

SO128-15 History of Sociological Thought

24/25

Department

Sociology

Level

Undergraduate Level 1

Module leader

Sivamohan Valluvan

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This core module introduces you to some of the main themes in classical sociology. It's a huge subject. One way of approaching it is to see the emergence of sociology as a response to three revolutions: the intellectual revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries ('The Enlightenment'), the industrial revolution that it helped to foster, and the French and Haitian Revolutions of the late 18th Century which sent shock waves through Europe. The intellectual revolution led people to ask whether it was possible to do a science of history and society as well as a science of nature; the industrial and political revolutions led people to say that some such science was necessary, because the forces they unleashed – new ideas about politics (e.g. human rights, democracy, equality) new forms of organization (especially emerging nation-states), new types of social groups and new types of relationships between people (e.g. class, colonial) – were deeply disruptive of the old European order. Just as science can be driven both by pure curiosity and by the desire to harness nature's energies for human purposes, so sociology has its 'pure' scholars, its partisans and its reformists. The four writers – three European and one African American – we will look at all combined these multiple qualities. They all offered both techniques of thinking that continue to have major influence. Their foundational concerns with questions of capitalism and modernity, class and social hierarchies, nationalism and racism, alongside their general attempt to grapple with the question of how societies change remain central to the sociological approach.

These four thinkers were all also public figures, concerned with the political, economic and cultural problems of their day. This dedication to studying and commenting on society in an active and involved way remains an aspiration central to many sociologists' enduring interest in the subject.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

To give students beginning their degree a broad overview of the roots of sociology, both historical and intellectual, and of some of its most influential approaches

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

This module will look at the emergence of sociology in the 19th and early 20th centuries, both as a scholarly discipline and as an intellectual sensibility. It will address, thus, the versions of social science that some of the discipline's founders believed they were helping to create, the economic, cultural and political changes that they were living through, and the social and intellectual milieu in which they came to maturity. In order to do this we will touch on both their programmatic statements about how scholarly inquiry should be carried out and their efforts to grapple with a particular substantive problems as regards modernity. We will also suggest ways in which their efforts have either stood the test of time or been rendered obsolete. An outline:

Introduction: the birth of modernity and sociological theory
Debating Marx and Weberian approaches to class inequality
Durkheim on solidarity Marx on capitalism and alienation
Durkheim on suicide and individualism
Marx on class struggle and capitalism
Marx on alienation and human freedom
Weber on culture, capitalism and the Protestant work ethic
Du Bois on racialisation and freedom

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- An understanding of some of the distinctive features of sociology as a discipline and the approaches to social theory associated with it.
- An awareness of major classical sociological perspectives and traditions, and the social and historical contexts in which they emerged.
- An acquaintance with at least some of the classical sociological texts and the debates to which they have given rise.

Indicative reading list

Hughes, Sharrock and Martin (2003) *Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx, Weber Durkheim*, London: Sage.

- Abercrombie, N. 2004. *Sociology. A Brief Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Aron, R. 1962. *Main Currents of Sociological Thought*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Bhambra, G. K. 2007. *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Basingstoke: Palgrave
- Bruce, S. 1999. *Sociology: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University press. [clear and to the point]
- Collins, R. 1994. *Four Sociological Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [useful account of the directions taken by classical sociology later on]
- Giddens, A. 1972. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*
- Holmwood, J. and A. Stewart 1991. *Explanation and Social Theory*. London: Macmillan.
- Hawthorn, G (1976), *Enlightenment & Despair: A History of Social Theory*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Jensen, H. (2012) *Weber and Durkheim: A Methodological Reader*, New York: Routledge
- Lepenes, W. *Between Literature and Science*. [erudite and often amusing account of 19th century sociology]
- Nisbet, R. 1966. *The Sociological Tradition*. [influence of conservatism on sociology]
- Runciman, W.G. 1999. *The Social Animal*. Fontana.
- Craib, I. 1997. *Classical Social Theory*. [decent summaries of Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel]
- Wright Mills, C. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Du Bois, W. E. [1935] 1998. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. Free Press.
- Durkheim, E. 1982. *On Morality and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hamilton, Peter 1992. 'The Enlightenment and the Birth of Social Science' in Hall, S. and Gieben, B. (eds.) *Formations of Modernity*. Oxford: Open University / Polity Press
- Lukes, S. 1973. *Emile Durkheim: his life and work*. Penguin.
- Poggi, Gianfranco. 1983. 'Lego quia inutile: an alternative justification for the classics', in Stephen P. Turner (ed.) *Social Theory and Sociology: The Classics and Beyond*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Weber, Max 1992. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Routledge.
- Kumar, K. (1978) 'The Great Transformation' in *Prophecy and Progress*, Penguin Classics
- Thompson, Kenneth, 1984. *Readings from Emile Durkheim*, Chichester: Horwood
- Marx, K, and Engels, F. (2002[1848]) *The Communist Manifesto*, London: Penguin Books.
- Wood, Ellen Meiksins 2002. *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*. London
- Appleby, J. (2010) *The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism*, W.W. Norton and Company
- Du Bois, WEB 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Gordon, L. (2000) *Existencia Africana*, London: Routledge

International

Attends to thinkers and perspectives that offer a expansive sense of modernity - in Europe but also the wider world (particularly through capitalist and/or colonial relations).

Subject specific skills

Social theory canon - understanding of the foundations of the discipline and social sciences in general

Transferable skills

close engagement of original theoretical text- demonstrating ability to navigate difficult data
written fluency - demonstrating ability to convert complex original material into accessible and fluent essay answers
verbal communication - seminar discussion/debate which rewards ability to verbally convey understanding of complex theoretical material

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	132 hours (88%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

must read core texts each work as well as come to each weekly seminar with written notes in reference to the set questions provided by convenor for each original text.

writing two essays - one formative and one summative.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A1

Weighting

Study time

2000 word essay

100%

Answer one question (all module weeks/topics will have a corresponding essay question that the student may chose).

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback and verbal feedback if requested via convenors/seminar leaders' office hours.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
 - Year 1 of L301 Sociology
 - Year 1 of L301 Sociology
 - Year 1 of L301 Sociology
- Year 1 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology
- Year 1 of UIPA-L3L8 Undergraduate Sociology and Global Sustainable Development

This module is Core optional for:

- UPDA-LM49 Undergraduate Health and Social Policy
 - Year 1 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
 - Year 5 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
 - Year 6 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
 - Year 7 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
 - Year 8 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
 - Year 9 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
- Year 1 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 1 of ULAA-M135 Undergraduate Law and Sociology
- Year 1 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 1 of ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)

This module is Option list G for:

- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 1 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 1 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 1 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)