HSPS Tripos – Part 1, Soc1
Introduction to Sociology: Modern Societies I
(2017-18)

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<tr>
<th>Paper Coordinator</th>
<th>Lecturers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva, <a href="mailto:fcs23@cam.ac.uk">fcs23@cam.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>Dr Teije Hidde Donker, <a href="mailto:td402@cam.ac.uk">td402@cam.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>Dr Manali Desai, <a href="mailto:md644@cam.ac.uk">md644@cam.ac.uk</a></td>
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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 through 18 two-hour lectures over three terms. 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 here and by supervisors. Required reading is starred.

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
Supervision is essential for this paper and will be arranged by Directors of Studies in the Colleges. It is recommended to have six to eight supervisions in total for this paper (including revision supervisions), covering six of the topics in this paper guide. A list of qualified supervisors is provided by the paper coordinator.

Part I: THEORIES OF MODERNITY (Michaelmas 2017)
Dr Teije Hidde Donker

Topic 1 – Karl Marx
(Michaelmas week 1)

This lecture introduce Marx’s views on the transition to modern capitalism. 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.

a. Historical context
The first part 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.

b. Historical Materialism and the Communist Revolution
The second part explores four texts that are distinctive of Marx’s views. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts includes a famous section on alienation, and German Ideology presents a basic outline of a materialist conception of history. Both demonstrate the influence of Feuerbach on the young Marx and the extent to which he distances himself from Hegel. Communist Manifesto is a polemical defence 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.

c. Marx and Marxism: the legacy and its critics
The final part of 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

**Essays**

1. Do you agree that Marx is a critic of capitalism but not of industrialisation?
2. For Marx, what are the evils of capitalism, and how are they to be resolved in the future?

**Topic 2 – Max Weber**

(Michaelmas week 2)

These lectures introduce Weber’s views about the transition to rational capitalism. 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.

**a. Historical context**

The first part of 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’.

**b. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**

The second part 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. The lecture also 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.

**c. Weberian sociology and its critics**

The final part gives some indication of Weber’s influence and assesses various critiques of Weberian sociology.

**Reading**


Collins, H. Weberian Sociological Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (esp. chapters 1, 2)


**Essays**

1. According to Weber, what is the role of the Predestination doctrine in the development of early capitalism? Do you agree?  
2. According to Weber, what makes bureaucracies efficient? Do you agree?

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**Topic 3 – Emile Durkheim**

(Michaelmas week 3)

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.

**a. Historical context**

The first part of 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.

**b. Division of Labour, Suicide and other works**

The second part introduces Durkheim’s Division of Labour. We first discuss Durkheim’s use of evolutionary theory to account for societal change. Second, we discuss his diagnosis of the problems of modern society, in particular the notion of anomie. We subsequently explore 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.

**c. Durkheimian sociology and its critics**

The second part of this lecture explores Durkheim’s legacy as manifest in the work of more recent social thinkers. It also discusses major criticisms of Durkheimian sociology.
Reading


Essays
1. What does Durkheim mean by anomie, and why does he regard it as problematic?
2. Critically assess Durkheim’s use of evidence to support his theory about the causes of suicide.
Part II: The Study of Modern Societies (Michaelmas 2017 - Lent 2018)

SOCIAL INEQUALITIES
Dr Manali Desai

Topic 1 – Class and Inequality
(Michaelmas week 4)

a. In this part of the lecture we will discuss various theories of class, examining how neo-Marxists and neo-Weberians have thought about class, and Bourdieus’s variation on the theme.

b. In this part of the lecture we will discuss empirical studies of class, examining evidence on the persistence and evolution of social class in modern Britain.

Reading


Essays

a. Do Savage et al make a convincing case for a new model of class? Why or why not?
b. Discuss and provide evidence for two mechanisms that enable class in modern Britain to persist.
**Topic 2 – Race, Ethnicity and Racism**
(Michaelmas week 5)

**a.** The first part of this lecture will discuss the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ and how they are linked to contemporary inequalities.

**b.** In the second part of this lecture we will discuss the history of racism in the UK and beyond, considering how ethnic divisions can become racialized and lead to discrimination and violence.

**Reading**

**a.**

**b.**

**Essays**

**a.** What are the similarities and differences (if any) between the concepts of race and ethnicity?

**b.** Discuss two key social or cultural mechanisms by which racism persists in contemporary culture (you can choose a non-western country or a country other than the UK)?
**Topic 3 – Nations and Nationalisms**
(Michaelmas week 6)

a. This part of the lecture addresses the rise of the nation and nationalism in Europe and beyond.

b. In this part of the lecture we will ask whether nationalism is on the decline in the face of globalization.

**Reading**

a. 

b. 

**Essays**

a. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Anthony Smith’s theory of the ethnic origins of nations.
b. Discuss, using examples, how ‘globalization’ both erodes and strengthens nationalism.
**Topic 4 – Gender, Sexuality, and Intersectionality**
(Michaelmas week 7)

**a.** In this part of the lecture we will discuss the category of ‘gender’; how is it constructed, and why is it so powerful? How are gender and sexuality related?

**b.** What is ‘intersectionality’ in sociology and why is it important?

**Reading**

**a.**

**b.**

**Essays**

**a.** Are gender and sexuality fundamentally intertwined, or should they be considered as entirely separate analytical frameworks?

**b.** Discuss two ways in which the theory and method of intersectionality challenges white, western feminism (or feminist theory).
**Topic 5 – The Politics of Inequality**

(Michaelmas week 8)

**a.** This part of the lecture discusses the rise in global inequality and considers some of the causes.

**b.** This part of the lecture discusses the consequences of these inequalities with a focus on the consequences of austerity.

**Reading**

**a.**


**b.**


**Essays**

**a.** Why has inequality grown steadily during the past two decades?

**b.** Discuss two important consequences of recent austerity measures in the UK, using evidence to show these effects.
POWER & SOCIETY
Dr. Teije Hidde Donker

How do shifting power relations relate to social change? This section of the paper examines the concept of power from a sociological perspective and surveys three forms of power: political, military, and ideological. It concludes with a discussion of how these forms of power intersect in global power projection today.

**Topic 1 – Understanding Power**
(Lent week 1)

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 more diffuse and socially constructed.

**Reading**

**Essays**
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?

**Topic 2 – Political Power: State & Revolution**
(Lent week 2)

This lecture considers the causes of revolution from various theoretical perspectives, and
discusses 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.

**Reading**


**Essays**

1. What causes revolutions and why are they becoming less likely?
2. How can we explain the recent revolts in Egypt?

**Topic 3 – Military Power: War & Society**

(Lent week 3)

This lecture addresses the changing character of warfare and its relation to society. It then discusses different approaches of evaluating the sources and types of militarism, focusing on the US.

**Reading**


*Shaw, Martin. 2005. The New Western Way of War. Cambridge: Polity [CH1,4]*


York: Ballantine Books. [CH6]

**Essays**
1. Why can contemporary warfare be considered entirely new? Do you agree?
2. What is the difference between internal and external militarism?

**Topic 4 – Ideological Power: Neoliberalism**
(Lent week 4)
This lecture discusses different views of the influence of ideology in the contemporary world. It explores the origins, spread and dominance of neoliberalism as ideology today.

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

**Essays**
1. How could ideas become a source of power?
2. Why did neoliberalism achieve global dominance?

**Topic 5 – Combined Power: Globalization & Neoliberalism**
(Lent week 5)
In this final lecture, we turn to global power projection. We ask if, in the contemporary globalized world, states can still combine all sources of social power to achieve imperial dominance.

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


**Essays**

1. How does globalization alter international power relations?
2. Is imperialism still possible today?
Part III. Revision Sessions (Easter Term 2018)
Dr Teije Hidde Donker

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

c) 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.