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SOSC3000C: Social Theory & Modernity

Spring 2019 (TuTh 3.00 - 4.20 pm) Room 2302

The purpose of this course is to help students acquire familiarity with major social theories and theoretical traditions, develop the ability to think analytically and critically about the various social, political, and economic issues in the modern world, and master the skills to carry out theoretically-informed research in social science.

Synopsis

This course is divided into three parts: Each part will examine a major theoretical tradition in social science:

- (1) Part I will examine *the Critical Tradition of Karl Marx and the Marxists*. The emergence of capitalism since the 16th century not only led to the creation of the modern world, but it also led to the spread very serious social problems which may endanger the survival of capitalism. Part I of this course will start with the critical tradition. It will first focus on the writings of Karl Marx, looking into Karl Marx's methodology, his critique of modern society, class conflict, and political revolution. After reviewing the critique of Marx in the 20th century, Part I will examine how various social theorists informed by the Marx's writings – like the Critical School, Neo-Marxism, and World-Systems Theory – have updated, revised, and enriched Marx's theories in order to understand the new happenings in the modern world.
- (2) Part II will examine *how the Conservative Tradition Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons* responded to the challenge of Marx and Marxism. It will begin with Emile Durkheim's methodology, his theory on division of labor and social solidarity, and his studies on suicide and religion. Then Part II will turn to Talcott Parsons' structural

functionalism, focusing on his social system theory, his concept of power, social change, modernization, and stratification. After reviewing the critique of Parsons in the 1960s, we will discuss how the functionalists have updated, revised, and enriched Parsons' theory of structural functionalism. We will, in particular, focus on Robert Merton and the conflict theories of Lewis Coser.

- (3) Part III will examine *Max Weber, the Weberian and the micro tradition*. We will first look into Max Weber's methodology, his theory of status group, legitimation, bureaucracy, and religion. Then we will examine the influence of Weber on the study of modernity, including the emergence of the developmental state and the impact of Confucianism on East Asian modernization. After that, we will examine Weber's influence on micro theories, focusing on symbolic interaction theories, exchange theories, and rational choice theory.

Course Requirements

- (1) **Three essay exams** with a total of 90 points (First exam: 30 points, Second exam: 30 points, Final exam: 30 points); (2) **A short essay** which is worth 10 points. The total points are 100 points.
- The short essay should be around 500-750 words. In the short essay, the student is asked to explain how a particular theory (or a particular concept) covered in class could help him/her to understand the modern world better, e.g., how to make sense of his/her life experience, of the current events in Hong Kong and China (or other part of the world), or the significant historical transformation in the modern world over the past few centuries.
- **Deadline of the short essay: April 30.** Submit a hardcopy of your short essay to me or Vivien at the class meeting on April 30 (Tue). Please also send a soft copy to Vivien's e-mail as a backup. Points will be deducted if the short essay is submitted late: One point per day will be deducted. If your short essay is late for 10 days, you don't need to submit it!

Grading Policy

Total is 100 points: 3 exams (each is 30 points) + 1 short essay (10 points)

Grades: **A** = 90-100 points

B = 80-90 points

C = 70-80 points

D = 60-70 points

Important Notes:

- If you miss an exam, you will *not* get any point for that exam. Not make-up exam will be granted except on medical ground with a doctor's certificate, so please make sure you mark the following exam dates on your calendar. **First Exam: March 12.** **Second Exam: April 9.** The final exam will be announced later in April. **Deadline for the short essay: April 30.**
- It is very important that you attend all the lectures. Exam questions will draw heavily from lecture materials. If you miss over a week's lectures, you will have difficulties in getting a decent grade in this course.
- Feel free to talk to the instructor (Alvin Y. So) or the TA (Vivien Pong) anytime if you have any question or problem. You are welcome either to call us or send us an e-mail to make an appointment to see us at our offices.

Required Textbook

Ritzer, George. 2011. *Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw Hill. 8th edition.

(listed in the readings as "**Ritzer**")

Lemert, Charles 2017. *Social Theory: The Multicultural & Classical Readings*. Taylor & Francis.

6th edition. (listed in the readings as "**Lemert**")

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

Upon completion of this course, students are expected to be able to understand:

- (1) The different theoretical traditions to interpret the modern world
- (2) How an event, an institution, a policy can be interpreted differently from different theoretical camps in the society
- (3) The various attempts that social scientist put forward to solve the emerging social problems of the modern world

After taking the course, students should be able to understand what the concepts of "class", "state", "rationality", "social solidarity", "structure", and "function" mean, why the radicals are so different from the conservatives, and why the debates and controversies in social science are never-ending.

Assessment Tasks and Activities (ATAs) and Alignment with the course ILOs

<i>ATAs</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Describe how these ATAs are aligned with the ILOs</i>
Three Essay Exams	The three essay exams are aimed to examine students' ability to integrate the different lecture/reading materials. It will include both short essay and long essay questions	The short essay exam question will test the students' ability to explain the concepts learned in this class, while the long essay exam question will test students' critical judgment on controversial issues (e.g., they will be asked to evaluate the merit of the critical tradition versus other traditions, to explain how the concept of the critical tradition could shed new light on the current social and political problems in Hong Kong
The Short Essay	A 500-750 word short essay aimed to examine the ability of the student to apply the concepts (theories) learned in this course to understand his/her biography, society, and history	Writing the short essay will help the student to decide which theoretical tradition he/she will find most attractive (or most useful), why people from different theoretical traditions will agree (or not agree) with him/her, and how the concepts could suggest new solutions to solve the old social problems.

Topic and Reading

DATE	TOPIC	READING
Jan 31	Intro to class & social theory	Ritzer: Chapter 1, pp.1-41
The Critical Tradition of Marx and Marxists		
Feb 12	Marx's method & critique	Ritzer: Chapter 2 (pp. 43-75) on Marx
14	Marx's class & class conflict	Lemert: Pp.28-54
19	Marx on state & revolution	
21	Critique of Marx	
26	Critical School	Ritzer: Ch 8 (pp.282-309) on Neo- Marxists
28	Neo-Marxist: the state & class	
Mar 5	Neo-Marxist: world-systems	Lemert: Pp.308-313, 460-462
7	Neo-Marxist: Neoliberalism	Lemert: Pp.469-671
12	The First Exam	

The Conservative Tradition of Durkheim and Parsons

- Mar 14 Durkheim: method & suicide Ritzer: Chapter 3. Pp.76-111
19 Durkheim on division of labor & the state Lemert: Pp. 59-80
21 Durkheim on religion & sociology of knowledge
26 Parsons social system Ritzer: Chapter 7, pp.236-260
28 Parsons on power and stratification
Apr 2 Critique of the conservatism & Merton
Apr 4 conflict theory of Lewis Coser
9 **The Second Exam**

Weber and the Micro Tradition

- Apr 11 Weber on method & status group Ritzer: Chapter 4, pp.112-157
16 Weber on authority & Bureaucracy Lemert: Pp. 82-101
18-23 *Spring mid-term break!*
25 Weber on religion
30 Weberian: the rise of East Asia
Apr 30 **Deadline to submit the short essay**
May 2 Symbolic Interactionism & dramaturgy Ritzer: Chapter 10, pp.369-390
May 7 Exchange theory
May 9 Rational Choice theory
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