

**The University of Chicago**  
**The College**  
**Self, Culture and Society I**  
***PERSPECTIVES ON MODERNITY: THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION***  
Autumn 2014

Instructor: Robert Owens (Sociology, PhD student); browens@uchicago.edu  
Social Science Research Building 401, MWF 11.30am–12.20pm  
Office hours: F 10–11.30am Gates-Blake 231 *or by appointment* (email me with a few suggested times)

**What is this course about?**

This course is about many things at once. It is an introduction to social science by way of some of the classical sources that were influential in the development of the modern disciplines of economics, political science, sociology and anthropology. It is a bit about the history of ideas. It is also a thematic introduction to a more or less coherent tradition of thought known as “social theory.”

Social theory in turn is largely about answering four questions: how can we explain (1) **social action**, (2) **social order**, (3) **social change**, and (4) how does **our society differ from other human societies, including those of the distant past?** Rousseau, Smith, Marx, Weber and Polanyi will all have something to say about all four of those questions, as will most of the authors you will read in the winter and spring quarters. The “our society” that is their reference point is Europe from about 1750 (Rousseau’s early writings) to 1944 (Polanyi’s *Great Transformation*). This is of course different from our “our society” (or “my society” and “your society,” if you like). This difference is worth noting even though we will not have time in *this* class to assess the relevance of such different standpoints.

Fortunately, our authors’ standpoints turn out to be immensely fruitful for us, because Europe in the period 1750–1945 underwent an immense transformation—so much so that many have argued that Europe’s modernization made it fundamentally different from all other human societies and from its earlier self. An essential part of this change was the development of a new social organization of production. The social organization of production will therefore be the thematic focus of our thematic overview of social theory, and we’ll conclude with some recent texts that try to bring the social theoretical questions up to date with reference to 21st century economy and society.

This course is about one thing over and above these other things, however. That is teaching you **how to read complex social scientific arguments, how to assess them for internal consistency and how to write about them clearly and critically.** These are the skills on which my teaching will be focused and on which you will be graded. Developing them will entail learning to recognize different kinds of claims and learning to parse them analytically: empirical and theoretical arguments, normative and positive, descriptive and speculative. **Read every week’s readings closely**, and read them **multiple times**, especially if you leave class feeling like you read a different book from the one we just talked about. Page counts will be modest but I expect you to come to class prepared to talk and to make close reference to the texts.

### Readings:

All required books (marked \*\*) are on order to the Seminary Coop bookstore and on reserve in the Regenstein. Excerpts (marked ‡) are on Chalk. **Please print and bring to class the excerpted readings.** I will ask you to **keep laptops off the seminar table.** If the cost of printing is a burden, please let me know and we will work something out.

\*\*Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Modern Library)

\*\*Karl Marx, *Marx-Engels Reader* (ed. Robert Tucker; Norton)

\*\*Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Talcott Parsons; Routledge)

\*\*Karl Polanyi, *Great Transformation* (Beacon)

‡Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (trans. and ed. Victor Gourevitch; Cambridge)

‡Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Liberty)

‡Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions" (in *From Max Weber*, trans. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills; Oxford)

‡Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed* (Holt)

‡Tyler Cowen, *Average is Over* (Dutton)

### Assignments:

- First paper, 5pp., assigned Oct 15 and due Oct 20.
- Second paper, 5pp., assigned Nov 12 and due Nov 17.
- Oral exam final (15 minutes approx., details forthcoming).
- Discussion questions (2–3 times in the quarter).

### Grading and expectations:

Final grades will be calculated as follows: First paper (20%), second paper (30%), final oral exam (30%), in class participation and discussion questions (20%).

Discussion questions should be posted on Chalk by 5pm the day before class. Dates for discussion questions will be assigned on the first day of class.

Late papers will be downgraded one grade per day (A to A-, etc.) for each day they are late.

Papers more than 10 days late will not be accepted and will receive a failing mark. Extensions are unlikely. Your best bet for getting an extension if you need one is to approach me early on and professionally and (in the case of a medical emergency) with a note from a medical professional. If you submit papers electronically, it is your responsibility to make sure that I have received them by the deadline.

### On academic honesty:

**If you plagiarize any part of any paper, you will fail the course.** Your basic rules of thumb should be, **do not put any text that you did not write yourself into your paper except for clearly referenced quotations from the primary texts, and cite all your sources such that any reader could locate them without difficulty.** Remember also the goals of this course. You are trying to develop your independent ability to understand some important, mostly old, texts and the arguments they contain. Sources beyond the assigned readings will usually not help and may be counterproductive.

Beyond these guidelines, I understand that standards of academic honesty are not fixed for all time and that in the age of Internet and Wikipedia, there are legitimate sources of confusion

about what constitutes plagiarism. We will discuss this briefly on the first day, and if you have any doubts, **talk to me**. Carelessness and misunderstanding are not excuses.

**Schedule:**

**MON., SEPT 29:**

Course introduction—no reading.

**WED., OCT 1:**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*.  
Read: Epistle Dedicatory, Preface. (pp. 111–130).

**FRI., OCT 3:**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*.  
Read: Part I. (pp. 131–160).

**MON., OCT 6:**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*.  
Read: Part II, Notes. (pp. 161–222).

**WED., OCT 8:**

Adam Smith. *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.  
Read: pp. 9–15, 82–92, 179–193.

**FRI., OCT 10:**

Adam Smith. *Wealth of Nations*.  
Read: pp. xxiii–xxvi, 3–43, 284–288.

**MON., OCT 13:**

Adam Smith. *Wealth of Nations*.  
Read: pp. 53–99.

**FIRST PAPER ASSIGNED WED., OCT 15 IN CLASS**

**WED., OCT 15:**

Adam Smith. *Wealth of Nations*.  
Read: pp. 3–99.

**FRI., OCT 17:**

Adam Smith. *Wealth of Nations*.  
Read: pp. 745–746, 819–846, 876–878.

**FIRST PAPER DUE MON., OCT 20 BY 5pm (submit in class or by email)**

**MON., OCT 20:**

Karl Marx. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.

Read: pp. 70–81 in *Marx-Engels Reader*.

**WED., OCT 22:**

Karl Marx. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.

Read: pp. 70–81 (read again!), 81–98 in *Marx-Engels Reader*.

**FRI., OCT 24:**

Karl Marx. *German Ideology*.

Read: pp. 149–163, 172–174 in *Marx-Engels Reader*.

**MON., OCT 27:**

Karl Marx. *German Ideology* and *Grundrisse*.

Read: pp. 221–226, 236–244 in *Marx-Engels Reader*.

**WED., OCT 29:**

Karl Marx. *Grundrisse*.

Read: pp. 247–250, 278–292 in *Marx-Engels Reader*.

**FRI., OCT 31:**

Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*.

Read: pp. 469–470, 473–483 in *Marx-Engels Reader*. [It is not required, but read to the end of the *Manifesto* (p. 500) if you are interested in the intellectual history context of Marx's political writing.]

**MON., NOV 3:**

Karl Marx. *Capital*.

Read: pp. 302–312, 319–336, 336–364 in *Marx-Engels Reader*.

**WED., NOV 5:**

Karl Marx. *Capital*.

Read: pp. 384–417, 422–438 in *Marx-Engels Reader*.

**FRI., NOV 7:**

Max Weber. *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Read: Author's introduction, Part I. (pp. xxviii–50). [Notes are not required, but turn to them if they seem to you to signal something especially important or interesting.]

**MON., NOV 10:**

Max Weber. *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Read: Author's introduction, Part I (again).

**SECOND PAPER ASSIGNED WED., NOV 12 IN CLASS**

**WED., NOV 12:**

Max Weber. *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Read: Part II (as much as you can). (pp. 53–125). [Notes are not required, but turn to them if they seem to you to signal something especially important or interesting.]

**FRI., NOV 14:**

Max Weber. *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Read: *Protestant Ethic*, Part II (finish). (pp. 53–125).

**SECOND PAPER DUE MON., NOV 17 BY 5pm (submit in class or by email)**

**MON., NOV 17:**

Max Weber. “Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions.”

Read: entire. (pp. 323–359 in *From Max Weber*).

**WED., NOV 19:**

Karl Polanyi. *Great Transformation*.

Read: Chs. 1–7. (pp. 3–89).

**FRI., NOV 21:**

Karl Polanyi. *Great Transformation*.

Read: Chs. 8–14. (pp. 90–186).

**MON., NOV 24:**

Karl Polanyi. *Great Transformation*.

Read: Chs. 15–18. (pp. 187–230).

**WED., NOV 26:**

Discussion-only class—no reading.

**FRI., NOV 28:**

No class (Thanksgiving weekend).

**MON., DEC 1:**

Tyler Cowen. *Average is Over*.

Read: pp. 3–10, 19–27.

Barbara Ehrenreich. *Nickel and Dimed*.

Read: Intro and one of chs. 1, 2, 3.

**WED., DEC 3:**

TBD. [NB there will be reading on the last day—to be determined, depending on the interests and tastes of the class.]

**FINAL ORAL EXAMS WILL BE HELD DURING READING PERIOD AND EXAM PERIOD (DEC 4–DEC  
12)**