Pol Sci 493/593: Structures of Power, Structures of Thought

This course will help you to think critically about the complicated relationships between, on the one hand, the form and content of social and political thought, and, on the other, systemic relations of power. As a case study, we will pay special attention to the interface between liberal political theory and positivist social science, as bodies of thought, and capitalism, as a social, economic and political system.

Our semester-long conversation about the issues in question will be multi-faceted, and will be carried out at multiple levels of abstraction. We will be looking at the history of ideas; at the concept of ideology; at the logic of capitalism; and at meta-theoretical questions about the kind of intellectual stance that is required in order for these issues to come to the fore. By the end of the term you will have the wherewithal to adopt a sophisticated, reflective approach to the analysis of social, political, philosophical and methodological ideas. Readings will include: Rousseau, Durkheim, Marx, Lukacs, Horkheimer, and MacIntyre.

The course will be conducted as a seminar, which means that the week-to-week responsibility for the intellectual vitality of the course falls very heavily upon the participants. Accordingly, there are process as well as content-related expectations. For most weeks, students will be required to prepare a short précis of the reading, in order to prepare for discussion. Beyond this, part of the work of the course will involve cultivating the skills and virtues needed to engage in a sustained collective intellectual enterprise.

Grade Breakdown

As far as possible, I would like you to be able to set aside worries about grades, and simply throw yourself into the intellectual project of the course. The heavy emphasis on participation in the grade breakdown is designed to help facilitate this objective: if you (1) come to each seminar fully prepared to help advance the work of the day; (2) make it a point to meet with me or contact me through e-mail the minute that you feel confused or uncertain about anything; and (3) are willing to do whatever it takes to make sense of challenging material, then the grade should take care of itself. Note that I don’t allow computers or other electronics to be used in class.

Requirements:

50% - Participation
   including 1 page abstracts of reading (excluding 1/20 and 3/10; also, you may skip one, and make one up late) – undergrads have option of only submitting reading notes

50% - Papers
   short paper (10%) - 5-6 pages, double spaced
   long paper (40%) - 8-10 pages (undergrad); 12-15 pages (grad)
Books

Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*
Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*
Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism*
Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*
MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (expected)
Shapiro, *How to Read Marx’s Capital*

All other assigned readings will be made available through e-res.

Relevance to the Five Dimensions of Education at SLU

1. **Scholarship and knowledge**: students will gain an understanding of critical social theory, especially of how forms of thought are analyzed and related back to their sociological context, from this general perspective; students will also gain basic knowledge of capital as a social structure.

2. **Intellectual inquiry and communication**: students will develop their abilities to read and to write analytically; to think conceptually; to pursue clarity; to accept ambiguity, contradiction and uncertainty. See #5 also.

3. **Community building**: in addition to the immediate relevance of the course topic to developing social awareness, students will be required to engage in collective intellectual activity throughout the semester, as participants in the learning community of the classroom.

4. **Leadership and service**: see #3 and 5.

5. **Spirituality and values**: Students will be challenged to question the “natural-ness” of dominant ideas, especially those most intimately connected to the underlying political economic structure of our society; this opens the way for the posing of normative questions about present circumstances. See also #2: collective, non-dogmatic inquiry, aimed at the achievement of insight, cultivates important intellectual and interpersonal virtues.


**Provisional Reading and Discussion Schedule**

Week 1: Introduction
   No reading for first class meeting

Week 2: The Socio-Historical Production of Subjectivity I - Dialectics
   Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*,

Week 3: The Socio-Historical Production of Subjectivity II - Social Categories, Social Facts
   Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, selections
   Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, selections

Week 4: The Unique Logic of Capitalist Relations of Production
   Marx, *Capital*, selections
   Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism*, chapters 1 and 2
   Recommended: Shapiro, *How to Read Marx's Capital*, pps. 1-92 (relevant portions)

Week 6: Capitalism as a Social Form
   Marx, *The German Ideology*, selections
   Heilbroner, chapters 3 and 4
   Raymond Williams, “Hegemony”

Week 5: Alienation, Freedom and Species-Being
   Marx, selections from *1844 Manuscripts*;
   Marx, *Capital*, “On the Fetishism of Commodities”
   William James Booth, “The Limits of Autonomy: Karl Marx’s Kant Critique”

Week 7: False But Real Appearances
   Re-read Marx, *Capital*, “On the Fetishism of Commodities”
   Heilbroner, chapter 5
   Derek Sayer, *Marx and Weber*, selections
   Wood, “The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism”

Week 8: Ideology and Forms of Thought in Capitalism
   Lukacs, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” (sections 1-2)
   Adorno, *Lectures on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, selections
SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Instrumental Reason - I
   Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason*

Week 10-12: Instrumental Reason – II
   MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (expected)

Week 14: Capitalism and Social Science
   Geras, “Marx and the Critique of Political Economy”
   Ollmann, “What Is Political Science?”

Week 15 – Review, reflections