

## SOCIOLOGY 3A03 European Sociological Theory

Fall, 2017

Instructor: Professor Cyril Levitt

Day and Time of Classes: Tuesdays 7:00-10:00 p.m.

Ext.: 23600

Class Location: BSB B135

Office: KTH-604

Email Address: [levittc@mcmaster.ca](mailto:levittc@mcmaster.ca)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OUTLINE, TEXTS AND METHOD OF EVALUATION:

The sociological writings of two seminal European thinkers, Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud, are the focus of this course. Durkheim and Freud have provided different approaches to understanding religion, group psychology, leadership, racism, violence, social ideals, symbolism, community, war and peace and other major issues which have been of social scientific concern and interest over the course of the last century. Emile Durkheim, the first person to hold a chair in sociology in France and the founder of a school of thought which continues to influence the discipline today, published what was arguably his most important work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, in 1912. In this book, Durkheim argues that religion is a particular symbolic expression of social life and that the sacred can only be understood as a form and an expression of the social. In this sense God can be seen as a personification and expression of society. In studying the totemic religious systems, Durkheim believed he could examine the pristine links among religion, morality and society without the contaminating complexities introduced by later religious beliefs and practices.

Sigmund Freud, physician, psychiatrist and neuroscientist, was the founder of psychoanalysis, which he saw as a clinical and applied science of the human mind. Freud was also intensely interested in some of the same questions raised by Durkheim although he approached them from a different perspective. In his study of totemism, *Totem and Taboo*, written at about the same time as Durkheim's work on religion, Freud argued that religion had a phylogenetic basis in the early experiences of the humankind, experiences which were given expression in the main characteristics of totemic forms of kinship and religious injunctions. To this Freud added in a later work on religion, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) - which we will not look at in detail in the course but list it as a suggested reading - that religion represented a response to the helplessness and fear of the adult before the terrors of nature external to us - disease, disaster, death - the fear of nature internal to us - our own drives of sexuality and aggression - and the threats from our fellow human beings - war, exploitation, slavery, etc. These notions were developed further in his 1929 work *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

The learning outcomes of this course are consistent with McMaster's Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations, which can be found at:

<http://ccl.mcmaster.ca/COU/pdf/Undergraduate%20Degree%20Level%20Expectations.pdf> It is the goal of this course to develop, compare and contrast the theories of these two important thinkers in the history of European thought.

## Course Requirements

The final grade in the course will be derived from three exams given in the multiple-choice format. The first will be held after we have covered the first section of the course on Durkheim, likely in early to mid-October. The second will be given after we've looked Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, roughly in early November, and the final exam will be held during the examination period in December and will cover the material taken up after the second exam and focus on the comparison between Freud and Durkheim. The breakdown of the grades will be as follows:

First Examination.....30% of final grade  
Second examination.....30% of final grade  
Final examination.....40% of final grade

## Structure of the Course

The course will be built around the lectures that will take place every Tuesday from 7:00-10:00 p.m. The lectures themselves will be built around the readings that will be announced in advance. In addition, there will be periods of consultation during office hours in which Prof. Levitt will be available to go over the material one on one over the course of the semester. The examinations will be based entirely on the readings and the material covered in the lectures. Office hours will be held between 5:30-6:45 p.m. on Tuesdays.

## Why There is no Weekly Timetable for Readings or Lectures

Students often ask why there is no timetable that provides an overview of which readings and what topics will be covered in the individual lecture period over the course of the semester. Experience has shown that it is difficult to know in advance where we will be in the text/lectures on any given day. That depends on the rhythm of the class, the number of questions asked, possible (if unlikely cancellations), etc. In the past this has led to attempts to speed up the lectures to keep on schedule or to slow them down by telling jokes, talking about extraneous matters, and other ways of killing time. Students, however, should be apprised of the fact that the lectures will closely parallel their readings and that we will proceed through the books at our own pace. Dr. Levitt will try to let the class know approximately what will be covered in the following lecture or two.

## Texts

Durkheim, Emile *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen Fields, Free Press, 1995

Freud, Sigmund *Totem and Taboo*, (edition in the Mac Bookstore)  
id. *Civilization and Its Discontents* (edition in the Mac Bookstore)

## Suggested Reading

Freud, S. *The Future of an Illusion* (many editions)

## **NOTE:**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

## **POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the University.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at [http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac\\_integrity.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm). The following illustrate only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g., the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

## **DEPARTMENTAL/UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

Do NOT fax assignments. Please see your instructor for the most appropriate way to submit assignments.

The Sociology staff do NOT date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of papers.

The McMaster Student Absence Form (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/>) is a self reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Please note, this tool cannot be used during any final examination period.

You may submit a maximum of 1 Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation.

If you are absent more than 3 days, exceed 1 request per term, or are absent for a reason other than medical, you MUST visit your Associate Dean's Office (Faculty Office). You may be required to provide supporting documentation.

This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence.

Students should check the web, the white board and the Undergraduate Bulletin board outside the Sociology office (KTH-627) for notices pertaining to Sociology classes or departmental business (eg. class scheduling information, location of mailboxes and offices, tutorial information, class cancellations, TA job postings, etc.).

Computer use in the classroom is intended to facilitate learning in that particular lecture or tutorial. At the discretion of the instructor, students using a computer for any other purpose may be required to turn the computer off for the remainder of the lecture or tutorial.

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It is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.