Foundations of Modern Social Theory SOCY 151

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:00am – 11:15am, July 1 – August 2, 2019

Instructor: Till Hilmar
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Office Hours: After class and by appointment

Welcome and Course Overview

This course will introduce you to the work of some of the most important writers in social theory. The goal is to provide you with rock-solid knowledge on fundamental topics in sociology.

We will start with an in-depth investigation of the “classics” Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, and Marx, their philosophical roots, and the issues of modernity and capitalism. We will then move on to other foundational thinkers and their work on gender, race, and colonialism. We will put these writers in conversation with each other and explore their similarities and differences.

Throughout the course, we will explore an exciting and critical issue at the heart of contemporary debates about democracy: the problem of legitimacy of the social order. Where do ideas about a just order come from, and on what grounds are claims about the injustice of an order formulated? Moreover, we will ask: How does social exclusion affect social theory? Why did some contributions become part of the “canon” in social theory, and others did not?

The class format will be a mixture of lectures, discussions, and debates. We will start each class with a short lecture about the social and intellectual context of the writers, their main arguments, and how they are tied to other works and general themes of the course. We will then engage in discussions about the texts and sometimes form debate groups to explore specific topics. We will take a discursive approach, identifying our writers’ key arguments and putting them in conversation with others. This will help you to process, understand, and apply the readings to the questions the course explores and to your own broader intellectual interests. The goal is to have an open and inclusive conversation about these texts.

I will help you find access to the material, develop effective reading techniques, and practice the ability to devise your own arguments based on theoretical reasoning.

Course Requirements

Attendance and participation (20%): Social theory is best explored by direct engagement with the texts and in-depth discussion. Therefore, attendance and active participation are key components. Students are expected to do all the readings before the class and come prepared to discuss the material. In order to give you more time and space to immerse yourselves in the texts, I am keeping other assignments to a minimum.

Discussion questions (20%): You will post a discussion question/comment to Canvas (the online learning platform to which every student will have access) before each class. It can focus on one particular aspect of the text that fascinates you, something that you need clarification or further discussion in the class, or a response to comments/questions written by your fellow students.
1 mid-term paper (4-5 double-spaced pages, 20%): The mid-term paper is meant to be an engagement with the works of Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, and Marx. I will distribute specific questions from which you will choose one to answer. You can also devise your own topic in consultation with me. The midterm will be due on Sunday, July 21.

1 final paper (10-12 double-spaced pages - 40%): The final paper will be based on a broader engagement with the course material. You will be given questions that cover several thinkers and topics. You will again have the opportunity to devise your own question. In the paper, you are expected to go beyond demonstrating comprehension of the material and to develop your own arguments about the texts, the ideas they present, and themes that link them together. The final paper is due on the last day of class (August 2).

**Course material**

You will find a lot of the course material online (marked E-Reserves). I suggest you buy some of the books listed below as a hardcopy. You can generally find cheap second-hand versions online. If you do not have the financial means to purchase the books, please get in touch with me so that we can figure out how you will get the material.

In addition, even though the bookstore will have specific editions of these books, you can use different editions, in that case please make sure to identify the correct sections.

The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. by Robert C. Tucker – Hardcopy suggested
Georg Simmel, Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings, Donald Levine and Morris Janowitz, ed. University of Chicago Press - Hardcopy suggested
Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society. Lewis Coser, ed. Simon and Schuster. – Hardcopy suggested
Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (Fields Translation) – Hardcopy suggested

**Screens in Class**

I also encourage you to buy hard-copy books because reading them, as opposed to reading digitally, usually results in a more profound engagement with the work. Also, we’ll limit the use of screens in class as much as possible. There is research showing that students who take notes longhand remember more and have a better grasp of the material. See for instance:

Course Schedule (We will talk about the reading load in the first class, and keep in mind that some texts are “recommended” - not “required.”)

Origins of legitimacy and justice

Day 1: Monday, July 1

In this introductory session, I’ll provide you with an overview over the structure and goals of the course. We will consider your needs and ideas and plan together. Then we’ll start by discussing the foundations of the idea of the “social contract”.


Recommended:

Day 2: Wednesday, July 3

Individuality, Society, Property

- Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*. Part 1, Ch. 1-3, 5. [E-Reserves]
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, Book II, Book III (Chapters 1,2,16,17,18), Book IV (Chapter 1), [E-Reserves]

Recommended:

Justice for the group; relations among individuals: Durkheim and Simmel

Day 3: Friday, July 5

Community and Solidarity

- Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. Introduction, Book I (Chapters 1,2,3), Book II (Chapter 2)

The Sacred, Collective Emotions and Social Classification

- Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (pp. 19-41) [E-Reserves]

Recommended:
- Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, “Introduction,” “Anomic Suicide.”
Day 4: Monday, July 8

**Social Forms and Relationalism: Social Proximity and Distance**

- Georg Simmel, “Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality” *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 251-293

**Recommended:**

- Mario Luis Small, *Someone To Talk To*, 2017, Introduction, E-Reserves
- Nicholas Christakis, The Hidden Influence of Social Networks, TED-Talk on Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UtOghblfE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UtOghblfE)

Day 5: Wednesday, July 10

**Capitalism, Power, Forms of Domination and Political Legitimacy**

**Alienation, Freedom, Human Emancipation**

- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*. Absolute Freedom and Terror” And “Lordship and Bondage” E-Reserves

Day 6: Friday, July 12

**Theory of History, Historical Materialism**


**Recommended**


Day 7: Monday, July 15

**Critique of the Capitalist Mode of Production and Class Society**

Day 8: Wednesday, July 17

**Power and Institutions: Types of Legitimate Domination**

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. “Good and Evil, Good and Bad” and “Guilt, Bad Conscience, and Related Matters”, E-Reserves

**Recommended**

- Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, pp. 3-62 E-Reserves

Day 9: Friday, July 19

**Class and Status, Religion and Capitalism**


**Recommended**


**MIDTERM DUE: SUNDAY, JULY 22**

**Experience and Interaction, Political Signs and Landscapes of Meaning**

Day 10: Monday, July 22


Day 11: Wednesday, July 24

• Robin Wagner Pacifici, *What is an Event?* Chapter 1, ‘Political Semiosis’, Chapter 6: ‘Sedimentation and Drift’. **E-Reserves**

**Recommended**

• Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 432–33, **E-Reserves**

**Revisiting the “Social Contract”: Gender, Race and Histories of Exclusion**

**Day 12: Friday, July 26**

**Gender and Sexuality**

• Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. “The Point of View of Historical Materialism,” and “Conclusion.” **E-Reserves**

**Recommended:**

• Nancy Fraser, A Genealogy of ‘Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the US welfare state” (coauthored with Linda Gordon), in: Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism*, 2013 **E-Reserves**
• Kate Manne, *Down Girl. The Logic of Misogyny*, 2018, Introduction: Eating her Words; Chapter 1: Threatening Women, **E-Reserves**

**Day 13: Monday, July 29**

**Racial Exclusion in History and Theory**


**Recommended:**

Day 14: Wednesday, July 31

**Racism, Colonialism and Post-Colonial Theory**

- Julian Go, *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*, 2016, Chapter 3: The Postcolonial Challenge, E-Reserves

**Recommended**


Day 15: Friday, August 2

**Antiglobalism and the Resurgence of Nationalism**

- Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Excerpts, E-Reserves

**Catching up and Looking Ahead**

- What’s the use of social theory today?

FINAL PAPER DUE: FRIDAY, AUGUST 2