

The Historical Sociology of Knowledge

SOC 649a

Nicholas Hoover Wilson (n.wilson@yale.edu)

Fall 2014

The sociology of knowledge came into being with the signal hypothesis that even truths were to be held socially accountable, were to be related to the historical society in which they emerged. --Robert Merton, "The Sociology of Knowledge."

ORGANIZATION

The historical sociology of knowledge is a field that asks where ideas come from, how knowledge about the social and natural world (and even the idea of a distinction between the two) arises and is diffused, and what effects stem from particular ideas, kinds of knowledge, and ways of observing and regulating social practices. Since it touches on so many parts of history and the social sciences, it is a vast field—so vast, indeed, that each week below could easily be expanded into its own seminar. With a view to narrowing this scope, in this course we concentrate on issues of political economy, the state, and scientific expertise from early modernity to the present.

The first part of the course surveys approaches to the historical social science of the emergence and change of ideas, as well as their reciprocal effects on social structures and practices. In the second part of the course, we engage with a selection of relevant topics and debates in contemporary scholarship. When engaging with each work, we will strive to parse it (and place it in dialog with other works) with an eye to four dimensions:

1. The overall **question** or **problem** motivating the work;
2. The substantive **argument** it makes;
3. The **logic-of-inquiry** it uses to test, demonstrate, or support its argument; and
4. The **evidence** it uses to support its argument.

REQUIREMENTS

The course revolves around careful, attentive reading and regular class participation. Each student will also be asked to lead discussion during a week of their choice. The final paper is a prospectus for or completed draft of a research paper.

WEEK 1 (Aug 27th): Introduction

WEEK 2 (Sept 3rd): Classical Analytic and Explanatory Approaches

- Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, selections.
- Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," "Science as a Vocation."
- Emile Durkheim, "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions."

WEEK 3 (Sept 10th): Contemporary Analytic and Explanatory Approaches I

- Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, selections.
- Robert Merton, "Paradigm for the Sociology of Knowledge" and "Science and the Social Order."
- Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, selections.
- Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, selections.

WEEK 4 (Sept 17th): Contemporary Analytic and Explanatory Approaches II

- Bruno Latour, *Science in Action*, selections.
- Donald MacKenzie, "Is Economics Performative? Option Theory and the Construction of Derivatives Markets." In *Do Economists Make Markets?*
- Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology*, selections.
- Mantzavinos, C., Douglass North, and Syed Shariq, "Learning, Institutions, and Economic Performance."

WEEK 5 (Sept 24th): Early Modern States and Knowledge

- Mario Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier*, selections.
- Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air Pump*, selections.

WEEK 6 (Oct 1st): Early Modern Society and Knowledge

- Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, selections.
- Steven Shapin, "A Scholar and a Gentleman," selections.

WEEK 7 (Oct 8th): Early Modern Economies and Knowledge

- Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, selections.
- Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*, selections.
- Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, selections.

WEEK 8 (Oct 15th): The Emergence of the Modern Economy I

- Joel Mokyr, *Gifts of Athena*, selections.
- Margaret Schabas, *The Natural Origins of Economics*, selections.

[No meeting Oct 22 – Fall Recess]

WEEK 9 (Oct 29th): The Emergence of the Modern Economy II

- Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, selections.
- Marion Fourcade, *Economists and Societies*.

[No meeting Nov 5]

WEEK 10 (NOV 12th): Knowledge and Modern State Power

- James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, selections.
- John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, selections.
- Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, selections.
- Michele Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, selections.

WEEK 11 (NOV 19th): Politics and Expertise

- Thomas Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*.
- "Knowledge about what? Policy intellectuals and the new liberalism," by Ira Katznelson, in Rueschemeyer and Skocpol (eds.), *States, Social Knowledge, and the Origins of Modern Social Policies*.

[No Class Meeting on Nov 26th – Thanksgiving Break]

WEEK 12 (DEC 3rd): The State of Modern Science

- Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life*, selections.
- Elizabeth Popp-Berman, *Creating the Market University*.

WEEK 13 (DEC 10th): Presentations and Discussion of Student Projects