

Sociology 460: Contemporary Social Theory

Fall 2011

T/Th 9:30-10:45

Meeting Place: Peabody 203

Professor Margarita Mooney

Department of Sociology

Office: 263 Hamilton Hall

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Office Hours: Tu/Thu 10-11 a.m. (in 263 Hamilton);

online (via Eluminate or Skype) by appointment.

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Department of Sociology

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Office hours: Wed. 3-4:30 p.m.-

Online Via Eluminate/Skype by appt

Please note that we will use Sakai for this course; and you are required to bring your computer to class meeting in order to use some of the discussion tools. We will also conduct class polls using polleverywhere.com, which you can use with your computer or SMS (phone).*

Course Description: To what extent do values influence the theories and methods of sociology? What common assumptions about human personhood underlie common concepts in sociology, such as power, structure, culture, and agency? In this reading, writing and discussion-intensive class, we will first review classical arguments about the role of values in sociology. Next we will discuss Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and apply them to contemporary social theories. Then we will explore competing visions of the human person contained in some examples of current thinking in anthropology, psychology and economics. Finally, we return to recent sociological theory about human persons and human communities, focusing on developing a critical, yet realist, perspective on the production and application of social science knowledge.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Leading class discussions (5%): Twice a semester you will be required to prepare a one-page analytical summary of the week's course readings and lead the class discussion for that day. You are required to make an appointment to discuss the readings with either the Professor or the TA during her in-person or on-line office hours *no later than the Friday prior to the week the readings are assigned*. These summaries must be posted on Sakai under "Discussion and Private Messages" *no later than 12 noon* the Monday prior to our class meeting. You will then be

expected to present your summary to the class to start the discussion. This assignment will be graded on an A-F scale.

Participation in Class Discussions and On-Line Discussion Forums (2%): Class participation and discussion constitutes dialogue and engagement with ideas that emerge during class; hence, participation and discussion differs from both the reading summaries and the journal and should not just repeat what you have said elsewhere. You will be graded on a scale of A-F for class participation and discussion. For example, to earn an A for class participation, you must attend every class in person and speak up for every class—either during class or on-line on the “Discussion and Private Messages” section of Sakai.

Intellectual Journal (3%): We will use the “Blog” function on Sakai to generate an intellectual journal. This assignment encourages you to keep up with the reading, enlivens class discussions, and offers a forum to record your responses to the readings, thereby personalizing the course and, at the same time, sharpening your skills in thinking critically and writing fluidly. Journal entries should be approximately 250 words and may include hyperlinks to newspaper articles, you-tube videos, or other on-line material related to our class. Each entry should (1) either quote or summarize one passage in one (or more) assigned text for that day and (2) record your reflections on the reading. Each entry should engage *one* idea in the text in some direct and thoughtful way. The journal entries are due at the start of class on the day that the reading is assigned. No exceptions. You must write one journal entry for each class meeting when new readings are assigned (approximately 22 times a semester). You are graded on completion: a score of 1 means you completed the assignment as instructed and 0 means unacceptable. We do not grade the journals for thesis, style, or grammar (but I encourage you to use these entries as a way to practice good writing). We will read and grade your journal entries in groups; you will get a grade for them in Weeks 5, 10 and 15. Your final grade for this is the number of satisfactory completed assignments/total assignments.

Two Take-Home Essays: (20% each): Due Sept. 30 and Nov. 4. You will be asked to write two 5-page essays that critically engage with the theoretical perspectives discussed in class. A description of these assignments will be posted on Sakai.

Research Paper #3: (35%): 8-page Research paper. You will pick a social science research and critique the literature on this topic using the theories and concepts discussed in class. The topic and references need to be previously approved. A description of this assignment will be posted on Sakai. Draft workshop on November 15. Final draft due Dec. 6.

Power Point Presentation on Research Paper (5%): You will develop a 10-minute Power Point Presentation on your research paper and present it to the class. Presented in class December 6 and December 15th.

Readings

All course readings will be available on Sakai.

Honor Code

The University Honor Code – which prohibits giving or receiving unauthorized assistance on graded course work – will be in effect through all exams, quizzes, and written assignments. Please read carefully the provisions of the Honor Code, make certain you understand and adhere to them, and ask me to clarify any questions you have regarding the Code. The Code is a long and valuable tradition at UNC – protect it! Read more about the honor code at: <http://honor.unc.edu/>

Class Readings and Schedule

Section I: Defining Social Sciences: What types of Science are they?

Week 1 (Aug. 23/25): Values in Social Science Research

- Weber, Max, *The Methodology of Social Sciences*, Ch.2, pp. 49-50 and 72-85.
- Durkheim, Emile. Selections from *Rules of the Sociological Method*.

Week 2 (Aug. 30/Sept. 1): Meta-narratives and virtues

- Marx, Karl. Selections from the *German Ideology*, from Tucker volume on Marx's writings, pp. 149-155, 172-173, and 176-188. *Theses on Feurbach*.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*, Ch.8-9, pp. 102-120.

Week 3 (Sept. 6/8): Aristotle & MacIntyre on Virtues and Ethics

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Ch.7-11, and Book II, Ch.1-4.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*, Ch.12, pp.160-164

Section II: Views of the Human Person in Psychology, Anthropology, and Economics

Week 4 (Sept. 13/15): Anthropology

- Benedict, Ruth, *Patterns of Culture*, Ch.3 and Ch.8, pp. 251-259.
- Wojtyla, Karol, *The Acting Person*, Ch.7, pp.267-295.

Week 5 (Sept. 20/22): Psychology

- Frankl, Viktor, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Part II.
- Skinner, B.F., *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Ch.9. (selections)
- Fowers, Blaine. "Instrumentalism and Psychology: Beyond Using and Being Used"

Week 6 (Sept. 27/29): Take-Home Essay and In-Class Discussion of Essay Drafts

** Work on Take Home Essay #1. Due Friday Sept. 30 at noon. Please upload to “Assignmetns” on Sakai. Class meetings this week will be used to review readings and answer questions about essays.**

Week 7 (Oct. 4/6): Markets and Morals: Classical Debates and Contemporary Views

- Albert Hirschman, “Rival Views of Market Society: Civilizing, Destructive or Feeble?.” *Journal of Economic Literature*. Vol. XX (December 1982), pp. 1463-1484.
- Templeton Foundation. “Does the Free Market Corrode Moral Character?” Autumn 2008. Authors: Kay. S. Hymowitz, Tyler Cowen, or others. www.templeton.org/market

Week 8 (Oct. 11/13): Economics & the Family

- Gary Becker, *Accounting for Tastes*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, chapter 7, pp. 139-156, “The Economic Way of Looking at Life”.
- Jennifer Roback Morse. *Love and Economics: Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn’t Work*. Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2001. Prologue, “The New Problem that has no Name,” pp. 3-10, Introduction “Homo Economicus and the Noble Savage,” pp. 11-22, Chp. 1 “Babies and Trust,” pp. 25-37, Chp. 2 “The Prisoner’s Dilemma,” pp. 38-49, Chp. 3 “Contracts in Libertarian Thought,” pp. 53-61, Chp. 4 “Why Marriage is Not a Contract,” pp. 62-80.

Week 9 (Oct. 18/Fall Break on Oct. 20):

- Roy F. Baumeister and Kathleen D. Vohs. “Sexual Economics: Sex as Female Resource for Social Exchange. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*” 2004, Vol. 8, No. 4, 339–363.

Revisiting Sociology

Week 10 (Oct. 25/27): Nisbet and the Sociological Tradition

- Nisbet, Robert, *The Sociological Tradition*, Ch.3, pp. 86-97, and selections of Chapter 1.
- Durkheim, Emile, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, Book 3, Ch. 1, 2, 3.

Week 11 (Nov. 1/3): Social Construction of Reality

- Berger and Luckmann “Social Construction of Reality.” (Intro and Section 1, pp. 19-43)
- Sayer, *Realism and Social Science*, pp. 10-17.

Week 12 (Nov. 8/10): Smith's Moral Believing Animals

- Smith, Christian. *Moral Believing Animals*, Chp. 2 "Human Cultures as Moral Orders"
- Smith, Christian. "Does Naturalism Warrant a Belief in Universal Benevolence and Human Rights?"

Week 13 (Nov 15/17): Social Structure and Emergence

**Draft workshop of research paper Nov. 17th

- Smith, Christian. *What is a Person?* "Chapter 1: The Emergence of Human Personhood."

Week 14 (Nov. 22/Thanksgiving is Nov. 24)

- Smith, Chp. 2 person book, selections on Critical Realism. Pp. 90-104.

Week 15 (Nov. 29/Dec. 1): Weak or Strong Social Construction of Reality?

- Smith, Christian. What is a Person? Chapter 3. "The Reality of Social Construction." Selections.

Week 16 (Dec. 6): Wrap-Up and Research Papers

- Final research paper due; Power Point presentations start.

Tuesday, Dec. 15, 8-11 am. Final Exam; Power Point Presentations of research papers.