Classical Foundations of Social Theory 26 735 502

Fall Term 2014

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Summary: Classical theories in sociology provide many students with their first exposure to the most influential positions from which social scientists conceive modern western civilization (i.e. modernity) and its leading institutional orders. Since the scale and depth of classical theorists exceeds the limits of any single syllabus, every course on the subject must make some choices based upon the goals of the program and students it serves. Many classes in classical theory divide their syllabi in terms of the thought of each of the dominant theorists, always including Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim and often including several more. This class will follow a slightly different means of organization. Since students in Peace and Conflict Studies will be expected to grasp the institutional organization of the societies in which they will work and do research, this course is organized around three institutional areas, namely modern capitalism, the modern state, and modern culture. As an example of how this works, in covering modern capitalism sustained attention will be given to Karl Marx. However, in addition to Marx, there will be coverage of central ideas pertaining to capitalism from the writings of Adam Smith, Karl Polanyi, and Joseph Schumpeter. Only in the case of Max Weber will it be necessary to cover the thought of a major theorist under more than one heading. An advantage of the organization of this syllabus in terms of institutional orders is that where the classical theorists overlooked key aspects of a topic, these oversights can be covered by introducing the thought of more contemporary theorists. Hence, during the course of the term we will have occasion to deal in a certain depth with writings of Michael Mann on the state and ethnic cleansing, Anthony Giddens on modernity and modern culture, and Michel Foucault on modern forms of discipline and surveillance.

Orientation: The topics discussed in this class are deeply implicated in many of the most heated political and cultural debates of our times. The goal in this class, however, is more about understanding rather than judgment or critique. The assumption here is that it is important to understand what we mean by capitalism, the state, ethnic cleansing, and so on, as a prelude to criticism and social or political action of any and all kinds.
Assignments: There will be three assignments, each of which will consist of a set of questions on a take home exam. Though lengths will vary; students can expect to write between 5-10 pages for each exam.

Grading: Each exam will be graded with a letter grade using both pluses and minuses. Each exam will be given equal weight. Final grades will follow the university rules: A, B+, B, C+, C, D, F.

Exams will be evaluated primarily on how well the questions are answered. Mastery of the ideas in the class and lectures will be of basic importance. However, a portion of each grade will hinge on quality of writing. This includes the mechanics of composition, grammar, syntax, sentence and paragraph structure, etc. Where questions of the organization of entire answers are concerned this will be taken into account as a matter of the substance or content of the answer.

Each of the first two exams will be due two weeks after distribution. The last exam will be due during Finals Week but I may try to distribute some questions so that students have two weeks to complete this exam as well. Exams must be handed in on time. Unexcused late exams will be penalized one half a grade (e.g. from B+ to B).

Readings and Lectures: Lectures are crucial to doing well in this class. Students who miss a lecture may find themselves having trouble answering questions on the next exam. I will not penalize students for absences. However, students who must miss a lecture should make arrangements for a fellow student to record the class and listen to the recording before the next exam.

Plagiarism: The Rutgers administration always asks faculty to warn students about plagiarism. I really don’t expect problems on the graduate student level. However, be advised that all forms of plagiarism, including use of electronic services for composing or editing assignments as well as copying or mimicking assignment answers by two or more people, will result in harsh penalties up to and including failure in the course.

NOTICE ----- This term (Fall 2014) I am in the process of posting many assigned readings to Blackboard. This process will be ongoing during the term. Hence, the readings below cover only the first 3-4 weeks of the term. I will add material to the syllabus periodically during the term. I will make announcements in class when I have made additions to the syllabus and added material to Blackboard.
SYLLABUS

(All weeks are approximate.) All readings are available on Blackboard. All titles are as listed on Blackboard.

Week 1: Introduction

Readings:


Week 2: Adam Smith and Introduction to Marx

Readings

-----Heilbroner on Adam Smith

-----Adam Smith Selections from the Wealth of Nations

-----Marx and Engels from The Communist Manifesto, Chapter 1 (time permitting)

Weeks 3-5: Karl Marx on Capitalism

Readings

-----Bender, excerpt on Marx and Alienation

-----Marx, excerpted passages on Alienation

-----Marx, selections on Capitalism

Weeks 5-6: Polanyi and Schumpeter on Capitalism

Readings

-----Polanyi, selections on Markets and the Double Movement

-----Ritzer, on Schumpeter and Creative Destruction

Additions to the syllabus will appear here and also be announced in class.

Week 6-9 s Power and the State

Readings NEXT PAGE
---Schroeder on Mann’s Theory of Power and the State

-----Michael Mann, The Autonomous Power of the State

-----Michael Mann The Dark Side of Democracy Chs. 1 and Conclusion

-----Max Weber on Power and Bureucracy

-----Max Weber Power as a Vocation

-----Roberto Michels on Oligarchy