

SOC6328 Classical Social Theory – Fall 2023
W 6-8.50pm
Sociology Conference Room

Prof Denis O’Hearn
Old Main 201

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday 11-12pm and by appointment

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. 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 or from bookstores. Feel free to order course books 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.

Outline of course meetings

August 30 Week 1: Introduction, Approaches to Social Theory:

Consensus/Conflict; Modernization/Imperialism

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

Sept 6 Week 2: Hobbes and Locke, Possessive Individualism

Readings: Macpherson on Hobbes and Locke [BB]

Sept 13 Week 3: Comte, Durkheim on social fact

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

Sept 20 Week 4: Durkheim on suicide

Readings: Durkheim *Suicide*, Books 2 and 3

Sept 27 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 4 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. 11 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. 18 Week 8: Weber on class and state

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

Oct. 25 Week 9: Weber on the rise of capitalism

Readings: Weber, *Protestant Ethic*

Nov 1 Week 10: writing week

Nov 8 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 15 Week 12: Race and class

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

Nov 22 Week 13: Gender

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

Nov 29 Week 14: Feminism and ethnicity

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

Dec 6 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]

Important dates:

Aug 28th	Fall classes begin
Aug 28th-Sept 1st	Late Registration (Fees are incurred)
Sept 4th	Labor Day Holiday – University Closed
Sept 13th	Fall Census Day Note: This is the last day to register for classes. Payments are due by 5:00 pm.
Sept 25th	20 th Class Day Note: Students who were given a payment deadline extension will be dropped at 5:00 pm if payment arrangements have not been made.
Oct 6th	Graduation application deadline for degree conferral
Nov 3rd	Fall Drop/Withdrawal Deadline Note: Student-initiated drops are permitted after this date, but the student is not guaranteed a grade of W. The faculty member of record will issue a grade of either W or F.
Nov 17th	Deadline to submit candidates' names for commencement program
Nov 23rd-24th	Thanksgiving Holiday- University Closed
Dec 7th	Fall- Last day of classes
Dec 8th	Dead day
Dec 11th-15th	Fall Final Exams
Dec 16th-17th	Fall Commencement
Dec 19th	Grades are due
Dec 20th	Grades are posted to student records; students are notified of grades and academic standing