

**University of Manitoba**  
**Department of Sociology**  
**Contemporary Sociological Theory**  
**SOCIOLOGY 077.339, L01**

**Fall 2003, 3 cr. hrs.**  
**201 Tier**

**Instructor:** Rod Kueneman  
**Office:** 302 Isbister Building  
**Office Hours:** slot 6 or by appointment  
**Phones:** 474-6501 (office)  
452-4560 (home) between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.

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**TEXTS**

Lukes, Steven. Power: A Radical View (photocopy)  
Miliband, Ralph. The State in Capitalist Society (photocopy)  
Knuttila, Murray and Wendee Kubik. State Theories: Classical, Global and Feminist Perspectives (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)  
Luttrell, William. Transforming Communities

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be evaluated by way of the following activities:

First In Class Test	- 30%
First Take Home Assignment	- 35%
Second Take Home Assignment	- 15%
Second In Class Test	- 20%

The tests are 50 minute essay type. Study questions are provided in this outline. There will be some choice of questions for each test. The take home assignments are described later in this outline. While each of you will complete your own assignment, some class time will be set aside for small group discussion of some of the key issues.

**DUE DATES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**FIRST TEST**                    **October 10th**  
**READINGS:**                    Knuttila/Kubik Chapters 1 - 5.  
    Lukes (entire book)

**FIRST ASSIGNMENT**        **November 7th - due date**  
**READINGS:**                    Miliband (entire book)

**VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL DATE - November 12th**

**SECOND ASSIGNMENT**    **November 19th - due date**

READINGS: Miliband (entire book)  
Knuttila/Kubik Chapters 6 - 9

**SECOND TEST**                    **December 3rd**  
READINGS:                    Knuttila/Kubik Chapters 10  
Luttrell (Entire book)

Students who fail to write tests on assigned dates or who do not turn in the take-home assignments when due will receive a grade of F for that part of the course grade unless an alternative date has been agreed to by the instructor. Such arrangements should be made in advance whenever possible. Missed tests or assignment due dates must be rescheduled within 7 days of the above published dates. Rescheduled dates will only be approved for good reasons.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course briefly reviews the central themes of contemporary sociological theory. While you will be exposed to some basic information about several themes, we will be paying particular attention to the issues of structure, power, manipulation, domination and the growing crisis of global society. We will attempt to understand how the current patterns of power developed, who they benefit, what is the basis for their stability, and what possible avenues exist for social change. We will also consider the current state of social theory and the possible roles it might play in the 21st century.

### **Study Questions - First Test**

1. Discuss the organismic analogy in Durkheim's Division of Labour and show how this helps form the basis for Parson's structural functional analysis. To what extent are general systems theory and structuralism important departures from the organismic analogy?
2. There have been varying accounts about the place of the state in providing order in social modernity. Contrast the classical liberal, elite, pluralist, functional and marxist understanding of what the state does to order social relationships.
3. Briefly discuss the Parsonsian image of society and the role of sociological analysis. What are the benefits and weaknesses of Parsons' formulation?
4. Briefly identify the major criticisms levelled against Parsons' structural functionalism. Did Merton, Gans, Dahrendorf, and Buckley help salvage a systems' type of analysis?
5. We have compared various patterns of asymmetrical relationships in this section of the course. The Diagram (handed out in class) which we used in this discussion is attached

for your use. You are to choose one of the following options and discuss why it falls within the various categories outlined on the chart.

- a) authority
- b) force and manipulation or discipline and persuasion
- c) manipulation and persuasion

6. Discuss why the notion of conflict of interest is important to the practice of sociology. Why does the notion of conflict of interest help us analyse and distinguish between forms of asymmetrical relationships? How can we attempt to make such determinations of conflict of interest sound from a "scientific point of view"? Does the hypothetical construct "objective possibility" help in this regard?

### **Discussion Questions - First Assignment**

7. Should the mixed economies of liberal democracies be conceptualized as "authentically capitalist societies"? Identify the various key interest groups in liberal democracies, discuss their access to resources, and conduct an analysis of power to assist you in formulating an answer to this question.
8. Identify the key state elites and civil servants. Does Miliband think that they can be viewed as neutral with reference to such central economic actors as business and labour? Why or why not?
9. Miliband argues that the imperfect competition between "the major organized 'interests' in these societies" shows the pluralist theory to be wrong. Who are these interests? Is the competition imperfect? Why or why not?
10. Miliband devotes two chapters to the process of legitimation. Summarize some of the central points of his analysis. Why does he think that legitimation ideologies are so important? Does his analysis substantiate Gramsci's insistence on the importance of the concept of hegemony?

### **Discussion Questions - Second Assignment**

11. There is a range of opinion as to how the relationship between the capitalist class and the state should be described. How do the instrumentalists differ from the structuralists in their basic understanding of this relationship. (Be sure to include a discussion of their assessment of the autonomy of the state from the capitalist class). Where would you situate Miliband within this debate? Do you find this distinction helpful? Why or why not?
12. Miliband provides an analysis of domination within a capitalist economy. The analysis of gender relations is conspicuously absent in his mapping of inequality within this social formation. Select **one** of the following topics to assist you in recasting Miliband's analysis within a feminist voice:

- a) How should the analysis of imperfect competition be modified so as to include vehicles of domination such as gender and race? How would you weigh these facets of domination in comparison to the economic facet of domination created by capitalism?
  - b) Miliband discusses various dimensions of the process of legitimation. Could his analysis be improved by the inclusion of a discussion of the social construction and promotion of patriarchy and gender dominance? Is it necessary to include the discussion of the ideology of productive and reproductive labour in order to understand the stability of the capitalist formation?
  - c) The pluralists would see the feminist lobby as yet another interest group clamouring to the state for the promotion of its views. The class/hegemonists would be inclined to argue that the key forces of domination in capitalism are class related rather than gender related. Does feminist analysis, in your view, support a pluralist paradigm? Can it be successfully joined with a class/hegemonist analysis?
13. Miliband's analysis places a heavy emphasis on the primacy of the state as a key nexus in the exercise of the power of capital. Discuss how globalization makes it necessary to recast his analysis in order to incorporate the changes that have occurred since it was written in 1969.

### **Study Questions - Second Test**

14. The Corporations and the State are clearly the dominant actors at this point in human history. What could be done to help facilitate the transformation of the Mass (or Aggregate) of these times into a viable historical actor? Are social movements an appropriate vehicle?
15. Knuttila/Kubik propose an alternative framework for theorizing which remains focussed on the state but does acknowledge civil society. Luttrell offers an alternative approach which focuses more directly on civil society as an alternative to the state. Briefly outline each approach to social theorizing and discuss main commonalities and differences.
16. We have talked about Social Reconstruction as an option for these troubled times. What basic principles would be crucial to make such an undertaking viable? Reflect on some of the innovations being implemented in other communities and discuss what could be done to improve the present and future in friendly Manitoba.

### **TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENTS**

Much of the content of this course is of a survey nature. This will give you greater exposure to the scope and range of contemporary theory but will not provide much of an opportunity for depth and comprehension.

The purpose of the take home assignments is to provide such an opportunity. The central challenge before us is to account for the nature of the contemporary social order. The main argument which guides my understanding is that of Ralph Miliband, as outlined in The State in

Capitalist Society. I expect each of you to consider his argument and to give it a prominent place in your assignments. This does not mean that you must accept his argument, but any refutation of it in whole or part would also require that his position be made clear.

#### FIRST TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT

Your first task is to summarize the main argument put forward by Miliband. The attached discussion questions will help you work to this end either individually or in group discussions. The main purpose of this assignment is to establish a solid grasp of the various key actors who are struggling to control the modern social landscape. Use the four discussion questions to help reflect on Miliband's main argument and then work up an 10 -12 page (typed, double- spaced) summary.

#### SECOND TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT

The range of possibilities for this assignment are quite large:

For some of you unfamiliar with this argument, it may be enough for you assess it critically. You could review the instrumental and structural marxist understandings of the relationship between the capitalist class and the state, and advance your own understanding of the amount of autonomy available to the state.

Some of you may wish to juxtapose his argument to that of Althusser, Poulantzas, or some other neo-marxist writer and provide a critical assessment of such macro theorizing.

You could consider the work of Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society, or that of Mark Buchanan, Nexus, and use these developments in network theory to extend Miliband's analysis.

A student of the sociology of development and underdevelopment may wish to extend Miliband's analysis to understand what is happening in the third world.

Miliband's analysis could be subjected to a feminist critique. The implications of Miliband's analysis could be subjected to a feminist critique.

The implications of Miliband's understanding of state/corporate relations may provide a fertile framework for the analysis of the Rule of Law and Corporate Crime.

The sociology of work and labour relations can also be couched within such a framework.

**The possibilities, in large measure, are limited by your sociological imagination. Other topics are possible. Just see me to receive approval. Feel free to consult with me once you have formulated your basic argument.**

The first assignment is due on **November 7th**. The second assignment is due on **November 19th**. I would recommend that you start reading the Miliband text and start developing your summary of the main argument. Class lectures and group discussion will help you refine it, but

you need to study the text carefully before we cover it in class to receive maximum advantage from lectures and discussions. If papers are not handed in on time, and prior arrangements for late submission have not been made, I will not accept them and you will receive no credit.

### GRADING PROCEDURES

The following description of my grading scheme should make it possible for you to calculate your final grade in the course. You are urged to make your own computations to ensure that I have not made an error.

I find the normal grading system too constraining, so I have modified it to a limited extent by introducing the minus grade (e.g. A-, B-, C-). In the final grade submitted, however, I must conform to the university scheme.

Your answers are being evaluated on a letter grade system, not on a point system which is converted to a letter grade. The main benchmarks for the grade ranges can be described as follows:

- D/F= an answer which is factually weak, faulty analysis, and very poor organization.
- C= an answer which is mostly complete in terms of facts but suffers from poor analysis, organization and integration. Knowing the facts is a good start, but only a beginning.
- B= answer is factually accurate and mostly complete as well as organized and integrated.
- A= answer factually complete, well organized, sophisticated analysis which demonstrates a good degree of comprehension.

There is no grading curve used in the evaluation of our answers, as class could do very well or very poorly, I feel no obligation to artificially manipulate the distribution into a bell curve. Each letter grade has been assigned a numerical value to allow for averaging and the calculation of a final grade. The numerical value has been assigned to convert the letter grade into an interval scale. Thus a C $\neq$  30% rather a C is equidistant from a C+ (4) and a C- (2) on the scale; a C is a factually complete answer which suffers from limited analysis. Mechanically, you assign each of your letter grades the comparable numerical weight in your calculation in the following way:

A+ = 10	B+ = 7	C+ = 4	D = 1
A = 9	B = 6	C = 3	F = 0
A- = 8	B- = 5	C- = 2	

On a test with two questions, which received a letter grade of A- and C+, your average grade is  $8 + 4 \div 2 = 6$  or B. I take all of your tests and assignments and calculate them together, as weighted by their relative value and derive a final numerical value for the course. The final cutting points for your letter grade are very important, because the minus grades must now

disappear. They give you a higher final numerical grade because a weak A answer was an A- instead of a B+. But in the final analysis, all A- would become a B+. You would need some A or A+ grades to pull you over the cutting point. The cutting points are:

A+	(9.6 - 10)	exceptional
A	(8.3 - 9.5)	excellent
B+	(6.6 - 8.2)	very good
B	(5.3 - 6.5)	good
C+	(3.6 - 5.2)	satisfactory
C	(2.3 - 3.5)	adequate
D	(0.5 - 2.2)	marginal
F	(0.0 - 0.4)	failure

This grading scheme gives you the benefit of the buoyancy of the minus grade. If you fail to make it over a threshold, even by a fraction, it is unlikely that I will raise your grade unless you have shown significant improvement over the term; have submitted an exceptional piece of work, or have made positive contributions to class discussion. Otherwise, an 8.24 will remain a B+ and not an A.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

I encourage collaborative and cooperative work ethics. Feel free to discuss your thoughts with other members of the class and thereby develop your comprehension and critical analysis. But remember, when it is time to submit your assignments, do your own work. The written material of your colleagues is the fruit of their labour and under no circumstances should you avail yourself of it when preparing your own answers. Likewise the printed work of other scholars must be properly recognized. Acts of academic dishonesty or plagiarism are serious offenses and are subject to academic discipline. Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on 'Examinations: Personations' (pg. 28) and 'Plagiarism and Cheating' (pg. 29) found in the University of Manitoba's Undergraduate Calendar.