Classical and Modern Critical Social Theory

The course covers key positions in Social Theory and its Modern Critical Continuum; identifies present debates and future tendencies in theory and practice.

It is becoming increasingly problematic to rely exclusively on the classical social theorist for articulating and interpreting our modern experience. On the other hand, it may prove equally unwholesome to venture into the myriad of contemporary critical social theory without attention paid to its historical roots and connective dialectics. An emerging tendency today is to study the one in light of the other. We will attempt, therefore, to get a hold on both historical landmarks in the development of sociological thought, as well as contemporary revisions and new paradigms. Our inquiry will be one of critical socio-historical methodology, with the following goals in mind.

a. Command essential conceptual framework of analysis that are indispensable to social-cultural research.

b. Gain working knowledge of ideas and paradigms that are integral to qualitative and empirical research

c. Introduce the use of Modeling as the methodology and primary tool for interdisciplinary teaching, co-learning and research.

Let’s all make a collective effort to share the joys of social analysis; may it help us navigate through our entry into the Age of Complexity.

Conceptual Format

The essential writings of the classics revolve around the concept of modernity as a socio-cultural, economic, political and psychological medium for understanding both world and self (Weber, Gramsci, Marcuse among others). Modern Critical Theory, including post-structural, global, feminist… revises the scope as well as some key premises of the classics, all the while addressing new issues and new developments, and employing different styles and temperament. We tackle the new positions as they take us on a journey into the global scene and its challenges. Habermas, in particular, posits a hopeful phase, situated around the concept of the Public Sphere, Distorted Communication,…and the recovery of an eroding social life. The work by Held is one of the best to handle historically the development of Critical Theory, while Sitton addresses new
contested topics in Habermas ranging from the concepts of system and lifeworld to communicative pragmatics, aesthetics etc.,

In another vein, the hard-nosed structural theories of the classics (Saussure, Durkheim) are challenged by Foucault's new modalities of subtle modes of repression, surveillance and power. We will analyze the topic in reference to revised notions of subjectivity and domination, and follow up with the timely contributions by feminist thought, notably the work of Nancy Fraser, who subjects theory to gender critique in relation to self and society. The work by Charles Lemert on Deadly Worlds poses for us new dilemmas especially in reference to the tough realities and emotional costs of the Network society and Globalization.

We will have 2 short papers and on final take home.

Please contact me for any disability needs.

READING MATERIAL

The following are the required readings that will engage us throughout the course:
Representative selections of primary works by classical and critical theorists will be handed out periodically. Several of the required books are small in size but compact and rich, and quite efficient for our purposes.

**Required**
Charles Lemert; Deadly Worlds: The Emotional Costs of Globalization Rowman ..2006
S. Seidman; Contested Knowledge, Social Theory Today Blackwell, 2008. 4th Edition
H. Marcuse; One-Dimensional Man. Beacon press
John Sitton; Habermas and Contemporary Society. Palgrave- 2003
M. Foucault; Discipline and Punish Vintage
Nancy Fraser; Unruly Practices: Power, and Gender in Contemp. Theory  U.Minnesota Press
David Held; Introduction to Critical Theory University of California Press
Max Weber; The Protestant Ethic…(Translated by T. Parsons) Routledge Isbn 0-415-08434-2

**Recommended:** There will be fewer copies at the bookstore.
Alison Leigh Brown; On Foucault Wadsworth – 2000
Richard Hadden; Sociological Theory Broadview Press – 1998

**NOTE:**
To lessen your expenses, all other relevant articles and primary selections will be handed out free of charge. I suggest you keep them organized in a separate file. They will help you in your future teaching and research engagements.

At the end of every session there will be short class presentations by 2 students (as a team) on sections from Lemert’s work on Globalization. Deadly Worlds: The Emotional Costs of Globalization. Students have always enjoyed such assignments which help hone both power of articulation and the management of short oral presentations in the framework of a team work. We start doing this on a voluntary basis, all the while remembering that your classmates and my self are right there to support you.
SYLLABUS

The Syllabus contains five major segments of inquiry that are thematically sequenced and constitute an integrated inquiry for the course. Each segment will take between 2-3 weeks, depending on progress.

I. THE CULTURE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF MODERNITY —CLASSICAL CONTRIBUTIONS.

First exercise in Interdisciplinary Modeling (Human Interests and modes of Knowledge)
Readings: across 2 weeks
Kant: What is Enlightenment? Handout
Hadden - Social Theory. Chapter 1. The Enlightenment pp. 14-35
Seidman- Contested Knowledge, Part 1, Introduction and Chapter 1: The idea of Science of Society, the Enlightenment pp 5-16…
Weber: Charismatic Authority and Charismatic Community (Primary text –Handout)
Frank Parkin: Domination and Legitimacy (handout)

Weber: The Protestant Ethic and the spirit of Capitalism (Book)
I read it with you in class in one hour session- to highlight key connections between Classical and Modern Critical thought. Important to have edition listed in the Required Readings which has the translation by T. Parsons., allows us to follow the same reading portions in class.

Hadden: Max Weber- Chapter 4
Seidman: Weber –Chapter 4

Next class presentation (from the book by Lemert, Deadly Worlds- the Emotional Costs of Globalization
Introduction: Global Spaces, Individual Lives..

2. Classical CRITICAL THEORY: THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY AND ALTERNATIVES

Readings:

Held Intro to Critical Theory: The Institute and its Program pp 31-39
The Rise of Instrumental Reason.(Section on Marcuse) Pp 65-76,
Section on Art and Aesthetics pp 81-96
Marcuse: One Dimensional Man: Chapters 1,2,3,4,9
Martin Jay: The Frankfurt School..... (article::handout)

Marx The Manifesto
Hadden Chapter 2 --on Marx)
Peter Singer: Marx  (handout)

3. MODERN CRITICAL THEORY
Habermas :
Held (On Habermas ); Chapter 10 Discourse, Science and Society pp260-276 (on the
Public Sphere)
On Legitimation Crisis pp284- 295

Sitton: Habermas and Contemporary Society
Chapter 1,2,3( short, highly readable and connective chapters- they connect
Weber and Habermas. Do not miss.

Sitton  Society as Lifeworld and System Chapter 4,
Contested terrains Language Art and Gender chapter 6
Habermas and the Politics of the Twenty-First Century. Chapter 8

Seidman  Contested Knowledge: Rethinking the Classical Tradition
Chapteer 8. The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas

Habermas; Selections from his Primary works on Legitimation Crisis, System and
Lifeworld, Contributions to a Discourse of Theory of law and Democracy …

4. STRUCTURALISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM: THE CASE OF DURKHEIM AND FOUCALUT

Readings:

Seidman  Chapter3, Durkheim :The promise of Sociology
Durkheim: selections on structuralism

Hadden chapter 3, Emile Durkheim

Seidman: Contested knowledge: Michel Foucault’s Disciplinary Society ,Chapter 12

FOUCAULT ;

Nietzsche, Geneology, History (handout)
Discipline and Punish:
Part I.
Part III 1. Docile Bodies 2. The means of Correct Training 3. Panopticism,
Part IV The Carceral

Brown : On Foucault. (a small expository pamphlet) Short sections on:
Truth, power, self, Epistemology, The politics of Power,
The withering away of the self, Care of the self.

5. Feminist Critique in Social Theory

Readings:
Nancy Fraser: Unruly Practices
Part 3, "Gender and the Politics of Need Interpretation"
Chapter 7, "Women, Welfare and Need Interpretation"
Chapter 8, "Struggle Over Needs"
Chris Weedon: Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory
Chapter 5 Discourse, Power and Resistance (Handout)
Judy Butler: Contributions…

We may conclude with the following recent integrations;
From Nation to Globe: David Held and Mary Kaldor, in Seidman section 18
The return of the Empire: Hardt and Negri, in Seidman section 20