

**College of Social Studies
Sophomore Colloquium
Modern Social Theory**

Fall 2019
Office hours: W: 4:10-5pm and by appointment
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PAC 407

I. Introduction

During the first year of the CSS your tutorials and the colloquium all focus on the emergence and functioning of industrial society. The tutorials approach this theme from their own disciplinary perspectives. In History, for example, you will examine the modern history of Western Europe, particularly the industrial revolution and the emergence of modern, democratic politics. As you can see from the general syllabus of the colloquium, the principal academic content of this course is a selection of the major social and political theories written between 1650 and 1950. As you will learn in your tutorials, the processes of modernization and industrialization involved enormous changes in every aspect of life. While the changes were in many ways liberating, and welcome to some social groups, they were deeply threatening to others, and disruptive to all. Most important for our purposes, although they resulted from the conscious and intentional actions of men and women, the changes themselves were generally unplanned, often quite unexpected, and no one at the time had a clear understanding of the kind of society or way of life that was emerging. In many ways one can see these theories as attempts by philosophers and social thinkers to grasp the dramatic transformations that were occurring in their societies. By coming to understand their own societies better, they were able to analyze the different forms of society that were possible and to prescribe a particular form which, in light of their theories, could be seen to be superior to other attainable forms. These theories, then, were *critical* reflections on society, intended both to explain what was going on, and to criticize social reality, in part by articulating an ideal of social order and by specifying what must be done to achieve it.

Because of the critical dimension of these theories, they are important not only for what they teach us about how society works and the causes of modernization and industrialization, but also because they themselves become part of the very process of social change itself. For men and women take up these theories, or ideas inspired by them, draw up political programs, create institutions, and conduct their lives according to them. As these theories become part of society in this way, they often have consequences that are unintended by the theorists who drew them up. Thus, to look back on our history and to understand our own form of life requires that we understand the theories that have in part shaped it. As Keynes wrote in his *General Theory*,

the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are

dangerous for good or evil.¹

Thus, when you study the consolidation of the modern state, the development of the institutions of political and legal sovereignty, and the growth of new forms of the state and law, you will be studying social and political processes whose ideas were first articulated by Hobbes; when you investigate the growth of the constitutional state of the 19th century, you will find the ghost of Locke; and when you learn about the socialist movement and the creation and operation of non-market industrial economies, you will not have to look hard to see the influence of Marx.

If we must study these theories because they have become integral parts of our world, and the history of the creation of that world, we must also study them because they continue to provide the essential ideas we use to understand and explain that world. One of the principal aims of the social sciences is to develop theories that explain the widest possible range of social phenomena in terms of a few basic principles. Ultimately, the idea is to create a unified theory that could account for many aspects of social life, including such things as war, the structure of families, the level of prices and employment, political revolutions, and the forms of religious practice. Social theories ultimately rest upon certain very basic assumptions regarding human motivation, rationality, sociality and needs. In other words, they presuppose a conception of human nature and society, some image of what it is to be a person and the relationships of people to one another. In order to understand these theories, it is essential that we grasp the basic assumptions upon which they rest and the fundamental concepts they put forward.

The theories that we will be studying in this course all rest upon some conception of the person and society on the basis of which social scientists have continued to develop theories even to this day. The first theory we will study is Hobbes's *Leviathan*. In this work Hobbes sets out a conception of the person and of society that will be familiar to many of you, for in many ways it resembles the ideas that underlie much of modern economics, political science, and sociology – not to mention our ordinary, unreflective ways of talking about society. Another theory we will study is Marx's, and the connections between his theories of society and contemporary Marxist ideas are obvious. There will be such connections for all of the theories we will study this semester.

These theories also provide the frameworks within which normative issues have been and continue to be posed. If we want to understand such concepts as liberty, equality, solidarity, democracy, the public interest, justice, or alienation, then the best place to begin is with the thinkers who first enunciated them, or who first thought about them in a systematic, rigorous, way.

This course, then, has a number of intellectual objectives. First, it will provide a background for the other work you will be doing in the College by presenting some of the theories that are important components of the social and historical processes you will be studying in tutorials. Second, by studying these theories and analyzing their structures and basic assumptions, you should come to see some of the assumptions that underlie the theories modern social scientists use to explain society. This should help you become more self-conscious about your own assumptions about what is involved in understanding social life. Third, you should come to see, at least in an impressionistic way, the connection between thinking about society in a certain way and holding certain values or principles regarding how society ought to be organized. And last, you should come to see that there are a number of fundamentally different and competing ways of thinking about modern society, and what some of these differences involve.

The readings for this course are all classical texts of political and social theory, and many of them try to set out overarching views of human history, though necessarily based on information that is very limited due to the time in which these authors lived. You may wish to read or look at more recent efforts to

¹J.M Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, n.d.),pp. 383-4.

describe the large sweep of human history, drawing on advances in the natural and social sciences in the last century or two. If so, I would recommend three texts: Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1997); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011); Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015). Pinker's text is less sweeping than the other two, and focuses particularly on the decline of violence in human life in the last 800 years or so, and so is most directly germane to the concerns of our class.

One final note about the role of this colloquium in the CSS. This is the first occasion when your whole class will meet and work together on a common academic project. Thus, it is an opportunity to learn not only about the subject, but also about your colleagues. Ideally the colloquium will contribute to the development of a shared sense of membership and common purpose within your class, which can be one of the most valuable and rewarding aspects of the College experience, and something that is hard to find outside of the College setting.

The notes in this syllabus have been developed and refined over the years during which this course has been offered. They were originally developed by Brian Fay and Don Moon, but over the years they have been elaborated by many others.

II. Class Procedures and Assignments:

The class will normally meet Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 1:20 to 2:40. There is a study guide for each week, introducing the reading assignment for that unit by describing some of the general issues the readings address, and by offering a list of questions that direct your attention to essential points in the material; these guides are part of the syllabus, and begin on p. 7 below. There will be three kinds of writing assignments for the colloquium: short (2-3 page) papers, quizzes, and tutorial length (5-6 page) papers. Every week there will either be a short quiz at the beginning of class on Monday, or a short, 2-3 page paper that will be assigned ahead of time and will be due at the beginning of class on Monday. Short papers will be assigned for weeks 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12; there will be quizzes on weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 13. The first tutorial style paper will be due after fall break, on Wednesday, October 23 at noon; the second will be due after class is over, on Wednesday, Dec 11. These papers will require you to engage critically with the readings from several weeks, and will be similar to the kind of essay you will be writing at the end of the year for your comps. I encourage you to work together outside of class to discuss the reading and the questions, but each student must write his or her paper individually. During the class you may be called upon to summarize your paper in order to get the discussion started.

The short papers must be done by class time, but **one** paper may be submitted late during the semester. If you are late more than once, you will have to write a 6 page, tutorial type essay instead of the regular 2-3 page paper for each of the weeks in which you are late beyond the one allowable paper. Papers handed in for weeks in which you are absent will be counted as late. **All assignments should be uploaded to MOODLE.** If this is a problem for you, please contact me as soon as possible to make other arrangements.

Steph Aquino will be the preceptor for this class. She will hold review sessions on Sunday evenings and will also work with individual students to help with their papers and writing. I strongly encourage you to come to the Sunday sessions. The readings for this class are complex, often rather difficult texts, and you will find them more intelligible and interesting if you talk about them with other students and with the preceptor. The first preceptorial will be on Sunday, September 1; you will be notified about time and place by e-mail.

Disability Resources: Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

Books (all paperback):

978-1-55481-040-6 T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Broadview Press
0-87975-434-6 J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Moral and Legislation*, Prometheus
0 915144 867 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Hackett
0 915145 60 X John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Hackett
978-1-55481-297-4 Rousseau, *Fundamental Political Writings*, Broadview
0-521-39837-1 I. Kant, *Political Writings*, Cambridge
9781551110882 Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, Broadview Press
0 393 0904 0X K. Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Norton
978-0684836386 E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor*, Free Press
0 915144 43 3 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* Hackett
0-87220-283-6 Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, Hackett
978-0-87220-665-6 Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, Hackett

Some Notes on Writing:

In the CSS you will be doing a great deal of writing, which will give you the opportunity to improve your writing skills. We will be talking about writing in class, but here are some general notes you should bear in mind in writing your papers:

1. **Establish a focus.** A good paper has a thesis, a central idea or claim that it is making, and it presents an argument supporting that thesis. You should be able to make an outline of your paper, which will also be the skeleton of the argument you are making. It is often helpful to write out the outline – in sentence form, *not* simply as a list of topics – before writing the paper or, at least, the final draft. A good way to think about your paper is ask yourself, “What do I want my readers to believe after they have read my paper? What reasons can I offer them to think that?” If you can answer these questions succinctly, you’re off to an excellent start.
2. **Title.** The title should express the main idea or focus of your paper, preparing your reader to see immediately what you’re going to say, and why it’s interesting. Every paper written for this class must have a title.
3. **Structure and organization.** The paper should have a clear structure, with an introduction presenting the central question or problem you are addressing, a body that sets out a logical development of the reasons and evidence you are offering, and a conclusion that ties the paper together. In longer papers it is often useful to provide section headings. The introduction should generally state your main thesis or the central question you’re addressing in the paper and provide an overview of the structure of the argument.

Some specific points:

1. Please NUMBER your pages.

2. All quotations, paraphrases, and direct use of another's ideas (even if not quoted) **MUST BE** cited. Using parenthetical references (author's last name, page number); you do not have to use footnotes or endnotes in short papers. Footnotes can be used to present additional ideas, qualifications, or other points that would detract from the flow of the paper. If you are using a text other than one assigned for the class, please provide bibliographical information including publisher and date of publication.
3. Avoid common but egregious errors such as misuse of too, to or two; there, they're, or their; its or it's; affect or effect; principle or principal....
4. Since most if not all of our authors sometimes use "man" and "men" to refer to humans generally, when quoting them you should not change their language. You may refer to yourself using whatever pronoun you prefer.
5. There are a number of excellent guides for good writing. Strunk and White is a classic, especially for grammar and word usage; it also offers a useful set of "principles of composition." One option is Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. His work is particularly helpful in offering examples of how awkward passages can be rewritten, using rules or principles that are fairly concrete and address specific issues such as clarity, cohesion, emphasis, etc. (these are all chapter headings in his book). Anthony Weston, *Rulebook for Arguments*, offers a helpful discussion of how to develop (and express) an argument in a tight, logical way.

One final comment about class expectations: The structure of the CSS week means that most of you will only begin work on the colloquium after you have finished your tutorial on Friday, and that doesn't leave a lot of time for the reading and for doing the paper by Monday afternoon, and so you may be tempted to shortchange yourself, and do only enough of the reading to answer a specific question. That may often get you through the week, but only at the cost of not understanding all of the material, and taking that shortcut will hurt you when it comes to comps, or when you deal with some of these issues in your tutorials or other classes. If you are having difficulty keeping up, please don't hesitate to see me or Rosanne.

III. General Syllabus Note that the schedule of meetings for this class deviates from regular university MW classes in order to fit with your tutorials.

Week 1 (September 2/4): T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Week 2 (September 9/11): J. Bentham, selections from *An Introduction to the Principles of Moral and Legislation*, and James Mill, "Essay on Government."

Week 3 (September 16/18): John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* and "Letter Concerning Toleration."

Week 4 (September 23/25): J.J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*.

Week 5 (September 30/Oct 2): J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*.

Week 6 (October 7/9): The Enlightenment and the Idea of Progress, selections from Kant.

Week 7 (October 14/16): Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, selections.

Fall Break, October 21-22. First tutorial length paper due Wednesday, October 23 by noon. There will be no colloquium meeting on the 23rd.

Weeks 8 - 9 (October 28/30 and November 4/6): Marx, selections from *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

Week 10 (November 11/13): Durkheim, *The Division of Labor* and *Suicide*, selections.

Week 11 (November 18/20): Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*. (Mill and Nietzsche have been switched from previous years to give more time to Nietzsche)

Week 12 (November 25): J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*. Because of the Thanksgiving Break we will begin class at 12:00 on Monday and will finish class at the usual time, 2:40.

Weeks 13 (December 2/4): Max Weber, the “vocation” lectures together with selections from the anthology, *From Max Weber*.

December 11: Final paper due by noon on Moodle.