

Emory University
Department of Sociology
Fall 2020
T, TH 11:20-12:35 p.m.

Dr. Frank Lechner
Tarbutton 214
flechn@emory.edu
727-7530; Office Hours: F 9-11:00

SOC 150: Great Works in Social Thought

Content and goals

As part of the Voluntary Core Curriculum, this course examines a sample of great works in Western social thought from the European Middle Ages to the twenty-first century in order to reflect on important questions about social life. Does society require a common faith, or can we build solidarity in a different way? How should society balance individual and community, order and progress, or economic interests and social norms? What fundamental transformations, for example in ideas about inequality, have come about in modern societies—and are we going through another period of transformation today? By answering such questions, through close reading and lively discussion, the course aims to convey the arc of a broadly “liberal” tradition and will help you to

- critically appreciate seminal texts in the Western tradition
- understand both continuity and change in Western thinking about society
- situate your own views in the context of a long and diverse tradition
- improve your analytical and writing skills in dealing with challenging material

In addition to reading classic texts, we will study a small sample of works of art to reflect on ways in which they might embody forms of social thought.

Format

Even in online form, this course will mostly operate as a seminar in which we collectively discuss the texts and your assignments. Discussions will be recorded, for the exclusive use of students in this class. Partly to prevent Zoom fatigue, I will cover some readings in brief videos (specifics to be announced during the semester).

Readings

- All readings will be **linked or posted in Course Reserves or on Canvas**.
- Most readings (see Schedule) will consist of **excerpts** from larger texts.
- The readings aim to expose you to a **variety** of great works, but not entire books.
- The selection of readings partly reflects a division of labor with other VCC courses, which cover classics of antiquity, historical writing, ethics, and American political thought; however, some readings may overlap.
- Some classes will involve online exploration; at least one class will require access to Amazon Prime.

Guidance

- I will be available to meet, virtually or in person (on campus or nearby), during office hours and at other times, to discuss issues pertaining to the course or anything else you would like to bring up.
- Communicate with me in a timely manner if you are affected by Covid-19 in any way.
- You should anticipate about 2 hours of work, on average, prior to each scheduled class session; a few sessions may take more prep time, including the viewing of at least one movie. Use study questions, if posted, to guide your reading.
- Provided you make a good-faith effort to deal with the text itself, you are welcome to use the Web to do your own background research on a particular reading (for example, the online [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) is a good source on several relevant topics).
- For assistance with writing, I encourage you to consult tutors in the [Writing Center](#).

Requirements

1. **Midterm (Oct. 6) and final exam (due Dec. 14)**, consisting of essay questions, each exam worth 25% of your grade, open book/open notes, final exam partly cumulative (instructions TBA).
2. **Two essays**, about 3 pages, each worth 10%; one interpretive (analysis of a text), **due Oct. 4**, one creative (sketching a great work for the twenty-first century), **due Nov 25**.
3. **Four short assignments**, 2.5% each (see schedule below).
4. **Participation**, including attendance at and some contributions to Zoom sessions, 10%. You may skip one session unexcused. Further expectations TBA.
5. **Two Emory Williams Memorial Lectures**, [watch online](#), one-page comment, 5% of final grade. Note: normally, attendance at four lectures would be part of the Voluntary Core Curriculum program. The purpose of this requirement is to give you a taste of this tradition by asking you to select two of the many posted lectures.

Note 1: If you need accommodations, please contact [OAS](#).

Note 2: The [Honor Code](#) is in effect throughout the semester. Read carefully!

Schedule

- I often post short announcements prior to each class; these are part of the course material
- Italicized titles below refer to books from which we will read excerpts
- Several classes juxtapose authors to compare views or generate debate
- Most items will be covered in Zoom discussions, some in recorded videos posted on Canvas
- This schedule is subject to minor revisions, as needed

8/20 Welcome and introduction: Themes and patterns in Western social thought

Unit 1 Before 1500

8/25 Heloise and Abelard, letters
John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*

8/27 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*
Chartres Cathedral assignment

Unit 2 1500s-1600s

9/1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*

9/3 John Milton, *Areopagitica*

9/8 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

9/10 Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*
Dutch painting assignment

Unit 3 1700s

9/15 Bernard Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*
David Hume, *Essays Political, Moral, and Literary*

9/17 Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments, The Wealth of Nations*

9/22 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*
John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*

Unit 4 Late 1700s

9/24 Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View"

Johann Gottfried Herder, "This Too a Philosophy of History"

9/29 W. A. Mozart/Lorenzo Da Ponte, *The Marriage of Figaro*, opera assignment

10/1 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*

10/6 **Midterm Exam**

Unit 5 Mid-1800s

10/8 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*

Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"

10/13 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, The Old Regime and the Revolution*

10/15 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Frederick Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*

10/20 Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro";

"Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln"

10/22 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty; The Subjection of Women*

10/27 Giuseppe di Lampedusa/Luchino Visconti, *The Leopard*, movie assignment

Unit 6 Late 1800s-early 1900s

10/29 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*

11/3 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,

"Science as a Vocation"

11/5 Emile Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

11/10 Edith Wharton/Martin Scorsese, *The Age of Innocence* (movie)

11/12 Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* ("The Dynamo and the Virgin")
Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery*

Unit 7 Post-WWII

11/17 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*
Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*

11/19 Deirdre McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues*
Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*
John Gray, "An Illusion with a Future"

11/24 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*
John W. Meyer/Ronald Jepperson, "The "Actors" of Modern Society"

12/14 **Final exam**