The study of social theory is profound and deeply rewarding – that is, as rewarding as it is challenging. The insights that we can gain from theorizing the social world don’t come passively, nor do they always come quickly. But when we are able – through rigorous study – to grasp the theories explored in this course, we may find the result to be exhilarating, and even jarring. Jarring like losing your religious faith, or gaining it. Jarring like Neo’s emancipation from the Matrix – albeit less gooey and with better food. For the student of social theory, epiphany is the order of the day.

Social theory provides us with a set of tools – a series of lenses – through which we can begin to look at the world anew. In fact, as we hone our skills we can even begin to create new lenses of our own. Exactly what we will find when we look through these lenses remains to be seen. This is why social theory is so liberating, and indeed destabilizing. Defenders of the status quo often see social theory as a threat to the prevailing order of things. It is.

Academia, at its best, is a conversation – an open space in which we can share our ideas with one another and together enrich our understanding. This, I hope, will be the environment of our class. Our course is just that: ours, not mine. Your voice is indispensable to the learning of each of us. Find it. Use it. And value the voices, perspectives and life experiences of your classmates, even if they clash with your own. It is my hope that our class will become an open space in which we can explore new ideas and learn from one another.

Texts:

* Recommended (not required): Any dictionary of sociology.

Grading:

Assignments should be turned in electronically using D2L. To access our course page, go to d2l.pdx.edu, and log in using your Odin username and password. Once you are in our class page, click on “Dropbox” in the navbar across the top of the page, and then click on the appropriate assignment. You may submit your work as a doc or a pdf file. All dropboxes will close at 11:59pm on their corresponding due date.

Late work will be accepted until, but not after, Tuesday 12/4. All late work will be reduced one letter grade. Please submit late work in the “Late Assignments” dropdown in D2L.

15% Attendance – Attendance is required. If you are forced to miss class for any reason, you may make up your attendance points by writing a 2 page, double-spaced essay analyzing an experience you had during the week you missed using the theories we studied that week.

5% Quote of the Day – This exercise is intended as a fun way to share what we took from the weekly readings. (It’s also a small nudge to encourage us all to come to class having read the assigned materials!) Each class meeting, 2-3 randomly selected students will be asked to share their favorite quote from any of the week’s readings and to explain why they chose it. Student’s who are ready with a quote will be given full credit. Students who do not have a quote will receive no credit. Our first “quote of the day” will be Thursday of week 1, 9/27.
30% Correspondence Journal (Due 10/18 and 11/29, worth 12% & 18% respectively) – Too often, when we read the work of theorists, we are encouraged to think of them as unquestionable intellectual authorities, not fellow thinking, feeling subjects. In your Correspondence Journal, you will practice engaging with theorists in the latter manner. For each assigned reading throughout the term, you will compose a brief (250 - 300 word) letter to the respective theorist. The content of your letters is up to you, however it should be clear to me that you carefully read the material and engaged with the theories. You might, for example, pose questions, critique, offer thanks for new insights, point out flaws, etc. Feel very free to be critical, but keep your letters cordial. Please organize your journal with weekly headings as well as sub-headings for each letter. Only submit one file, not separate files for each letter. Please address the theorist by name, such as Dear Max or Dear Professor Du Bois. Your Correspondence Journal will be graded on a rubric, with equal weight given to “thoroughness” and “demonstrated understanding of core themes.”

20% Visualizing the Canon (Due 10/30) – In small groups, create visual representations of Marxist, Weberian and Durkheimian interpretations of a social issue of your choice. You may use any medium you like, however your representations must clearly and insightfully identify varying perspectives and analyses between each theorist. Emphasize differences between the theorists. On the day you turn it in, your group will briefly present your work to a group of your peers (not graded). Each group member will receive the same grade.

30% Theoretical Essay (Due Thursday 11/15) – In this essay you will build upon the work of any single theorist we’ve explored in class by analyzing an aspect of your own lived experience and drawing from library research. Remember, this is an exercise in social theory, not memoir. Your essay should use your own experience as data with which you will critique, support or expand upon one theorist’s work. Only turn in polished, thoughtful and thesis driven work. Your essay should be no longer than 4 pages, double space. Essays that exceed this limit will be marked down. You will also draw from and cite at least three non-assigned books or peer reviewed articles. You are welcome to cite readings from class, but they will not count toward the three-source requirement. If you are new to academic research, I would encourage you to start by exploring the “Sociological Abstracts” search engine on the PSU library web page. To find it, from the library homepage click on “databases and articles,” then select “S” and scroll down to Sociological Abstracts. You may also find the journal Theory and Society (the top theory journal in sociology) to be helpful. Please see me with any questions or to explore your theme. I’m happy to support you however I can!

Extra Credit – You will have the option to complete up to 5 extra credit assignments, each worth 2% of your overall grade. Therefore, if you complete all 5, you will raise your mark in the course a full letter grade. Extra credit assignments are negotiable, usually involving attending a free public event and writing a one-page single-spaced reflection essay relating the event to the themes of our course. They can be turned in any time until (but not after) Tuesday 12/4.

Weekly Breakdown:

**Week 1 (9/25 – 9/27) An Introduction to Modernity**
- Readings: Allan Chapter 1: Sociology, Theory, and the Modern Agenda Pp 3-12

**Week 2 (10/2 – 10/4) Karl Marx & the Material Roots of the Social**
- Readings: Allan Chapter 3: Contradictions in Capitalism: Karl Marx (1818-1883) Pp 39-70
- Du Bois The Forethought & Chapter 1: Of our spiritual strivings

**Week 3 (10/9 – 10/11) Karl Marx Continued**
- Du Bois Chapter 2: Of the dawn of freedom & Chapter 3: Of Booker T Washington and others

**Week 4 (10/16 – 10/18) Max Weber, Culture & Modern Bureaucracy**
- Correspondence Journal Due Thursday (7 letters)
Readings: Allan Chapter 4: The Irrationality of Rationality: Max Weber (1864-1920) Pp 71-106
Du Bois Chapter 4: Of the meaning of progress & Chapter 5: Of the Wings of Atalanta

**Week 5 (10/23 – 10/25) Émile Durkheim & the Organismic Analogy**
Readings: Allan Chapter 5: The Problem with Diversity: Émile Durkheim (1885-1917) Pp 107-136
Du Bois Chapter 6: Of the training of black men

**Week 6 (10/30 – 11/1) Theorizing the Self and Society: George Herbert Mead and Georg Simmel**
*Visualizing the Canon Due Tuesday*
Readings: Allan Chapter 6 The Modern Person: George Herbert Mead and Georg Simmel Pp 137-168
Du Bois Chapter 7: Of the black belt & Chapter 8: Of the quest of the golden fleece

**Week 7 (11/6 – 11/8) The Late Modern Person**
Readings: Allan Chapter 12: The Late Modern Person and the Situation: Erving Goffman, and Harold Garfinkel, and R.S. Perinbanayagam Pp 327-362
Du Bois Chapters 9: Of the sons of master and man & Chapter 10: Of the faith of the fathers

*Theoretical Essay Due Thursday*
Du Bois Chapter 11: Of the passing of the first-born & Chapter 12: Of Alexander Crummell

**Week 9 (11/20 – 11/22) Cultural Oppression: “Bamboozled”**
Readings: Du Bois Chapter 13: Of the coming of John, Chapter 14: Of the sorrow songs & Afterthought

**Week 10 (11/27 – 11/29) Looking Forward**
*Correspondence Journal Due Thursday (10 letters)*
Readings: Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze “Intellectuals and Power” available free online at:

**Final Meeting (Tuesday 12/4 10:15 – 12:05) Discussion: Theory for what?**