University of Cambridge
Faculty of Human, Social and Political Science
Introduction to Sociology: Modern Societies I

Paper Contacts

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2. Lecturers: Prof Patrick Baert, pjnb100@cam.ac.uk; Dr Manali Desai, md644@cam.ac.uk; Dr Hazem Kandil, hk376@cam.ac.uk

3. Supervisors: Supervisions for this paper will be co-ordinated by Josh Booth, jnwb2@cam.ac.uk

Outline of the Course

Aims and Objectives
The course has three interconnected aims and objectives:
• to introduce students to the systematic study of society and social life
• to introduce students to the central debates concerning the nature of the modern era and its social consequences by exploring a selection of key sociological texts by Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim
• to provide students with a fundamental understanding of the major institutions that comprise, and issues that confront, modern societies

Course Content
The course introduces students to the discipline of sociology in two parts. In the Michaelmas term students are thoroughly acquainted with core sociological concepts and concerns (e.g. class, bureaucracy, social solidarity, social change). We do this through a critical engagement with the ideas of three central figures in the history of modern sociological thought: Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. Towards the end of Michaelmas and throughout Lent, we build on the foundations laid by the classical theorists and develop a systematic analysis of key institutions and aspects of modern societies including the following: the modern state and the rise of nationalism; citizenship and the welfare state; the media and public life; class and inequality; gender and sexual divisions; race and ethnicity. We conclude with a broader reflection on the changing nature of modern societies in our contemporary global age.

Mode of Teaching
The paper is taught by lectures (34 over three terms). Supervision is essential for this
paper and should be arranged in consultation with a Director of Studies. It is recommended to have six to eight supervisions in total for this paper (including revision supervisions). A list of supervision topics is included in this paper guide and will also be available from the Faculty Office. Students will be expected to supplement the material acquired in lectures through their own reading of the literature recommended by lecturers and supervisors.

Mode of Assessment
There is one three-hour written examination at the end of the year. Candidates must answer three questions from an undivided paper.

Supervision
Supervisions for this paper are organized by Directors of Studies in the Colleges. A list of qualified supervisors is provided by the course coordinator.

Outline of Lectures

Part I: THEORIES OF MODERNITY (Michaelmas 2014)
Prof Patrick Baert

Lectures 1-4: Karl Marx

These lectures introduce Marx’s views about the transition to modern capitalism. We focus on four texts, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, German Ideology, Communist Manifesto and Grundrisse. Specific emphasis is given to two fundamental aspects of Marx’s project: first, his observations regarding what is distinctive and problematic about modern society; and second, his materialist understanding of historical change.

1. Historical context
This lecture addresses the particular intellectual and socio-political context within which Marx wrote. More specifically, we will consider how Marx was influenced by and reacted against German idealist philosophy and utopian socialist thought.

2. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts and German Ideology
This lecture explores these two texts, which both demonstrate the influence of Feuerbach on the young Marx and the extent to which he distances himself from Hegel. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts includes a famous section on alienation, and German Ideology presents a basic outline of a materialist conception of history.

3. Communist Manifesto and Grundrisse
This lecture considers these two texts, which are both remarkably wide-ranging in scope.
Communist Manifesto is a polemical defense of historical materialism and argues that the collapse of capitalism is inevitable. Grundrisse is generally viewed as a transition piece, linking his earlier philosophical concerns with the more empirical emphases found in Capital.

4. Marx and Marxism: the legacy and its critics
This lecture deals with Marx’s enduring influence, the varieties of Marxism, and its critics. We also assess the widely held view that recent social and political events refute the validity of Marx’s views.

Reading List (lectures 1-4)

Lectures 5-8: Max Weber
These lectures introduce Weber’s views about the transition to rational capitalism. The lectures focus on three texts, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, ‘Bureaucracy’ and ‘Class, Status, Party’. As with the lectures on Marx, we consider two fundamental aspects of Weber's intellectual project: first, his observations regarding what is distinctive and problematic about modern society; and second, his interest in the role of unanticipated effects in history.

5. Historical context
This lecture explores the particular intellectual and socio-political context in which Weber wrote. It includes, amongst other things, a discussion of Weber’s relationship to historical materialism, Nietzsche’s influence, and Weber’s position vis-a-vis the ‘Methodenstreit’.

6. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
This lecture introduces Weber’s classic study of the relationship between Protestantism and rational capitalism. It explores Weber’s use of Verstehen and the role of unintended
effects of purposive action.

7. Bureaucracy and social stratification.
This lecture discusses two aspects of Weber’s thought. Firstly, it explores Weber’s text on ‘bureaucracy’. Emphasis is given to the following two themes: Weber’s notion of rationalisation and the concept of ideal types. Secondly, this lecture explores Weber’s notion of stratification by focusing on his text ‘Class, Status, Party’.

8. Weberian sociology and its critics
This lecture gives some indication of Weber’s influence on otherwise very different authors (for example, Adorno, Bauman and Boudon). It also assesses various critiques of Weberian sociology.

Reading List (lectures 5-8)
Collins, H. Weberian Sociological Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (esp. chapters 1, 2)

Lectures 9-12: Emile Durkheim
These lectures introduce Durkheim’s views about the transition to a modern differentiated society. We focus on Division of Labour and Suicide, discussing it in two ways. Firstly, we consider Durkheim’s thoughts on what is distinctive and problematic about modern society, and secondly his views concerning how society is held together.

9. Historical context
This lecture explores the particular intellectual and socio-political context in which Durkheim wrote. It includes a discussion of Durkheim's efforts to create a new academic discipline, the influence of Comtean positivist philosophy and the socio-political situation in the Third Republic in France.

10. Division of Labour
This lecture introduces Durkheim’s *Division of Labour* in two parts. First, it discusses Durkheim’s use of evolutionary theory to account for societal change. Second, it discusses Durkheim’s diagnosis of the problems of modern society, in particular the notion of anomie.

11. Suicide and other works
This lecture explains how some of the themes in *Division of Labour* are taken up in later works, including *Rules of Sociological Method*, *Suicide* and *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

12. Durkheimian sociology and its critics
This lecture explores Durkheim’s legacy as manifest in the work of more recent social thinkers including Claude Levi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Randall Collins and Jeffrey Alexander. It also discusses major criticisms of Durkheimian sociology.

**Reading List (lectures 9-12)**

**Essay questions (lectures 1-12)**
1. “In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven” (Marx). Discuss.
2. For Marx, what are the evils of capitalism, and how are they to be resolved in the future?
3. According to Weber, what is the role of the Predestination doctrine in the development of early capitalism? Do you agree?
4. According to Weber, what makes bureaucracies efficient? Do you agree?
5. What is the usefulness of Weber’s distinction between classes, status groups and
5. What does Durkheim mean by anomie, and why does he regard it as problematic?
6. Is Durkheim’s use of biological metaphors to explain society inherently conservative?


SOCIAL INEQUALITIES
Lecturer: Dr Manali Desai

Lecture 1: Nationalism, Race and Ethnicity
1a: This part of the lecture will discuss the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ and how they are linked to contemporary inequalities.

Essay question 1a: Is racial inequality declining in contemporary Britain?

Reading


1b: In this lecture we will discuss the rise of nationalism and why it such a powerful force in today’s world.

Essay question 1b: Is globalization likely to erode the significance of nationalism?

Reading

Lecture 2: Class and Inequality
2a: In this part of the lecture we will discuss the concept of class and its relationship to inequality in modern societies.
Reading

2b: In this lecture we will discuss whether class is becoming less significant as a basis of inequality and political allegiance in our societies today.

Essay question 2b: Critically assess Pakulski and Waters’ theory of the declining significance of class.

Reading

Lecture 3: Social Mobility
3a: In this part of the lecture we consider how inequalities of opportunity arise in modern Britain, and why are they sustained.

Essay 3a: Studies of social mobility suggest that there are relatively high levels of self-recruitment at the upper and lower levels of the class structure. How can this be explained?

3b: In this lecture we discuss whether Britain could be described as a meritocracy, that is, a society in which social positions are allocated on the basis of merit rather than social background such as class or race, as well as inherited privileges?

Essay 3b: Is Britain a meritocracy?


**Topic 4: Gender**

4a: In this part of the lecture we will discuss the category of ‘gender’ – how is it constructed, and why is it so powerful?

Essay 4a: If gender is socially constructed why is it so pervasive and powerful?


4b: In this part of the lecture we will discuss how gender intersects with modern institutions in contemporary society

Essay 4b: Why does gender-based occupational segregation persist?


**Topic 5: The Welfare State and Its Crisis**

5a: This part of the lecture discusses the relationship between class, gender and the rise of the welfare state in Europe.

Essay 5a: Compare and contrast the welfare state in Britain and Sweden.


5b: This part of the lecture discusses the politics of welfare reform since the 1980s.

Essay 5b: Why has the welfare state come under attack in recent years?

Reading:

**POWER & SOCIETY**

**Lecturer: Dr. Hazem Kandil**

How do shifting power relations produce social change? This section of the paper examines the concept of power from a sociological perspective. It then surveys three forms of power: political, military, and ideological, before turning to global power projection today. It is taught in five 2-hour sessions. Required readings are starred.

**Lecture 6 –Understanding Power**

This lecture introduces the concept of power through two main paradigms: the first is the realist view that highlights power struggles between various actors; and the second is the post-structural view that conceives power as diffuse and illusive.

Questions
1) How do the realist and post-structural views of power differ?
2) Which approach to power do you consider more useful in social analysis, and why?

**Lecture 7 — Political Power: State & Revolution**
This lecture considers the causes of revolution from various theoretical perspectives, and assess why the prospects of revolutionary change have diminished with the strengthening of states. This is followed by an attempt to explain one of the recent Arab revolts.


Questions
1) What causes revolution, and why are they becoming less likely?
2) How can we explain the recent revolts in Egypt?

**Lecture 8—Military Power: War & Society**
This lecture addresses the changing character of warfare and how it relates to society. It then evaluates the sources and types of militarism, focusing on the US.


**Questions**

1) Why is contemporary warfare considered entirely new?

2) What is the difference between internal and external militarism?

**Lecture 9—Ideological Power: Neoliberalism**

This lecture reflects on the meaning and influence of ideology in the contemporary world. It investigates the origins and spread of the dominant ideology of the age: neoliberalism.

—Thompson, John B. 1990. *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [CH1-’The Concept of Ideology’]


**Lecture 10—Combined Power: Globalization & Imperialism**

In this final lecture, we turn to global power projection, asking whether globalization is larger than any single state, or whether states today could still combine all sources of social power to achieve imperial dominance.

—Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2001. *Empire*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press. [Preface; CH2, Section 5; CH3, Sections 3, 6; CH4, Section 3]


**Questions**
1) Is imperialism still possible today?
2) How does globalization alter international power relations?

Part III. Revision Sessions (Easter Term 2015)
Prof Patrick Baert, Dr Hazem Kandil, Dr Manali Desai

Further information:

a.) How this course relates to others
This paper provides students with grounding in some of the classic texts of social thought, with an introduction to some of the key concepts in sociology today and with an understanding of some of the core institutions of modern societies. The paper provides the foundations for more advanced coursework in sociology at the IIA and IIB levels.

b.) Supplementary Reading List


Student Feedback:
Your chance to put forward your opinions on the papers you take!

For Sociology Papers, student feedback is collected via hard-copy anonymous questionnaires distributed at various points in the academic year. It is crucial that you fill these out and give feedback on your papers. Getting good feedback from students makes the course better and shows the outside world how Cambridge degrees consider their students views.
Course organisers take students' concerns and suggestions into consideration each year when preparing their paper outlines and selecting supervisors for the year. So please remember to fill out a form.