Sociology 157: Contemporary Social Theory
Pomona College

Spring 2012

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“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” -Karl Marx, 1845

Course Description

This seminar focuses on the key issues that have shaped social theory throughout the twentieth century, the debates that have surrounded them, and the role of sociology in our globalized world. Taking classical social theory as our foundation, we will examine how theorists conceptualize the purpose of academic sociology, power and domination in modern and postmodern times, contemporary social structures and institutions, cultural and ideological forces, and the fundamental roles of race, gender, class, and sex in shaping society and everyday experiences. This course concludes with a look at theories of resistance and social change, and considers the role of sociology in directing and producing change.

Required Books

Participation & Assignments

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<td>Class participation</td>
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<td>Journal entries</td>
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<td>Two essays</td>
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Talking about the subject matter is of utmost importance when studying social theory. Therefore, **class participation** is a major component of your grade. You are expected to come to class having read assigned readings thoroughly, having reflected on them, and ready to have a conversation about them.

You are responsible for keeping a journal and for bringing it to class. Use your **journal entries** to reflect in two to three paragraphs on what you have read for each class session. You might consider the greater significance of the theory at hand, where their theories fall short, how one might explore their theories methodologically, and any compelling questions that we might discuss as a class. As the semester progresses, you might begin to reflect on connections between different theorists, and debates among them. Whether hand-written or typed, you should bring your journal to every class session to aide you in discussion. Throughout the semester I will check at random that you have brought your journal to class, and will collect them to grade and respond to them twice, on Thursday, February 9, and Thursday, April 12.

Each of you will participate in a team of three that is responsible for **facilitating discussion** once during the semester. You will sign up for a date, and must come prepared to lead the class in conversation about the key ideas presented in the readings, questions raised by it, as well as points of debate inspired by it. Each team must submit printed talking points on their assigned day.

During the semester you will write **two essays**, each eight to ten pages in length. These must be typed, double spaced, in 12 point font, and stapled (or otherwise fastened) when submitted. You are required to use ASA style citations in these essays. Essays must be submitted in person on the day that they are due. Extensions will only be considered after in-person requests, at least one week in advance of the assigned due date. The first essay is due Tuesday, February 21, and the second, Tuesday, April 17. Late papers will not be accepted. Essay prompts will follow at a later date.

Each student will complete a **final oral exam**. You will be given questions to prepare in advance of the final. On the date of the final, you will be assigned a question at random to which you must respond in front of your peers. Senior oral exams will be given on the last day of class, Tuesday, May 1. Only seniors may attend this class session. All other students will take the exam on the scheduled date of Tuesday, May 8.
Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introduction to Contemporary Social Theory

Tuesday, January 17: Consider Social Theory

Thursday, January 19: The Classical Foundation


Week 2: Hierarchies of Knowledge and the Trouble of Sociology

Tuesday, January 24: Tearing Down the Ivory Tower


Thursday, January 26: Reckoning with Sociology

Group Facilitation 1


**Week 3: Power & Domination in Modern Society**

Tuesday, January 31: The Forces of Power


Thursday, February 2: The Structure of Domination

*Group Facilitation 2*


**Week 4: The Power of Ideology and Discourse**

Tuesday, February 7: Ideology and Consciousness


Thursday, February 9: Discourse and Knowledge

**Group Facilitation 3, Submit Journal**


Week 5: Social Structures and Institutions

Tuesday, February 14: Institutional Learning & Social Order


Thursday, February 16: State Power & Institutions


Week 6: Mass Culture & Mass Media

Tuesday, February 21: The Politics & Industry of Mass Culture

Submit Essay 1


Thursday, February 23: The Social Significance of Mass Culture


Week 7: Identity & Belonging in a Complex World

Tuesday, February 28: Understanding Identity

Thursday, March 1: Identity Deconstructed
Group Facilitation 4
Week 8: Theorizing a Global Society

Tuesday, March 6: Global Capitalism, the Transnational State, and Labor

Thursday: March 8: Global Development & Civil Society

Week 9: SPRING BREAK ©
Week 10: Consumption & Consumerism

Tuesday, March 20: Consumerism & Capitalism

Thursday, March 22: Consumption & Identity

**Group Facilitation 5**

Week 11: Race & Racism

Tuesday, March 27: Racial Formation

Thursday, March 29: Theorizing Racism
Week 12: The Intersectionality of Race/Class/Gender/Sex

Tuesday, April 3: Theories of Intersectionality

Thursday, April 5: Lived Experiences of Intersectionality
Excerpts TBA.

Week 13: Theorizing Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

Tuesday, April 10: The Inseparability of Gender, Sex, and Sexuality
Thursday, April 12: Queering Theory

**Group Facilitation 6, Submit Journal**


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Week 14: Resistance & Struggle

Tuesday, April 17: The Shape of Resistance

**Essay 2 Due**


Excerpts TBA.


Thursday, April 19: Oppositional Identities & Practices in Everyday Life

**Guest speaker: Alison Crossley**


**Week 15: Revolution & Liberation**

Tuesday, April 24: Revolution & Justice


Excerpts from Critical Globalization Studies TBA.

Thursday, April 26: Liberation Sociology


Week 16: Senior Oral Exams

Tuesday, May 1: Senior Oral Exams

Week 17: Final Examinations

Tuesday, May 8: Oral Examinations commence at 9:00 AM.