work of two women of color who introduce approaches to the understanding of ethnicity and gender.

The course is organized into lectures and student-led discussions. The short lectures will closely cover course readings, but my style is conversational so I will always welcome interruptions and discussions. As the course proceeds, you will be responsible for leading discussions of the weeks’ readings. We always learn more by discussing things and asking questions than we will if I hand down “truth” from the front of the classroom.

Your grade will depend on section participation and an essay. Participation will include submission of reading responses/questions in advance of each week’s class. Suggested topics for essays will be provided but you are welcome to negotiate alternative topics with me. Preferably, they will be related to your chosen or prospective dissertation research.

I encourage you to take up a position, whether or not it agrees with whatever you may perceive as my position. This is an open forum and all views are welcome except hate speech. I only require that your arguments be based on reasoned argument and not on unsupported “opinion.”

All readings are available on blackboard. Feel free to order course books in hard copy from on-line sources and also feel free to read additional materials that you think might be useful.

Finally, enjoy the course. Social theory can be seen as a chore. It can also be viewed as something that opens our minds toward the possibilities of social research, and that will enable us to have a better understanding of the world around us. I hope that we can achieve the latter point of view and, for that purpose, I invite you to read the excerpt on blackboard from C. Wright Mills' *Sociological Imagination* and to take seriously his assertion that we study sociology to understand the world, and that we seek such understanding in order to change the world for the better.

### **Learning outcomes:**

1. The ability to critically read texts and analyze the social world around them using basic sociological concepts and ideas derived from significant sociological thinkers drawn from the past and contemporary periods.
2. The ability to communicate effectively in writing that is coherent, well- developed, and expressive of concepts, ideas, and themes derived from sociological thinking.
3. The ability to express your thoughts orally and to lead discussion.
4. Knowledge of themes, perspectives, and paradigms in particular areas of sociological thought.

### **August 28 Week 1: Introduction, Approaches to Social Theory:**

Consensus/Conflict; Modernization/Imperialism

*Readings:* Mills, excerpt from *Sociological Imagination* [BB]

### **Sept 4 Week 2: Hobbes and Locke, Possessive Individualism**

*Readings:* Macpherson on Hobbes and Locke [BB]

### **Sept 11 Week 3: Comte, Durkheim on social fact**

*Readings:* Coser on Comte [BB]; Coser on Durkheim [BB]; Durkheim, *Rules*, introduction, chs 1-6 [BB]

### **Sept 18 Week 4: Durkheim on suicide**

*Readings:* Durkheim *Suicide*, Books 2 and 3

### **Sept 25 Week 5: Marx on class, state, rise of capitalism**

*Readings:* Coser on Marx [BB]; "Karl Marx (1): Philosophical Analyses," and "Karl Marx (2): Economic Analysis", pp. 39-80 in Mark

Abrahamson, *Classical Theory and Modern Studies* [BB]

Bob Jessop, "Recent theories of the capitalist state," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1, 1977, pp.353-373 [BB]

**Oct 2 Week 6: Marx's Kapital 1**

*Readings:* Marx, *Capital Vol 1*, pp. 89-93, 125-344

*Suggested supplementary reading:* David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London and New York: Verso)

**Oct. 9 Week 7: Marx's Kapital 2**

*Readings:* Marx, *Capital Vol 1*, pp. 411-26, 429-517, 544-64, 643-72

*Suggested supplementary reading:* David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London and New York: Verso)

**Oct. 16 Week 8: Weber on class and state**

*Readings:* Coser on Weber [BB]; excerpts from Weber, *Economy and Society* [BB]

**Oct. 23 Week 9: Weber on the rise of capitalism**

*Readings:* Weber, *Protestant Ethic*

**Oct. 30 Week 10: writing week**

**Nov 6 Week 11: An anarchist sociology?**

*Readings:* Petr Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, chs.3-5 [BB]

Stephen Jay Gould, "Kropotkin was no Crackpot," *Natural History* 1997

Denis O'Hearn and Andrej Grubacic, "Capitalism, Mutual Aid, and Material Life: Understanding Exilic Spaces," *Capital & Class*, 40:1 (2016), pp.147- 165 [BB]

**Nov 13 Week 12: Race and class**

*Readings:* DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [BB]

**Nov 20 Week 13: Gender**

*Readings:* Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* [BB]

**Nov 27 Week 14: Feminism and ethnicity**

*Readings:* Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*

**Dec 4 Week 15: Ethnography, race and gender**

*Readings:* "Novelist Zora Neale Hurston was a cultural anthropologist first" [BB]

Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo in America," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Oct.-Dec., 1931, Vol. 44, No. 174 (Oct. - Dec., 1931), pp. 317-417 [BB]