

# Social Theory SC21502

## Noa Milman

### Spring 2009

**Meeting time:** Tuesday & Thursday, 12:00-1:15

**Room:** Carney 307

**Email:** milman@bc.edu

**Office:** McGuinn 410B

**Office Hours:** Thursday 1:30-3:00 & by appointment

### Overview

This class aims to allow students an understanding of some of the great sociological theorists, both classical and contemporary. We will consider the dialogue between the different theorists, and will investigate questions of power, agency/structure and social change from the standpoint of each of these theorists. Students will be encouraged to engage with the material, to critically evaluate it, and to apply it in their thinking of contemporary social issues

### Reading

Calhoun et al. (ed.). Classical Sociological Theory. 2007, Second edition. Blackwell Publishing.

Pierre Bourdieu. Distinction. 1984, Harvard University Press.

### Attendance

Each student may have two unexcused absences without penalty. Each unexcused absence after two results in a one-third lowering of the final grade. For example, if you have three unexcused absences and your final grade is a B, it will become a B-. Funerals, serious illness, job interviews, religious holidays, and scheduled sporting events for student athletes that are properly documented are excused absences. If you need to miss a class, please let me know prior to class.

### Participation

This is a highly interactive class and your participation is essential for its success. The more you talk and engage with the material, the better and more valuable the learning experience will be for all.

### Requirements

**Weekly questions:** For every day that readings are assigned you should formulate a question (or a short reaction paper) on the reading material. The question should be emailed to me by 8:00pm the night before the reading is due. (If for example the reading is due on Tuesday, you should email me the question by Monday at 8:00PM). Your questions (or reaction papers) don't need to be long, but should indicate your active engagement with the readings, and we will use them in our class discussion. The question can be a point of clarification but ideally would be an analytical question. Questions should also be related to particular passages of the assigned reading rather than being general abstract questions that could be asked without doing the

reading. Questions should help us to come to grip with the readings. You may miss up to three question assignments. Even if you have to miss a class, you can still submit a question the night before class. You will not be graded for the questions (though they can help improve your grade, see below), but this is an essential component of the class and a mandatory requirement for passing the class. No exceptions will be made.

**Short essays:** During the semester you will be asked to submit two short papers (5 pages) on the theorists of your choice, in which you will critically engage with the theories we've learned. You may choose to apply the theory and use it to discuss a current event, a polemic topic, a literary or cinematic text, a court decision or a newspaper article. You can also choose to discuss the theory in relation to other sociological or philosophical theories. In both cases the theory should be the center of your paper - you should make sure to explicitly discuss the theory at hand and refer to the readings. The comparison/analysis should serve to illustrate the theory, and not vice versa. You will be graded for your understanding of the theory and your ability to use it critically and creatively. Papers are due by the dates indicated in the syllabus (usually within a week from the last day we've discussed each theorist).

**Final paper:** The final paper is similar to the short papers, but should include a discussion and critical analysis of two (new) theorists of your choice (10 pages). You may choose to write about theorists you've already discussed in previous papers, but that should be in addition to two other theorists. The final paper is due at the last day of class. Note that I will not be able to grant any extensions for this paper, so make sure to start working on it ahead of time.

### **Grading**

Your final grade will be an average of the grades you received for the long and short papers. Class participation will be considered for students whose average at the end of the semester falls squarely between two grades (between a "B -" and a "B," for example). For exceptional participation and weekly questions you can earn up to one-third of a grade that will be added to your final grade (e.g., if your final grade is a B, it will become a B+)

### **Academic integrity**

Cheating, plagiarism and fabrication of information or citations are strictly forbidden. Please read carefully BC's policy on academic integrity: <http://www.bc.edu/integrity>

*I reserve the right to make changes in the syllabus with an adequate prior notice.*

## Course Outline

### **Introduction**

**Thursday, Jan 15**

**Introduction to the class**

**Tuesday, Jan 20**

**Introduction to theory and historical background**

- General Introduction, P.1

### **Karl Marx**

**Thursday, Jan 22- Jan 27**

**Alienation and Historical Materialism**

- Chapter 5 –The German Ideology
- Chapter 6 – Economic and philosophic Manuscripts

**Thursday, Jan 29**

**History and Class Struggle**

- Chapter 7 -Manifesto of the Communist Party
- Chapter 8 -The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

**Tuesday Feb 3- Feb 5**

**The Dynamics of Capitalism**

- Chapter 9 - Wage-Labour and Capital
- Chapter 10 – Classes
- The Grundrisse, "The Dynamics of Capitalism," 247-250 in The Marx-Engels Reader [course reserves]
- Capital, Part V "Production of Absolute and of Relative Surplus Value", 417-419; "Commodities", 302 – 308; "The Fetishism of Commodities," 319-329 in The Marx-Engels Reader [course reserves]

**Tuesday, Feb 10**

**Marx in America**

- Barbara Ehrenreich. Nickel and Dimed , chapter 2, evaluation [course reserves]
- John Cassidy, The Next Thinker, "The Return of Karl Marx", The New Yorker, October 20, 1997, p. 248 [course reserves]

*(Feb 17 – last day to submit a paper on Marx)*

## Emile Durkheim

**Thursday, Feb 12**

### **Society and Social Facts**

- Chapter 11 – The Rules of Sociological Method

**Tuesday, Feb 17**

### **Solidarity and Modern Life**

- Chapter 12 – The Division of Labor in society

**Thursday, Feb 19**

### **Suicide**

- Chapter 14 – Suicide

**Tuesday, Feb 24**

### **Durkheim in America**

- David Karp, Speaking of Sadness. Chapters 2, 7. [course reserves]

*(March 3– last day to submit a paper on Durkheim, you may email me the paper)*

## Max Weber

**Thursday, Feb 26**

### **Introduction to Max Weber**

- Introduction to part IV
- Other readings TBA

**March 3-5 – Spring break, no classes**

**Tuesday, March 10**

### **Introduction to Weber and the Protestant Ethic**

- Chapter 17 - The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

**Thursday, March 12**

### **Ideal Types**

- Chapter 16 – Basic Sociological Terms, P. 225-227
- Chapter 19 – The Types of Legitimate Domination

**Tuesday, March 17**

### **Modern Society**

- Chapter 20- Bureaucracy
- "The Meaning of Discipline," From Max Weber, 253 -255; 261-262 (Don't read "The Origins of Discipline in War") [course reserves]

**Thursday, March 19**

**Weber in America**

- George Ritzer. The McDonaldization of Society: Revised New Century Edition. Chapters 2, 3, 7 [course reserves]

**Tuesday, March 24**

**Social Stratification**

- Chapter 18 – the Distribution of Power within the Political Community: Class, Status, Party.

*(March 31 – last day to submit a paper on Weber)*

**Pierre Bourdieu**

**Thursday, March 26**

**Forms of capital**

- "The Forms of Capital", In Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. (John Richardson, ed.) P. 241-258 [course reserves]
- Madeline Perez. "Low Income Latina Parents, School Choice, and Pierre Bourdieu", chapter 5 in Theory and Educational Research (ed. Jean Anyon) [course reserves]

**Tuesday, March 31 - April 2**

**Habitus**

- "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices", chapter 7 in Contemporary Social Theory, (ed. Anthony Elliott). [course reserves]
- Swartz, David. "Habitus: A Cultural Theory of Action" chapter 5 in Culture and Power. [course reserves]

**Tuesday, April 7**

**Distinction**

- Distinction, Introduction.
- Distinction, chapter 1, focus especially at:  
P. 11-19  
"The Entitlement Effect" p. 22-28  
"The Aesthetic Disposition" p. 28-30

“The Popular Aesthetic” p. 32-34

“Aesthetics, Ethics and Aestheticism” p. 44-50

“Distance from Necessity” and “The Aesthetic Sense as the Sense of Distinction”  
p. 53-62

“Manners and the Manner of Acquisition” p. 65-68

“The Two Markets” p. 85-92

**Thursday, April 9 –No class, Easter**

**Tuesday, April 14**

**Distinction**

- Distinction, chapter 2, p. 109-147

**Thursday, April 16**

**Bourdieu in America**

- Annette Lareau. Unequal Childhoods, chapters 6,7, appendix B [course reserves]

*(April 23 - last day to submit a paper on Bourdieu)*

**Foucault**

**Tuesday, April 21**

**Discipline and Punish**

Discipline and Punish, Part 1, chapter 1 “The Body of the Condemned” [course reserves]

**Thursday, April 23**

Discipline and Punish, Part 3, chapter 1 “Docile Bodies” [course reserves]

**Tuesday, April 28**

Discipline and Punish, Part 3, chapter 2 “The Means of Correct Training” [course reserves]

*Suggested reading: Discipline and Punish, Part 3, chapter 3 “Panopticism” [course reserves]*

**Thursday, April 30**

**Foucault in America**

Vivyan C. Adair. "Disciplined and Punished: Poor Women, Bodily Inscription and Resistance through Education" chapter 1 in Reclaiming Class: Women, Poverty, and the

Promise of Higher Education in America. (Eds. Vivyan C. Adair and Sandra L. Dahlberg)  
2003. [course reserves]

*(Final paper is due)*