Classical Social Thought (SP212) (Last updated: 18 Dec 2018)

Semester 2, 2018-19

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3pm and Thurs 2-3pm

Course Description:
This module provides an introduction to classic ideas and debates in the evolution of sociological thought. The writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883), Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920) feature prominently. Each of these thinkers reflects a particular approach to the study of society. Their ideas have contributed substantially to our understanding of the evolution and the shape of modern societies, including how power operates and how resources are distributed within and across the different parts of society. This module also explores key contributions to social theory with regard to race and gender by important contemporaries of Marx, Durkheim and Weber and considers the historical development of sociological thinking in Ireland.

Learning Outcomes:
At the end of this course students will be familiar with the classical tradition in social thought, with a principal focus on the key ideas and approaches of Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Other key contributors to the development of sociological thought who will be discussed include: Harriet Martineau, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B Dubois, Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

Assessment: This module is assessed by midterm essay (30%) and final exam (70%)

Core texts:

- **Lemert, C.** (ed.) (2017) *Social theory: the multicultural, global and classic readings.* 6th edn [Hereinafter: *Social Theory*].

Other recommended texts:

- **Giddens, A.** (1971) *Capitalism and modern social theory*, Cambridge University Press (NUI Galway Library: 301.001 GID; one-day loan) [Hereinafter: *CMSST*].
Required reading from the above books will be made available via Blackboard.

**WEEK 1 (JAN 14)**

**Introduction**

**Reading:**

**Additional reading:**
Craib (2011) ‘The main characters and the main ideas’ in *CST*, pp. 11-22.

**PART I: WHAT IS SOCIETY AND HOW SHOULD IT BE STUDIED?**

**WEEK 2 (JAN 21)**

**Topic 1: The beginnings of a science of society**

**Reading:**

**Additional reading:**

**Topic 2: Sociology and social facts**

**Reading:**

**Additional reading**

**WEEK 3 (JAN 28)**

**Topic 1: Historical materialism**

**Reading:**

**Additional reading:**
Allan (2013) ‘The sociological imagination of Karl Marx’ and ‘Marx’s sociological
imagination’ in *Explorations* (approx. 20 pp).
Giddens (1971) ‘Historical materialism’ in *CMST*, pp. 18-34.

**Topic 2: Gender and social structure**

**Reading:**

**Additional reading:**

**WEEK 4 (FEB 4)**

**Topic 1: The primacy of social action**

**Reading:**

**Additional reading:**

**Topic 2: Ethics and society**

**Reading:**

**Additional reading:**

**WEEK 5 (FEB 11)**

**Race, discourse and culture** (lecture 1)

**Reading:**
Additional reading:

Gender, race and class (lecture 2)

Reading:

Additional reading:

PART II: SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

WEEK 6 (FEB 18)

Durkheim’s key ideas (2 lectures)

Reading:
Craib, ‘Durkheim: drunk and orderly’ in CST, pp. 63-55 (considers Durkheim’s ideas on solidarity, sociology of religion and knowledge, morality and education, and law, state and politics).
Craib, ‘Durkheim’s organic analogy’ in CST, pp. 187-203 (considers Durkheim’s theory of history and debates about his position along the conservative-to-liberal spectrum).

Additional reading:

WEEK 7 (FEB 25) – READING WEEK

WEEK 8 (MAR 4)

Marx’s key ideas (2 lectures)

Reading:
Craib (2011) ‘Was Marx a marxist?’ in CST, pp. 86-118 (considers key ideas
including: alienation, commodity fetishism, social class, ideology, state and the patriarchal family).
Craib (2011) ‘Marx and the meaning of history’ in CST, pp. 204-231.

Additional reading:

WEEK 9 (MAR 11)

Weber’s key ideas (2 lectures)

Reading:
Craib (2011) ‘The liberal Weber’ in CST, pp. 119-145 (considers Weber’s ideas about legitimacy, conflict, social groups, power, domination, class, status)
Craib (2011) ‘Weber as tragic liberal: the rise of the West’ in CST, pp. 232-238 and 248-260 (considers Weber’s sociology of religion with a focus on the ‘The protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism’)

Additional reading:

WEEK 10 (MAR 18)

The emergence of sociological thinking in Ireland (two lectures)

Reading:

WEEK 11 and 12 (MAR 25/APRIL 1)

Review and exam topics revision