Contemporary Political Theory
RPOS 603 (10128), Spring 2018
Thurs. 5:45 – 9:25 HS 13

Office Hours
Main Campus, Humanities 016. Thurs. 10:10-12:10
Downtown Campus, Milne 218. Thurs. 3:30-5:30

Contemporary Political Theory:
Introduction to Critical Theory

This course has four overall objectives: 1) to introduce students to the “Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School” by focusing on the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno and to some extent Walter Benjamin; 2) to introduce students to at least one newer form of critical theory that helps to elaborate and develop while challenging central dimensions of Horkheimer and Adorno’s thought; 3) to expand our horizons regarding what counts as “critical theory” by engaging important recent texts in feminist theory and at the center of debates regarding the “Anthropocene”; 4) and, finally, to introduce students to the work of Juergen Habermas, the founder of the second generation of critical theorists who trace their origins to the Frankfurt School.

Course and Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is to teach students how to carefully read and interpret texts, how to identify key concepts on which theoretical arguments are based, and how to use these arguments and concepts to develop critical analyses and understandings of modern democratic societies and their politics. Students will be taught to think about the complex matter of what counts as politics and how the definition of politics changes for political theory as modern democratic societies evolve. These objectives will contribute to teaching students how to formulate concepts and arguments of their own in their written work (term papers) and in oral presentations (class participation and formal presentations).

Course Requirements and Grading

There are three requirements for this course for graduate students:

First, all graduate students are required to write a research paper of 15-20 pages, to be submitted by or on, though no later than, May 15 (the final day of examinations). Papers are to be submitted electronically to mschoolman@albany.edu. A prospectus for this paper of 3-5 pages and a working bibliography are due Thursday April 5 in hard copy. Students are encouraged to meet with Professor Schoolman during office hours to discuss term paper projects. Research paper: 50 % of the final grade. Professor Schoolman will write a term paper along with the class that he will make available to the class for discussion on one of the regularly scheduled evenings of the seminar.
2). All graduate students are expected to make oral presentations on assigned reading for the week. The number of readings on the syllabus and the number of graduate students in our seminar will determine the number of presentations each student will make. Presentations should be between 15-20 minutes and equal 25% of final grades. Presentations should accomplish the four following tasks:

(1) summarize the author's argument in the assigned reading;
(2) relate the author's argument to past readings and class discussions;
(3) raise critical questions about the reading;
(4) form an argument for and/or against the reading.

3. Class participation: 25% of grade. No student can receive the grade of 'A' in this class without a record of regular class participation.

Attendance Policy: as class meets only once a week students are strongly discouraged from missing any classes unless it is unavoidable for reasons of illness or other personal matters. Attendance is taken each class.

The grading scale will be as follows: A= 93-100, A-= 90-92, B+= 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72, D+ = 67-69, D = 63-66, D- = 60-62, E=below 60. If you feel you have been awarded an unfair grade, you may contest it. However, if you want to do so, it must be done in writing and no sooner than 48 hours after you have received the grade. In your written complaint you need to provide a specific account of what in particular you are concerned about.

Classroom Etiquette

Students are permitted to bring beverages to class. Food is not permitted. Cell phones are to be turned off upon entering class. Students who use computers for note taking are not permitted to use their computers for any other application during class time. Students must arrive to class on time and be seated by 5:45. Students unable to arrive at class on time should consider another course, as the material missed in lecture cannot be made up and late arrivals disturb the class.

Required Course Readings

All required texts – but two – are available on Blackboard. As lectures will analyze readings and students can only follow these analyses with the readings in front of them, it is recommended that students print hard copies of reading material to bring to class or have laptops on which readings are downloaded and can be referred to in class. Or, alternatively, students should consider purchasing the required texts, as graduate students may well want these texts as permanent additions to their personal library.
Available on Blackboard

Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*

**Assigned Reading from this text available on Blackboard:**
“Traditional and Critical Theory”
“The Social Function of Philosophy” & “Postscript”
“Art and Mass Culture”
Publisher: Stanford University Press (May 2002)

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
Publisher: Stanford University Press (May 2002)

Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry*
Publisher: Routledge; 2nd edition (May 30, 2001)

Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*
Publisher: University of Minnesota Press (December 1998)

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics*
Publisher: Continuum Books (2004)
ISBN: 0826489540
Morton Schoolman, "Introduction: Past as Prologue” (to be added)

Juergen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*
Publisher: Polity Press; New Ed edition (December 17, 1992)

**Assigned Reading from this text available on Blackboard:**
“Discourse Ethics”

To Be Purchased

Lori Jo Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir*
Publisher: Duke University Press, 2017
ISBN: 9780822369707

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*
Publisher: Duke University Press, 2011
ISBN: 9780822346333
**Weekly Reading Assignments**

**Jan. 25. Course Introduction**

**Feb. 1.** Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory of Society*

- “Traditional and Critical Theory” (Presenter: )
- “The Social Function of Philosophy” & “Postscript” (Presenter: )
- “Art and Mass Culture” (Presenter: )

**Feb. 8.** Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

- “The Concept of Enlightenment” (Presenter: )
- “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (Presenter: )

**Feb. 15.** Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

- “Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment” (Presenter: )

Theodore Adorno, *The Culture Industry*

- “The Schema of Mass Culture” (Presenter: )
- “Culture Industry Reconsidered” (Presenter: )

**Feb. 22.** Theodore Adorno, *The Culture Industry*

- “Culture and Administration” (Presenter: )
- “How to Look at Television” (Presenter: )
- “Transparencies on Film” (Presenter: )
- “Free Time” (Presenter: )
- “Resignation” (Presenter: )

**Mar. 1.** Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

- “Art, Society, Aesthetics” (Presenter: )
- “Situation” (Presenter: )
- “The Ugly, the Beautiful, and Technique” (Presenter: )
- “Natural Beauty” (Presenter: )

**Mar. 8.** Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

- “Art Beauty” (Presenter: )
- “Semblance and Expression” (Presenter: )
- “Enigmaticalness, Truth Content, Metaphysics” (Presenter: )
- “Toward a Theory of the Artwork” (Presenter: )

**Mar. 15. Spring Break, No Class**

**Mar. 22.** M. Schoolman, “Introduction: Past as Prologue” (Presenter: )

Mar. 29. Lori Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir*, “Introduction” and chapters 1 & 3 (Presenter:  

April 5. Lori Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir*, Chapters 4, 6, & “Conclusion” (Presenter:  

April 12. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, “Preface” & chs. 1 & 2. (Presenter:  

April 19. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, chs. 5, 7, & 8. (Presenter:  

M. Schoolman, “Reconciliation with Nature”


May 3. Habermas, “Discourse Ethics” (Presenter:  

____________________________________
Absences from Examinations: Students are expected to attend all examinations, except for a compelling reason. A student who learns that he or she will miss a quiz, examination, or other evaluation must notify the instructor as soon as the conflict is noted. In cases where documentation is called for, appropriate documentation must be provided to the instructor or to the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education as soon as possible (see section below on Documentation and the Role of Undergraduate Education). All documentation must be presented before the end of the semester in question. Unless faculty have received a letter from the Office for Undergraduate Education stating that we have received appropriate documentation, you should ask to see original copies of medical excuses; do not accept photocopies.

Faculty Obligation to Provide Opportunities to Make Up Missed Work

i. If the cause of the absence is documented hospitalization, a death in the immediate family, a personal emergency, or a religious observance, the instructor must administer a makeup exam or offer an alternative mutually agreeable to the instructor and student.

ii. If the cause of the absence is a major academic conference at which the student has significant participation, a varsity athletic contest (excluding practice sessions and intra-squad games), a field trip in another course, or some other compelling reason, the student must notify the instructor involved well in advance. The instructor is expected to provide, if at all possible, an alternative by which the student will not be penalized as a result of the absence. Any conflicts between student and faculty in agreeing on the alternative may be presented for resolution to the chair of the department in which the course is offered. The resolution proposed by the chair is advisory, leaving the final decision to the faculty member.

Fraudulent excuses for missed examinations are considered violations of academic integrity and are grounds for academic and disciplinary penalties.

Documentation and the Role of Undergraduate Education: Instructors may, at their discretion, require or waive documentation of absences. Although we (the Office for Undergraduate Education) require students to discuss missed examinations and other penalized absences directly with instructors, we do, in some cases, serve as a central repository for any required documentation. For example, occasionally events such as hospitalization or a death in the family cause students to request that the Office for Undergraduate Education write a letter of excuse. This is most commonly done when a student faces an unexpected absence from the University and asks us to contact all course instructors simultaneously. It also allows students to maintain confidentiality regarding circumstances associated with personal or family emergencies. In these cases, the Office for Undergraduate
Education will send a letter requesting that special consideration be given to the student, after proof is provided by the student in the form of documentation from, or phone consultation with, credible professionals or others. Although the Office for Undergraduate Education provides this service, we strongly encourage faculty to use their best judgment when students have appropriate documentation for legitimate absences and not to rely on our office when it is not necessary. It should be made clear that while the preceding paragraphs describe circumstances under which faculty are required or expected to provide opportunities to make up missed work, the burdens of promptly contacting the instructor and providing appropriate documentation rest with the student.