

## KEY ISSUES IN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, CEU  
Mandatory course for MA in Sociology and Social Anthropology  
Fall Semester AY 2024-2025  
2 Credits/4 ECTS  
**Tuesdays, 13.30-15.10, room ...**

### Lecturer:

**Alina-Sandra Cucu**, [CucuAS@ceu.edu](mailto:CucuAS@ceu.edu)

### Teaching assistant:

**Umay Can**, [can\\_rabia-umay@phd.ceu.edu](mailto:can_rabia-umay@phd.ceu.edu)

### Office hours:

**Alina-Sandra Cucu**, ..., room ..., by appointment

**Umay Can**, by appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course follows four lines of thinking about the social world. First, we try to discern what is specific about sociological thinking. We continue by investigating the meaning of “society”, and we explore several possible answers to two questions: How is society possible? And, What holds the social fabric together? We move on to discuss the relationship between modernity and capitalism as problematized by theorists who have become “the classics” of social sciences, emphasizing their efforts to understand the organization of life in capitalism as totality. We continue by investigating how major classical theorists thought about the fundamental lines of fracture in society: class, race, and gender. We dedicate the last weeks of the course to discussing power, ideology, and the urban form, which greatly puzzled modern thinkers.

The course combines a survey of major ideas in social theory with close reading of key primary texts. Through the work of several major thinkers, we will survey concepts and categories that are central to social thought. Students will be expected to do the required readings, so we can have a deep and detailed discussion of the concepts and ideas featured in the texts. By the end of the semester, I hope we will share a common system of references and vocabulary, which will further help students with their academic work and with their future endeavours outside the classroom.

## The PEDAGOGICAL GOALS of this course are to:

- Build a theoretical foundation for students' further endeavours
- Familiarize students with the basic categories and concerns still shaping contemporary sociology;
- Critically assess how early sociological thinking was institutionally positioned between a claim to autonomous social science, and critical-political engagement;
- Understand some of the ongoing tensions within sociology since its founding;
- Develop students' oral and written argumentation skills;
- Deepen students' critical analysis and interpretation skills.

## GRADING

(1) **CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%)**: All students are encouraged to participate in class discussions and ask questions based on the assigned readings.

(2) **READING NOTES (20%)**: Students will write and submit **reading notes for all classes between week 2 and week 10**. The reading notes will be submitted two hours before the class starts at the latest (Tuesday, 11.30 ). The notes will be half-page to one page long (Times New Roman 12, single spaced). They will have to (a) summarize the argument of **one** of the mandatory readings assigned (1-2 sentences); (b) select and define the main concepts used by the author; (c) note if there were things the student could not understand. The lecturer will make sure to clarify the difficult points in class.

\*The notes do not have to be polished. They are meant to help students better understand what they read and to monitor their comprehension progress during the semester. Try your best and don't worry too much about the form.

(3) **CONCEPT DICTIONARY (20%)**: Students will be required to submit a personal dictionary with the definitions of the main concepts they select from the text (the ones they should also add in the reading notes, plus the ones they encounter in the other texts, and the ones we discuss in class). Please use complete references, with pages, so you can use the definitions as a direct quote when needed.

\*\*\***Due date: December 12.**

(4) **FINAL PAPER (40%)**: Students will be required to write a final paper of 2,000 words. You can choose any topic discussed in class. Mandatory *and* optional readings for that particular topic should be discussed in the paper. Discussing relevant titles beyond the class readings is encouraged, especially if students aim for high grades (A- and A). The papers can be purely theoretical, or you can use theoretical concepts to discuss a social process, phenomenon, or problem from the past or present. Choosing topics that are connected to your Master thesis is most helpful but not mandatory.

\***Due date: December 20.**

\*Please feel free to consult with me or with the teaching assistant about the paper during the semester.

\*Please start thinking about the topic of the paper early!

## **Email policy**

Please treat email as a form of professional communication and always use your CEU email address. Substantive issues concerning course materials should be raised during office hours with the course instructor. Email should not be used as an alternative to meeting with the instructor or the teaching assistant.

## **Policy for the late assignments**

Late assignments will be accepted with a late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends). If you have a legitimate excuse for a late assignment, please send justificatory documents when asking for an extension.

## **Academic integrity**

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from Central European University is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. Potential offences in papers and assignments include, but are not limited to:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
- Using Chat GPT or similar types of aid for entirely or partly writing your assignments.

\*\*\*Please read CEU's plagiarism policy: <https://documents.ceu.edu/documents/p-1405-1>

## **Accessibility**

If you are among the students with diverse learning styles and needs, please feel free to approach me to arrange the necessary accommodations.

## THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

### WEEK 1: Introduction

- Raewyn Connell. 1997. "Why is classical theory classical". *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (6): 1511-1557.
- Randall Collins. 1997. "A sociological guilt trip: Comment on Connell". *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (6), 1558-1564.

#### Further reading

- Immanuel Wallerstein. 1996. *Open the social sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the restructuring of the social sciences*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Zygmunt Bauman, Tim May. 2019. "Introduction: Crafting sociological lenses". In *Thinking sociologically*, p.1-12. London: Wiley Blackwell.
- C. Wright Mills. 2000 [1959]. "The promise". In *The sociological imagination*, p. 3-24. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Michael Burawoy. 2016. "Sociology as a vocation." *Contemporary Sociology* 45(4): 379–393.
- Guminder K. Bhabra. "Introduction". In *Rethinking modernity: Postcolonialism and the sociological imagination*, p. 1-14. London: Palgrave.

## HOW IS (MODERN) SOCIETY POSSIBLE?

### WEEK 2: How is (modern) society possible? (1) – Social contract, social Darwinism, social order, and imitation

- Emile Durkheim. 1994 [1893]. "Mechanical solidarity, or solidarity by similarities" (Chapter 2), p. 31-67; "Solidarity arising from the division of labour, or organic solidarity" (Chapter 3), p. 68-87. In *The division of labour in society*. London: Macmillan.
- Gabriel Tarde. 1903 [1890]. "What is a society?" (Chapter 3). In *The laws of imitation*, p. 59-67. Rahway, New Jersey: The Mershon Company Press.

#### Further reading

- Peter Kropotkin. "Introduction". In *Mutual aid*, p. 1-8.
- Tongo Takebe. "Society". In *Japanese family and society: Words from Tongo Takebe, a Meiji Era sociologist*, edited by Teruhito Sako and Suzanne K. Steinmetz. London and New York: Routledge.

### Week 3: How is (modern) society possible? (2) – Meaning, action, form

- Max Weber. 1978 [1921-1922]. "Basic sociological terms" (Chapter 1), p. 4-48. In *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Georg Simmel. 1971. "How is society possible?". In *On individuality and social forms*, p. 6-22. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

### Further reading

- Georg Simmel. 1971. "Sociability". In *On individuality and social forms*, p. 127-140. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

<b>CAPITALIST MODERNITY AS TOTALITY</b>
---

### WEEK 4: Capitalism as totality (1): Exchange and rationalization

- Max Weber. 2001 [1930]. "Author's introduction", p. xxviii-xxxix; "Religious affiliation and social stratification", p. 4-13; "The spirit of capitalism", p. 14-38. In *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. London: Routledge.
- Max Weber. 1978 [1921-1922]. "Sociological categories of economic action", p. 63-69; "Means of exchange" and "The market", p. 75-85; "Formal and substantive rationality of economic action", p. 85-86; "The concept and types of profit-making. The role of capital", p. 90-100; "Substantive conditions of formal rationality in a money economy", p. 107-109; "The economic relationships of organized groups", p. 339-348. In *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

### Further reading

- Max Weber. 2000 [1894]. "Stock and commodity exchanges [*Die Börse*]. *Theory and Society* 29: 305-338.
- Georg Simmel. 1971. "Exchange". In *On individuality and social forms*, p. 43-69. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Frederick Winslow Taylor. 2003 [1911]. "The principles of scientific management" (Chapter I). In *The early sociology of management and organizations*, edited by Kenneth Thompson, volume I, p. 121-132. London and New York: Routledge.
- Georges Friedmann. 1955 [1947]. "Introduction". In *Industrial society: The emergence of the human problems of automation*, p. 25-36. New York: The Free Press.

### WEEK 5: Capitalism as totality (2): The commodity form

- Karl Marx. 1982 [1867]. "The two factors of a commodity: Use-value and value"; "The two-fold character of the labour embodied in commodities"; "The fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof". *Capital: A critique of political economy*, volume I. Penguin Books.

- “Estranged labour”. 1988 [1844]. In *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*, p. 71-84. New York: Prometheus Books

### Further reading

- Georgy Lukacs 1967 [1923]. “Reification and the consciousness of the Proletariat”. In *History and class consciousness*. London: Merlin Press.
- Karl Marx. 2020 [1849]. *Wage labour and capital*. Paris: Foreign Languages Press.
- Polanyi. 2001 [1944]. “The self-regulating market and the fictitious commodities: Labor, land, and money”. In *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*, p. 71-80. Boston: Beacon Press.

## WEEK 6: Capitalism as totality (3): Modes of production and scales of accumulation

- Rosa Luxemburg. 1972 [1913]. “The question at issue” (Chapter 1), and “Imperialism” (Chapter 6). In *The accumulation of capital: An anti-critique*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Jose Carlos Mariategui. 1971 [1928]. “The problem of land” (Essay three). In seven interpretative essays on Peruvian reality.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/mariategui/works/7-interpretive-essays/essay03.htm>

### Further reading

- C.L.R. James. 1989 [1938]. “Prologue”, “The property”, “The owners”. In *The Black Jacobins: Toussant L'Ouverture and the San Domingo revolution*, p. 33-61. New York: Vintage Books.
- Interview with CLR James about *The Black Jacobins*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUnO8lfoVBk&list=PLcM-gF4XiX-81cPQ11c7NIunLpB1j2Dpc&index=7>

<b>BREAK</b>
--------------

WEEK 7: Reading week (no class)

<b>LINES OF FRACTURE</b>
--------------------------

## Week 8: Class, caste, slavery: Structural conditions and struggles for emancipation

- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. 1936. *The annihilation of caste* p. 11-24.
- William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois. 1998 [1935]. “The Black worker”, p. 3-16; “The White worker”, p. 17-31; “The planter”, p. 32-54. In *Black reconstruction*

*in America. An essay toward a history of the part which Black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880.* Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books.

- Anna Julia Cooper. 1998 [1925]. "The social conditions of the French-American colonies: The class structure". In *The voice of Anna Julia Cooper, including A voice from the South and other essays, and Letters*, edited by Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, p. 272-279. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1969 [1848]. "Manifesto of the Communist Party". In *Marx/Engels selected works*, Volume One, p. 98-137. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

### **Further reading**

- Rosa Luxemburg. 2008 [1913]. "The mass strike, the political party and the trade unions". In *The essential Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Helen Scott. Chicago: Haymarket.
- William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois. 1998 [1935]. "The general strike", p. 55-83. In *Black reconstruction in America. An essay toward a history of the part which Black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880.* Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books.
- Rafael Khachaturian. 2021. "The living pulsebeat of the revolution': Reading Luxemburg and Du Bois on the strike". In *Creolizing Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Jane Anna Gordon and Drucilla Cornel, p. 175-198. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

### **Week 9: Race**

- Anna Julia Cooper. 1998 [1892]. "Has America a race problem? If so, how can it best be solved?"; and "What are we worth?". In *The voice of Anna Julia Cooper, including A voice from the South and other essays, and Letters*, edited by Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, p. 121-133, p. 161-187. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois. 2007 [1903]. "Of our spiritual strivings". In *The souls of the Black folk.* p. 7-15. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

### **Week 10: Lines of fracture (3): Gender**

- Anna Julia Cooper. 1998 [1891-1892]. "Woman versus the Indian". In *The voice of Anna Julia Cooper, including A voice from the South and other essays, and Letters*, edited by Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, p. 88-108. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Alexandra Kollontai. 1977 [1909]. "The social basis of the woman question". In *Selected writings of Alexandra Kollontai.* Allison & Busby.

### **Further reading**

- Emma Goldman. 1911. "Traffic in women". In *Anarchism and other essays*, p. 183-200. New York & London: Mother Earth Publishing Association.
- Simone de Beauvoir. 1956 [1949]. "Introduction". In *The second sex*, p. 13-29. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Tongo Takebe. "The relationship between family and society", and "The social status of women". In *Japanese family and society: Words from Tongo Takebe, a Meiji Era sociologist*, edited by Teruhito Sako and Suzanne K. Steinmetz. London and New York: Routledge.

## POWER AND IDEOLOGY

### WEEK 11: Power and ideology (1): Authority, domination, legitimacy

- Max Weber. 1978 [1921-1922]. "The three types of legitimate domination", p. 212-216; "Status groups and classes", p. 302-309; "The economic relationships of organized groups", p. 339-348. In *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

#### Further reading

- Mikhail Bakunin. 1871. *What is authority?*

### Week 12: Power and ideology (2): Hegemony, utopia

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1968 [1932]. "First premises of the materialist method", p. 7-11; note 2, p. 18; "Civil society and the conception of history", p. 20-23. In *A critique of the German ideology*. Moscow: Progress publishers.
- Karl Mannheim. 1954 [1929]. "Ideology and utopia" (Chapter 2), p. 49-52, p. 87-96; "The utopian mentality", p. 173-182. In *Ideology and utopia: An introduction to the sociology of knowledge*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Antonio Gramsci. 1992 [1971] "The intellectuals", p. 5-14; note 5, p. 55-57; "The state"; "The modern prince", p. 180-182; "State and civil society", p. 242-247. *Selections from the prison notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.

#### Further reading

- Raymond Williams. 1983. "Hegemony", p. 144-146. In *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Max Horkheimer. 2002. "Traditional and Critical Theory". In *Classical sociological theory*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk. London: Blackwell.
- Theodor Adorno. 2002. "Cultural criticism and society". In *Classical sociological theory*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk. London: Blackwell.



## THE CITY

### Week 13: The urban form

- Georg Simmel. 1950. "The Metropolis and Mental Life". In *The sociology of Georg Simmel*, edited by K. H. Wolff, p. 409–424. New York: Free Press.
- Louis Wirth. 1956 [1928]. *The ghetto*, p. 282-292. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades project*, selections to be announced later.

### Further reading

- Georg Simmel. 1971. "The stranger". In *On individuality and social forms*, p. 143-150. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Siegfried Kracauer. 1998 [1930]. *The salaried masses: Duty and distraction in Weimar Republic*, p. 28-52. London: Verso.