Foundations of Sociological Theory

This course is meant to familiarize graduate students with some of the major thinkers and classic texts that have been central to theoretical perspectives in sociology. Through studying key works in social theory, we can understand the basis for many of the core questions, debates, and methodological approaches within the discipline of sociology. The course considers how various preoccupations of sociology grew out of theorists’ attempts to grapple with the legacy of the Enlightenment and the transition to modern society. In addition, we will examine how these theorists understand a number of important social issues, including the nature of interdependence, cooperation, inequality, power, meaning, social stability, and social change, as well as domains of social life such as religion and labor. The course will focus on the works of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, and the concepts they developed to understand social relations. We will not only try to explicate their ideas, but also consider their relevance for the contemporary world and current sociological research.

Learning Goals

Students who complete this course will:

1. Gain familiarity with classic theoretical perspectives in sociology.
2. Identify original sources of many contemporary theoretical ideas and concepts.
3. Improve the ability to comprehend, analyze, and discuss theoretical statements.
4. Assess the credibility and consistency of theoretical arguments.

Requirements

Students are expected to keep up with the readings and actively participate in seminar discussions. Written work consists of two papers, 8-12 pages each, that address theoretical ideas raised in the class. In addition, at least twice during the semester, students should post on the Latte site for the course questions about the readings that can be discussed in class. These posts need to be made by 9:00 PM on the day preceding class. A sign-up list will be circulated in the first weeks of the course so that we all know which weeks students are responsible for.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible.

The following books are available for purchase in the bookstore:


(if buying used, the Scribner edition is also fine)


These books are also on reserve at the main library.


The reading for Week 1 is available on Latte. All additional required readings are contained in a custom course packet. These are marked with an * on the syllabus. Information on how to purchase the packet will be announced in class.

**Course Schedule**

**Introduction**

**week 1**


**Perspectives on the Bases of Human Society and Cooperation**

**week 2**


no class -- Yom Kippur

Karl Marx: Capitalism, Conflict, and Human Emancipation


*Capital, Volume I*, chap. 1, secs. 1-2 & 4 (Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 302-312, 319-329); chaps. 6-7 (pp. 336-361); chap. 15 (pp 403-417); chap. 32 (pp. 436-438).

Emile Durkheim: Social Bonds, Collective Life, and Individual Well-Being


first paper due
week 9
Oct 31  
Suicide, Book 3, chaps. 1-2.


week 10
Nov 7  
Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. New York: Free Press, 1995, Book 1, chap. 1; Book 2, chaps. 6-7; Book 3, chap. 1; Conclusion.

Max Weber: Rationalization, Power, and the Loss of Meaning

week 11
Nov 14  

week 12
Nov 21  
no class -- Thanksgiving

week 13
Nov 28  


week 14
Dec 5  
(read this version rather than the one in From Max Weber as this one is a clearer translation)


"Politics as a Vocation" (originally published 1919). In Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, pp. 77-128.


turn in notification of topic for second paper

second paper due Thursday, December 20th