

INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY

Canons are not born, they are fabricated. They are historical products. So it is true for sociology. Our canon, itself subject to change and dispute, includes the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. In modern times the sociological canon was largely created by Talcott Parsons in his two-volume *The Structure of Social Action*, published in 1937. This classic of US sociology argues that Marshall, Pareto, Weber and Durkheim, unbeknownst to one another, were converging on a novel theory of social action -- Parsons' so-called voluntaristic theory of action -- around the turn of the 19th century. Of the four theorists two stuck -- Weber and Durkheim. Over time Parsons was attacked by conflict theorists, many of whom invoked the writings of Marx and Engels as offering deeper insights into the turbulent times of the 1960s. So Marx became part of the canon. There is nothing eternally fixed or static about the canon.

The canon is always under attack. Theorists are continually knocking at the door -- feminists (Beauvoir), critical race theory (Du Bois), even poststructuralism (Foucault), reflexive sociology (Bourdieu). That's good, demonstrating the dynamism of sociology, struggling to keep up with history. However, there are those who think the canon is irrelevant or even an obstacle to progress. To them Marx, Weber and Durkheim are of merely historical interest, originators of the discipline perhaps, but no longer important in the development of the science of sociology. We should forget them. Opposition to the canon also comes from a very different direction. Such figures as Raewyn Connell consider the canon to be made up of arbitrary figures, chosen because their presumptions suited certain interests in society or in sociology, thereby excluding equally important contributors to social theory, especially from the Global South. There should be no privileged canon and therefore no canon. Let a hundred flowers bloom.

Still, there are defenders of the canon, precisely because Marx, Weber and Durkheim not only reflect their times but also transcend their times. They are especially important when sociology is in danger of becoming a narrow, technocratic discipline, losing sight of the profound issues that define its originality. Arthur Stinchcombe, for example, argues that classical sociology offers exemplars of the best scientific work; recognition of social complexity in contrast to the clichés of sociology; an intellectual badge to identify style of work; sources of the fundamental ideas that drive sociology; source of abiding puzzles and hypotheses for empirical work; rituals of solidarity to define sociology as a distinct discipline.

It is the hypothesis of this course that the canon may be a historical product but it is not arbitrary. Canonical social theorists were in some way pioneers in developing sociology. Their theories of society embraced an understanding of differences between and within nations. At the same time the theories have a historical dimension, which, in

turn, rendered the possibility of a future at odds with the present. They were, in some sense, utopians. Their theories had to be grounded in original empirical research, itself based on a sophisticated understanding of methodology and science. They were philosophers, researchers, and historians as well as theorists of society – its components, its integration, its perpetuation, its transformation. Marx, Weber and Durkheim fit these criteria but they are not the only ones to do so. Of all the contenders for entry into the pantheon of sociology, the most common is William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. This course will examine the implications of sociology's embrace of Du Bois.

Born in 1868, four years after Weber and ten years after Durkheim, he outlived them by more than 40 years. As a historian W.E.B. Du Bois was the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard; as a sociologist he received his formative education in Germany. His writings lie at the intersection of an unusual biography of public engagement and nearly a century of history. His doctoral dissertation was an analysis of unsuccessful efforts to suppress the slave trade; his magnum opus, *Black Reconstruction* (1935) transformed previous understandings of the antecedents, meaning, and aftermath of the American Civil War. He was a founder of the NAACP and editor of its influential magazine, *The Crisis* for nearly 25 years; he was involved in organizing and writing about Pan Africanism culminating in African independence movements; his engagement with Soviet and Chinese socialism gave him a positive vision of what the world could be, making him an enemy of the US state; and his final departure for newly independent Ghana where he died in 1963.

When it has recognized him at all sociology has viewed him as an early urban sociologist, author of *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) and of his early more literary writings found in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), thereby ignoring his more radical writings that begin with *John Brown* (1909), moving onto *Darkwater* (1920), *The Gift of Black Folk* (1924), *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), and *The World and Africa* (1947) not to mention his fascinating historical fiction, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), *Dark Princess* (1928) and the Black Flame Trilogy (1958, 1959, 1961).

Canonical theories not only satisfy certain requirements, they are also connected to one another in some unifying way. Thus Parsons saw in his canonical theories a convergence on a rather abstract theory of social action. Others have seen the canon as sharing an engagement with industrialization, with modernity, with particular types of social change or consensus, the relation between individual and society, assumptions about human nature, etc. In this course we will focus on the idea of division of labor – what it means, its origins, its different forms, its conditions of existence and development, its past and its future, and its consequences for individuals and society. We will put the theorists into conversation with each other around the concept of the division of labor. With this lens we will see the implications of including Du Bois in the canon but first we will familiarize ourselves with the conversation among Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

There are different ways of teaching an introductory course on social theory. One way is to read extensively to get a broad sense of the classics and the issues they raise, while another way is to read intensively and mine texts for their meaning and contradictions. We will take the second road, what I call the ethnographic approach to social theory.

To underline the importance of careful reading every week you will write a no-more-than-250-word commentary on the readings to be posted on bcourses. They will be the basis of class discussion. I will give you questions to consider each week to help focus your commentaries which will be due midnight Sunday, starting September 6, if you are prepared to meet on September 7th, Labor Day. At the end of the semester I will require a short paper, reflecting on the content of the course.

In addition, I want you to work together in groups of three to interview each of four of my colleagues selected from the following: Karen Barkey, Irene Bloermraad, Cybelle Fox, Tom Gold, David Harding, Heather Haverman, Jenna Johnson-Hanks, John Lie, Mara Loveman, Trond Petersen, Dylan Riley, and Cihan Tugal. This will require familiarizing yourself with a faculty person's work and then interviewing them about the significance of social theory. The interview will be recorded and put on the department website along with all the others. You can find previous interviews [here](#) (Enriquez, Paschel, Mora, Fligstein and Fourcade).

Yes, we'll be remote. Our zoom room is: <https://zoom.us/j/93279341563>. No passcode. We meet 4-7p.m. (PDT) on Mondays. All the readings will be available as PDFs on bcourses under files, but I encourage you to buy the books. For the first class (August 31), please read Stinchcombe and Connell for discussion in class.

The readings are from:

- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)
- Robert Tucker (edited), *Marx-Engels Reader* (1971)
- Durkheim, *Division of Labor in Society* (translated by W.D. Halls)(1984)
- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* (translated by Talcott Parsons)
- Hans Gerth and C Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* (1946)
- Raewyn Connell, "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 102 no. 6, 1511-57 (1997)
- Arthur Stinchcombe, "Should Sociologists Forget Their Mothers and Fathers" *The American Sociologist*, 1982: 17: 2-11.
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* (1920)
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935)

SCHEDULE

1. August 31

- Introduction: the canon – to be or not to be?
Raewyn Connell, “Why is Classical Theory Classical?” How was the canon created? How did it develop? What historical forces have shaped the canon? What has been neglected? Why is there a canon? What is the alternative to the canon?
Arthur Stinchcombe, “Should Sociologists Forget Their Mothers and Fathers”.
What are the features and the functions of classical theory?

2. September 7 (Holiday)

- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*. What is the division of labor? Where are its origins? What are its different forms? What are the conditions of its development? What is its future? What are its consequences? What role does the state play in the division of labor? How does Smith understand the gender division of labor? How does he consider slavery?

3. September 14

- Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (pp.146-65; 172-5;189-200). What is the German Ideology? What are the Premises of all History? What are the two components of the division of labor? What is the division of labor in the family? What are the natural and voluntary divisions of labor? What are classes? What is Communism?

4. September 21

- Marx, *Wage Labor and Capital* (pp.203-18). What is the capitalist mode of production? What is the source of profit?
- Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (pp.700-717, 718-724) What are the origins, dynamics and future of capitalism?

5. September 28

- Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (pp.469-83). What are the dynamics of class struggle under capitalism? What is the state? What is the relation of classes to the state? (pp.186-8, 711, 713, 475).
- Marx, *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (pp.3-6). The (7) postulates of Historical materialism? [Why not Marx on Civil War???

6. October 5

- Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. Preface to the First Edition (p.3-7) and Introduction, pp.33-38). What is the science of Sociology? Is the division of labor pathology or normal?
- Book I, chapter 1 (pp.41-56). What are the two notions of solidarity? How to measure solidarity? What is the relation between division of labor and solidarity?
- Book I, chapter 2 (pp.57-87). What is a crime? What is the function of punishment? What is the form of punishment? Mechanical solidarity and the state.

7. October 12

- Book I, chapter 3 (pp.88-91, 96-100), chapter 5 (pp.131-35) and chapter 7 (158-80). What is organic solidarity? Restitutive Law. Durkheim's criticism of Spencer. Organic solidarity and the state. What happens to the collective consciousness under organic solidarity? What are the non-contractual elements of contract?
- Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* Book II, chapter 2 (pp.201-222). What are the origins and impetus behind the development of the division of labor?

8. October 19

- Book III, chapter 1,2,3 (pp.277-308). What are the abnormal forms of the division of labor?
- Conclusion (pp.309-319). What is the place of sociology in society?
- Durkheim, "Preface to the Second Edition." (pp.8-29). Durkheim's vision of the future.

9. October 26

- Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Introduction (pp.13-31). What does Weber mean by rationalization? What is the Spirit of Capitalism (pp.47-78); What is the Protestant Ethic? The difference between Luther and Calvin? (pp.79-128) What is the connection between Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism? What is the difference between the origins and the reproduction of capitalism? (pp.155-183)

10. November 2

- Weber, *Bureaucracy*. What is bureaucracy (pp.196-204)? What are the origins, conditions of bureaucracy (pp.204-209, 224-228, 230-232)? What is the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy? Between power and knowledge (pp.232-235, 240-244)? Why is bureaucracy so permanent? What threatens bureaucracy? (pp.214-216, 228-30, 220-1).
- Weber, *Class, Status, and Party* (pp.180-195)

11. November 9

- Selections from Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*. What is politics? What is the state? What are the types of politicians? How do political institutions differ in England, US and Germany? What is the vocation of politics? What are the qualities of the ideal-type politician? What are the dangers of politics? What is the relation between an ethic of absolute ends and an ethic of responsibility? What is the relation between science, politics and religion?
- Selections from Weber, *Science as a Vocation*. What are the conditions of the scientist qua teacher? What is the role of the teacher? What is science? What is the vocation of science? What is the relation between values and science? What are functions of science?

12. November 16

- Selections from Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

13. November 23

- Selections from Du Bois, *Darkwater*

14. November 30

- Selections from Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*
 - I. The Black Worker (pp.3-16)
 - II. The White Worker (pp.17-31)
 - III. The Planter (pp.32-54)
 - IV. The General strike (pp.55-83)
 - V. The Coming of the Lord (pp.84-127)
 - XVI. Back Toward Slavery (pp.670-711)
 - XVII. The Propaganda of History (pp.711-730)

15. December 7

- Conclusion – Reconstructing the Canon.