

## Postmodernization: Science Under Siege (S0H98a) Bachelor-Level

Tuesday 9:00-11:00am

Location: AGOR – 00.E20 (Aula Emma Vorlat)

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Office: SW 02.115

Office Hours: Thursday 1:00-3:00pm

**Note 1:** *This is the Bachelor version of the Master course Postmodernization: Science under Siege (SOC95a). It can exclusively be taken by incoming exchange students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, KU Leuven. The lessons coincide with those of the Master version, but the oral examination will be adapted to the appropriate Bachelor level.*

**Note 2:** *Unless circumstances demand otherwise, all classes will take place on-campus in Leuven. Each of the classes will be recorded and made available two-weeks later on Toledo.*

### Course description:

The focus of this course is the cultural sociology of (social) science, or, put somewhat more broadly, what it means to study science – and especially *social science* – as a form of culture. In the first half, we will focus chiefly on the increasingly contested ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ status of sociological knowledge. Consequently, our readings will revolve around the following themes: (1) the increased awareness, since the 1960s, that sociological research and theorizing cannot help but be informed by partial and one-sided cultural worldviews (as emphasized in Max Weber’s methodology of the social sciences) such that sociological knowledge easily becomes bound up with legitimation and power; (2) how in the 1960s and 1970s this awareness sparked widespread feelings of intellectual malaise and political frustration that pervade sociology until the present day; and (3) how this so-called ‘crisis of sociology’ has given rise to attempts at intellectual reconstruction (e.g., constructivism, cultural sociology, postmodernism, and science and technology studies) aimed (sometimes wittingly, sometimes unwittingly) at eroding the discipline’s former scientific authority. In the second part of the course, we will turn our attention to the wider societal context within which these debates have taken place, considering how the decline in the authority of science has not only occurred in sociology and academia, but also among ‘lay’ audiences in western society. This will involve critically discussing the boundaries of science, conspiracy theories, the distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, the nature of public science, and the socio-cultural dimensions of technological innovation.

### Learning Outcomes:

- Understand that a decline of the authority of science is central to the notion of ‘postmodernization’ as distinguished from ‘modernization’.
- Learn that what Max Weber called ‘disenchantment’ actually foreshadows the decline of the authority of science alongside that of religion.
- Learn how discontents about the traditionally alleged ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ status of sociological knowledge have, over the past half century, sparked not only a ‘crisis of sociology’, but also processes of intellectual reconstruction aimed at overcoming it.

- Develop knowledge of some of the principal manifestations of societal contestations of the authority of science in the past half century.
- Learn to transform this theoretical sociological background into a useable “toolbox” that will enable them to better make sense of the world.

### Course Format:

All lectures will be interactive. Key themes and arguments contained in the assigned readings will be explicated by the instructor, but ample time for group discussion will also be allotted. Students will be expected to come to class prepared to ask questions and share their thoughts. Students are also encouraged to relate class topics to current events and everyday experiences. The aim of each class will be to puzzle through the core ideas contained in the readings collectively. Learning in this class, therefore, will be a joint venture.

**Assessments:** The course evaluation will be composed of two parts.

- 1) **Short Essay (40% of final grade):** You will be required to write a brief essay on one of a set of questions. You will be expected, in your essay, to reference at least one of the course readings.

**Due date:** April 18, 2023 by midnight

- 2) **Final Examination (60% of final grade)** A closed-book written exam during the examination period. The exam will not only entail straightforward knowledge questions, but also insight questions that assess the ability to apply what has been learned.

### Late Policy:

Assignments that are submitted late will receive a 10% deduction each day. If there is an extenuating circumstance that you would like me to consider, please e-mail me *before* the deadline rather than after it has passed.

### Statement on Academic Integrity:

KU Leuven students, faculty, administrators and staff all have responsibilities for supporting and upholding the fundamental values of academic integrity. Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (see: <https://www.kuleuven.be/english/research/rri>) and by the quality of courage. These values and qualities are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive.

**Student Accommodation:** KU Leuven is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact a Disability Officer as early as possible: <https://www.kuleuven.be/english/stuvo/studentwithadisability/contact-campus-leuven>.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE & Reading List**

\* All readings will be made available on Toledo.

### **Week 1: Tuesday, February 14**

#### **Course introduction**

\*PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS\*

I will be in the UK, so this lecture will be recorded beforehand and uploaded onto Toledo. In it, I will outline the basic themes and expectations of the course, as well as how I would like the lectures to run.

*No Readings*

### **Week 2: Tuesday, February 21**

#### **Overcoming Difference: The Promise of Science**

##### *Readings:*

- Stephen Toulmin, (1990), 'What Is the Problem about Modernity?', pp. 5-44 in: *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Steven Seidman, (1994), 'Grand Visions: Auguste Comte and Karl Marx', pp. 19- 53 in: *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

### **Week 3: Tuesday, February 28**

\*PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS\*

I will be in Canada, so this lecture will be recorded beforehand and uploaded onto Toledo.

#### **Facts and Values**

##### *Reading:*

- Max Weber, (2014 [1904]), 'The "Objectivity" of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy', pp. 100-138 in: Hans Henrik Bruun & Sam Whimster (eds), *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings*, New York: Routledge.

**Week 4: Tuesday, March 7**

\*PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS\*

I will be in Canada, so this lecture will be recorded beforehand and uploaded onto Toledo.

**The Crisis of Sociology***Readings:*

- Alvin W. Gouldner, (1962), 'Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology', *Social Problems* 9 (3): 199-213.
- R. W. Connell, (1997) 'Why Is Classical Theory Classical?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 102 (6): 1511-1557.

**Week 5: Tuesday, March 14****Religion Displaced by Science?***Readings:*

- Smith, Christian, (2003), 'Believing Animals', pp. 45-61 in: *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers & Rudi Laermans, (2021), 'Introduction: A Cultural Sociology of the Authority of Science', pp. 1-34 in: Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers & Rudi Laermans (eds), *Science under Siege: Contesting the Secular Religion of Scientism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Week 6: Tuesday, March 21****Scientific Authority in the Face of Pluralism***Readings:*

- Colin Wight, (2018), 'Post-Truth, Postmodernism and Alternative Facts', *New Perspectives* 26 (3): 17-29.
- Dick Houtman, (2021), 'The Disenchantment of the World and the Authority of Sociology: How the Queen of the Sciences Lost Her Throne', pp. 37-63 in: Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers & Rudi Laermans (eds), *Science under Siege: Contesting the Secular Religion of Scientism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Week 7: Tuesday, March 28****Constructionism*****Readings:***

- Malcolm Spector & John I. Kitsuse, (1973), 'Social Problems: A Re-Formulation', *Social Problems* 21 (2): 145-159.
- Kate Burningham & Geoff Cooper, (1999), 'Being Constructive: Social Constructionism and the Environment', *Sociology* 33 (2): 297-316.

***\*EASTER BREAK\******Week 8: Tuesday, April 18****Postmodernism*****Readings:***

- Zygmunt Bauman, (1987), 'Introduction – Intellectuals: From Modern Legislators to Post-Modern Interpreters', pp. 1-7 in: *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Steven Seidman, (1996), 'The Political Unconscious of the Human Sciences', *The Sociological Quarterly* 37 (4): 699-719.
- Donna Haraway, (1988), 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (3): 575-599.

***\*Short Essay due April 18, 2023\******Week 9: Tuesday, April 24****Boundaries In and Beyond Science*****Readings:***

- Thomas F. Gieryn, (1983), 'Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Science', *American Sociological Review*, 48 (6): 781-795.
- Jaron Harambam & Stef Aupers, (2021), 'Contesting Epistemic Authority: Conspiracy Theories on the Boundaries of Science', pp. 179-202 in: Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers & Rudi Laermans (eds), *Science under Siege: Contesting the Secular Religion of Scientism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Week 10: Tuesday, May 2****Public Science in a Postmodern Age***Readings:*

- Brian Wynne, (1992), 'Misunderstood misunderstanding: social identities and public uptake of science', *Public Understanding*, 1: 281-304.
- Philip Smith and Nicolas Howe, (2015), 'Chapter 2: Climate Change as Social Drama', *Climate Change as Social Drama: Global Warming in the Public Sphere*, pp. 15-49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 11: Tuesday, May 9****The Nature/Culture Divide***Readings:*

- Bruno Latour, (2004), 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry* 30: 225-248.
- David Inglis and John Bone, (2006), 'Boundary Maintenance, Border Crossing and the Nature/Culture Divide', *European Journal of Social Theory* 9 (2): 272-287.

**Week 12: Monday, May 16****Science, Technology, and Power***Readings:*

- Steven Epstein, (2008), 'Culture and Science/Technology: Rethinking Knowledge, Power, Materiality, and Nature', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 619 (1): 165-182.
- Jenna Burrell and Marion Fourcade, (2012), 'The Society of Algorithms', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47: 213-237.

**Week 13: Monday, May 23****Course Recap / Exam Preparation***No Readings*