

Sociology 150: The Individual and Society
Wellesley College, Spring 2015

Class Meets: Tuesday and Friday: 1:30-2:40

Professor Thomas Cushman

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00-12:30, PNE 334 (and by appointment)

This course is an interdisciplinary examination of the complex relationship between the individual and society. The course focused on a number of important and timeless questions that are fundamentally important for a liberal arts education: what does it mean to be human? What is a person? What is the nature of freedom? In what ways are human beings free and in we free and in what ways are we determined by forces outside our control? How do we forge identity, sincerity, and authenticity in a social world that often challenges us to be other than we wish to be? We look at classical and contemporary perspectives in order to deepen our understanding of the fascinating sociological idea of *individuality*, the philosophy of *individualism*, and the idea of *freedom* as these have emerged historically and in the modern world.

Readings:

The course is a reading intensive one and the following books are required and available in the bookstore:

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Hackett 1978

Gustav LeBon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*

Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, Holt 1994

Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Harper 1998.

Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, Harvard University Press 2003

Robert Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, University of California Press 2007

Fred Alford, *Rethinking Freedom? Why Freedom Has Lost Its Meaning and What Can Be Done to Save It*, Palgrave MacMillan 2005.

In addition, there are a number of core readings that must be done as assigned and these are available on Sakai.

Course Policies:

Attendance and participation at all class sessions is required. The course grade is based on the following:

1. Four essays, six-eight pages: 12.5 percent each
2. Final examination: 25 percent. You are responsible for all class lectures and readings on the examination.
3. Attendance and participation: 25 percent: Students should come to class having read all the material for each class period. Each week, I will post on Sakai some of the topics for focus in class discussion so you can prepare for more focused discussion in class. To facilitate class discussions, students will be called on and expected to participate. If you are not present, or prepared, this will be noted.
5. Late papers are accepted, but on a very simple basis: 1/2 a letter grade penalty for every day late, unless you have a valid, documented medical or family emergency provided by the class dean's office in advance. *This policy is strictly enforced*. Students have the right to challenge a grade on a particular, assignment, though I reserve the right to revise the grade downward if, after discussion, I feel it is warranted.

Statement on Open Discussion of Controversial Issues: This course deals issues that are always provocative and controversial. A requirement of the class is a willingness to listen to and debate others' points of view and a commitment to freedom of expression. There is no requirement to accept any view, but toleration is crucial. If you are not comfortable with lively and vigorous debate in which your views will be challenged and in which you may freely challenge others' views (including the professor's), you should not take this class. The willingness to engage in critical examination and critical re-thinking of what you think you know and what others think they know to be true is a central prerequisite for the class. There will not be any "trigger warnings" in this class. The phrase "I'm offended" indicates an emotional state, not an argument. One object of the class is to learn how to think and learning how to think means that you will experience some intellectual discomfort: consider this class as an exercise in learning how to manage that and actually grow from it.

Course Outline and Schedule

January 27: Introduction to the Class and Some Exercises: What is an "individual"? Some basic definitions: Individuality, Individualism, Individualization

January 30-February 3: The Pattern of History and the Individual
Read: Marcel Mauss, "A category of the human mind: the notion of person; the notion of self" ®
Plato, *The Republic*, Chapters XII-XIV ®

Varad Mehta, "The Stone is Everything": Sparta and the Individual from Enlightenment to Revolution" ®

"Individualism in Classical Chinese Thought, at: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ind-chin/#H4>

Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), address at:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121203_justpeace_en.html

Fazlur Rahman, "The Status of the Individual in Islam" ®

The Ten Commandments

February 6: The Enlightenment and the Rise of the Individual

Read: Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" at:

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Social Contract" ®

John Locke, "The Second Treatise of the State of Nature" ®

February 10: The Enlightenment and the Individual (continued):

Begin reading J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

Adam Smith, "The Division of Labor", from *The Wealth of Nations* ®

February 13-17: J.S Mill on Liberty and the Individual: Philosophical and Sociological Foundations of Libertarian Thought

Read: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in entirety

Paper One due, Monday, February 23, by 4:30 on Sakai

February 20-27 : Classical Sociological Perspectives on Society and the Individual:

Gustav LeBon on The Crowd and Unreason/ Emile Durkheim and *Society Sui Generis*

Read: Gustav LeBon, *The Crowd: A Study in the Popular Mind*, in entirety

Durkheim, "What is a Social Fact?" ®

Excerpt from "Le Suicide" ®

"Individual and Collective Representations" ®

"Division of Labor and Social Solidarity" ®

March 3-6: Classical Sociological Perspectives on Society and the Individual: Max Weber, Values, and Rationalization

Read: Max Weber, "Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism" from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* at:

<http://marxists.org/reference/archive/weber/protestant-ethic/ch05.htm>

Max Weber, "On Bureaucracy" in *Economy and Society*, pp. 956-958, at:

<http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/users/f/felwell/www/Theorists/Weber/Weber1921.pdf>

March 10-13: Classical Sociological Perspectives on Society and the Individual: Karl Marx's "Species Being"

Read: Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" ®

March 17: Why Are People Afraid of Freedom? The Perspective of Erich Fromm
Read: Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, read first three chapters

Second Paper Due, March 17, by 4:30 on Sakai

Spring Break March 19-29 (please read Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, the week before and during spring break)

March 31: Why Are People Afraid of Freedom? The Perspective of Erich Fromm (continued)

Read: Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, to completion

April 3-10: Conformity and the Individual: Role Theory

Read: George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"

The Milgram Experiments view "Obedience" on video reserve

Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Pp. 1-120

April 14-21: Conformity, Dissent, and the Individual

Read: Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, chs. 1-4 for Friday and then chs. 5-7 & 9 for Tuesday.

Paper Three Due, April 24 by 4:30 on Sakai

April 24-May 1: Individualism in American Life

Read: Excerpts from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* ®

Robert Bellah, et. al. , *Habits of the Heart*, Chs. 1-6, then Chs. 7-10

May 5-8: Freedom and the Individual in Modernity

Read, Fred Alford, *Rethinking Freedom? Why Freedom Has Lost Its Meaning and What Can Be Done to Save It*, Chs. 1-4, and then Chs. 5-7

Paper Four Due, May 8, by 4:30