

Sociology 201
Contemporary Social Theory
Spring 2006

Professor Thomas Cushman
Pendleton East 334
Office Hours: Monday, 9-11, Thursday, 1:30-3:30

This course examines major social theories, with an emphasis on theories of modernity and postmodernity. A central concern of the classical sociological theorists such as Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, and Weber was to explore the social and cultural consequences of the transition from traditional to modern societies. We examine contemporary theories which continue their project. In recent years, disciplinary boundaries have become more fluid and sociology has become more open to thinkers in other fields such as philosophy and literary theory. We will examine these interdisciplinary efforts as well. There are three basic objectives for the class: to help you develop the capacity to read and “unpack” complex theoretical texts, to develop a vocabulary of key analytical concepts, and to develop the capacity to use these concepts to interpret modern social and cultural phenomena.

Course Readings

The following books are required and can be purchased at the bookstore.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*
Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives*
Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*
Lee Clarke, *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination*

A number of articles are on e-reserve and are indicated as such in the course schedule. These are available in the course fold which every student in the course will have on her desktop.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Attendance and participation is required of all students and will factor into the grade. Students who miss four or more classes will receive no credit for the attendance and participation part of their grade. All students are required to do short weekly assignments. These are to be turned in after class each week as evidence of attendance and as the basis for class discussions. These are not to be emailed to me and they will not be accepted late.

There will be three 6-8 page essays on topics to be provided and a take-home final examination. The paper due dates are as follows:

Paper One: March 10

Paper Two: April 6

Paper Three: May 4

No late papers or examinations will be accepted, unless by previous arrangement. All students must turn in hard copies of papers: no papers may be submitted as email attachments unless asked for. All emailed papers and assignments will be deleted and considered as not turned in. This is a firm policy.

Students are responsible for all reading and lecture material on exams. Papers and exams will be graded rigorously according to the highest professional standards and according to the official grade scale as put forth in College Legislation. Grammar and writing style are considered in the determination of grades on papers.

Course Schedule: I have left the dates out because I want to leave some flexibility to make sure we cover all topics thoroughly and I will guide you from week to week on what the reading schedule will be.

I. Continuing the Classical Tradition: Marx, Durkheim, Simmel and Weber as theorists of modernity

Max Weber, "Excursus on Markets," in Economy and Society ®
Edward Tiryakian, "Dialectics of Modernity: Reenchantment and Dedifferentiation as Counterprocesses." Pp. 78-94 in Haferkamp and Smelser, eds. Social Change and Modernity. ®

II. Sigmund Freud

Civilization and Its Discontents, in entirety

III. Frankfurt School of Critical Theory

Reading on Frankfurt School history to be distributed before class.
Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Aspects of Sociology, "The Masses" and "Culture and Civilization." ®

- Herbert Marcuse, "Liberation from the Affluent Society" in Critical Theory and Society: A Reader. Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner, eds. ®
- Theodor Adorno and Marx Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" ®
- IV. Erving Goffman
- The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, in entirety
- V. Anthony Giddens
- The Consequences of Modernity, in entirety
- VI. Zygmunt Bauman
- Wasted Lives, in entirety
- VII. Social Theory and the Understanding of Post 9/11 Global Society Lee Clarke, Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination
- VIII. The Postmodern Challenge in Social Theory: readings to be distributed. We will also have a guest speaker, Dr. John Rodden, who will offer some commentary and a lecture on this topic – the date and time of this visit is to be arranged and it may be the case that this section VIII will be covered before section VII above in case Dr. Rodden comes earlier than expected.