

Social Theory SC21502

Noa Milman

Fall 2009

Meeting time: Wednesday 9:00-11:30

Room: McGuinn 437

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Office: McGuinn 410B

Office Hours: Wednesday 2-3PM & 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 one unexcused absence without penalty. Each unexcused absence after that 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 participate and engage with the material, the better and more valuable the learning experience would be for all of us. Active participation will also help to improve your grade.

Requirements

Weekly questions: For each assigned reading (that is, each bullet point in your reading list) you should formulate a question (or a short reaction paper) that discusses the reading. The questions should be emailed to me by 8:00pm the night before class (i.e., Tuesday at 8pm). 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 class discussions. The questions can be a point of clarification but ideally would be analytical questions. Questions should help us to come to grip with the readings and should be related to particular passages of the assigned reading rather than being general abstract questions that could be asked without doing the reading. You may miss up to two question assignments; regardless to whether you came to class or not. If

you have to miss a class, you should still email your questions the night before class. Completing the questions assignment 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 (5-7 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 on a Friday, a week and a half after the last class we discuss a theorist. **By November 6th you should have submitted at least one short essay.**

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. In addition to analyzing your case study, you should discuss points of similarity and disagreement between the two theorists (10-15 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 on December 16, 2009 at noon.

Grading

Your final grade will be an average of the grades you received for the long and short papers (80%), and your grade on participation and weekly questions (20%).

Academic integrity

Cheating, plagiarism and fabrication of information or citations are strictly forbidden. This class has zero tolerance approach to plagiarism - **STUDENTS WHO ARE CAUGHT PLAGIARIZING WILL FAIL THE CLASS, REGARDLES OF CIRCUMSTANCES.** Please carefully read 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

September 9, 2009

Introduction to the class

Introduction to theory and historical background

- General Introduction, P.1

Karl Marx

September 16, 2009

Historical Materialism and Class Struggle

- Chapter 5 –The German Ideology
- Chapter 6 – Economic and philosophic Manuscripts
- Chapter 7 -Manifesto of the Communist Party

September 23, 2009

Dynamics of Capitalism

- Capital, “Commodities”, 302 – 308; “The Fetishism of Commodities,” 319-329; “Production of Absolute and of Relative Surplus Value”, 417-419 in The Marx-Engels Reader [course reserves]
- Chapter 9 - Wage-Labour and Capital
- Chapter 10 – Classes

September 30, 2009

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]

(October 9, 2009 at noon– last day to submit a paper on Marx. Put it in McGuinn 410, mailbox #18)

Emile Durkheim

October 7, 2009

Social Facts and Solidarity

- Chapter 11 – The Rules of Sociological Method
- Chapter 12 – The Division of Labor in Society (recommended)
- Counihan, Carole. 1997. "Bread a World; Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia", chapter 21 in Food and Culture, ed. Counihan, Carole and Van Esterik, Penny. [course reserves]
- **Recommended:** Bratton, Denham and Deutschmann. 2009. "Emile Durkheim: The Division of Labor in Society", in Capitalism and Classical Sociological Theory. [course reserve]

October 14, 2009

Suicide and Durkheim in Our Time

- Suicide "Egoistic Suicide" p. 152-180 (skim p. 160-163), 208-216 [course reserves]
- Chapter 14 – Suicide (on Anomic suicide, in your reader)
- David Karp, Speaking of Sadness. Chapters 2, 7. [course reserves]

(October 23, 2009 at noon - last day to submit a paper on Durkheim. Put it in McGuinn 410, mailbox #18)

Max Weber

October 21, 2009

Weber's Sociology

- Chapter 16 – Basic Sociological Terms, P. 225-227
- Chapter 19 – The Types of Legitimate Domination
- Chapter 17 - The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

October 28, 2009

Modern Society

- Chapter 20- Bureaucracy
- George Ritzer. The McDonaldization of Society: Revised New Century Edition. Chapters 2, 3, 7 [course reserves]
- Chapter 18 – the Distribution of Power within the Political Community: Class, Status, Party.

(November 6, 2009 at noon - last day to submit a paper on Weber. Put it in McGuinn 410, mailbox #18)

Pierre Bourdieu

November 4, 2009

Social Capitals and Habitus

- “The Forms of Capital”, In John Richardson, Ed. Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. pp. 241-258 [course reserves]
- Pierre Bourdieu, "Structure, Habitus, Practice", chapter 7 in Contemporary Social Theory, ed. Anthony Elliott, Blackwell 1999. [course reserves]
- Distinction, P. 171 (figure 8).
- **Recommended:** Swartz, David. “Habitus: A Cultural Theory of Action” chapter 5 in Culture and Power. [course reserves]

November 11, 2009

Distinction

- Distinction, Introduction.
- Distinction, Chapter 1:
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
- Distinction, Chapter 2:
"Class condition and Social Conditioning" P.101
"Constructed Class" P. 106-109
"Social Class and Class Trajectories" p. 109- 112
"A Three Dimensional Space" p. 114-116, 120- 125
"Reconversion Strategies" p. 125 -147 (**look closely at the figure on p.128-129**)

November 18, 2009

Bourdieu in America

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

(November 30, 2009 at noon– last day to submit a paper on Bourdieu. Put it in McGuinn 410, mailbox #18)

November 25, 2009 – Thanksgiving, no class.

Last theorist - to be determined collectively in class

December 2, 2009

December 9, 2009

December 16 at noon – Final paper is due