

Foundations of Social Theory

University of Notre Dame · Instructor: Omar Lizardo

Discussion

Description

Course info, except for syllabus, is visible to the public.

Calendar

People

Library

Syllabus

Settings

You may have noticed that a big part of the reason why this course is called "foundations" is because we are going to have to read a lot of stuff reading by long-dead white males of European ancestry. There's a reason for this, and is connected to what I have touched on above: coming up with good answers to big questions requires both skill and imagination, and the really good answers have been so good as to have stood the test of time. That's why they are "classics" we read the old stuff, because that gives us some true and unsurpassed examples of incredibly creative answers to some really big and difficult questions. They are examples for you an me to follow in thinking about this big questions. That's why we read them.

while in other courses you have asked and been exposed to sociological answers to "small" and "medium-sized" questions, in this course we will almost exclusively deal with "big" (and sometimes "really big") questions. That's the only thing that makes this course different from other courses. Not the subject matter, nor the way that we go about trying to answer questions about that subject, but the scope of the questions that we will be asking. In fact, what makes this course distinctive is that there is no question that will be seemingly outside of our purview. The only restriction is that the question be answerable using "human and only human" means and that the question has some relevance to the study of persons as social beings. In this course then, you can think of "theory" as synonymous with "big, important question." Some examples of "big, important questions" are:

1. What is the essence of human beings?
2. Where does religion come from?
3. Can there be a society without a religion?
4. Why is Western European culture so different from other cultures?
5. What keeps people in society together?
6. Can there be a society without economic inequality?
7. What's more important conformity or individuality?

You will soon realize that what makes the sociological classics distinctive is that they expanded the kind of questions that could be asked by these merely human means. They did this by taking those questions away from philosophy and theology (fields which had traditionally monopolized the answers to some of these questions) and by denying the claim of philosophers and theologians that those questions could not be answered by human methods, but that they required some sort of "super-human" and non-empirical source of knowledge (divine or "intuitive") to be answered. Instead sociologists argued that we can use empirical means to get answers to these "big" questions.

Instructors



Omar Lizardo

Details

University of Notre Dame
Spring 2014

Syllabus

Syllabus is not visible to the public.

Requirements

1. Attendance and Active Participation in Class Discussions (5%). An important part of class discussions involves raising questions about the readings. Don't be shy to ask a question or say "I didn't understand what Durkheim meant by..." most of your classmates are probably as clueless as you are. You will also have an opportunity to raise issues and question (anonymously) in our online discussion forum at the Coursekit web site.
2. Electronically Submitted Daily Reading Summaries (15%). Each student will be required to submit a short (no less than 150 words but no longer than 500 words) summary of the readings scheduled for that day via the Calendar tool before class meets for that day (no later than 12:00pm on the day of class; this deadline will be inflexible since it will be set by the electronic submission system).
3. In Class Writing (10%). Occasionally, I will ask you to write "quick reflections" based on a question or prompt related to specific issues that we will be dealing with that class. Sometime I may call on you to "present" what you have written (this counts as participation).

4. Short Take-Home Essays (40%). Every week I will assign a medium-length (minimum 1000 words) essay on one of the questions that we will be dealing with that week. The essay will ask you to summarize the answers offered by that particular theorist as well as your evaluation of that answer. You are responsible for completing six (6) at the end of the semester. Essays topics are divided into three groups corresponding to each of the classical theorists we will be dealing with this semester. YOU ARE REQUIRED TO COMPLETE AT LEAST ONE ESSAY FROM EACH GROUP (the list can be found at: <http://goo.gl/QTXWM3>). If you don't this counts as a "minus one" (meaning that you will have to do seven total from the other two groups to receive full credit). You are always welcome to submit more than six, and I'll count that as extra-credit. This essay should be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins in a 12-point serif font like the "Times New Roman" font in Word. Fonts like Arial and Comic Sans are not allowed. In addition your name (and the name of the course) should be on the header of the page not on the actual body of the paper.

Final Paper Assignment (30%). This is the main assignment for the course. You will be asked to write an 2500-4000 words "theory" paper. This paper will address a "big question" of interest to you, using ideas from the readings that we will be doing throughout the semester as a resource in coming up with a preliminary answer to that question. An early "idea" draft will be due early in the semester, a draft "introduction" and reference list will be due at the time of the midterm, a full draft will be due after that and then you will submit a final draft instead of taking a "final exam." I will distribute more specific instructions at each of those times.

Grading Policy ▲

1. Electronically Submitted Daily Reading Summaries. These will be graded on a simple 0, 1, 2 scale. Zero (0) means that you gave no indication of having done the reading (I'm the sole judge of that), One (1) means that you gave some indication of having done the reading, and two (2) means that you gave full indication of having done the reading.
2. In-class writing. In class writing will be graded on a 0-5 scale, with zero (0) indicating no appreciable effort to deal with the question, and five (5) indicating an outstanding level of effort (most of the time, expect a grade in-between). I will return quick reflections back to you as soon as they are graded.
3. Short Take-Home Essays. The short take-home essays will be graded on a 0-10 scale with zero (0) indicating no appreciable effort in connecting the question to the assigned readings and explicating the issue from the point of view of the theorist in question, and ten (10) indicating an outstanding level of effort in both comprehending and summarizing what the theorist said, as well as connecting what the theorist said to the relevant question.
4. Final Paper Assignment. Your final paper will be graded according to a simple letter scale going from A through F. You will receive a "running-grade" on this paper. The first grade will be assigned at the midpoint of the semester, and then a final-grade will be assigned at the end of the course.

Final Grading Scheme ▲

A : > 95%
 A- : 90-94%
 B+ : 87-89%
 B : 83-86%
 B- : 80-82%
 C+ : 77-79%
 C : 73-76%
 C- : 70-72%
 D : 60-69%
 F : < 60%

Readings ▲

There will be two primary sources of material in class: required texts and assigned readings. All of the assigned readings that are not in the required text will be available in the course website in pdf format.

There are no required texts for this course. All of the readings will be made available in pdf format in the course website.

Code of Conduct Policy ▲

As an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame, you are bound (whether you know, like it or not) by the University's academic code of conduct (see <http://honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code/>). This means that you better be familiar with it, because not knowing the rules is not an excuse; you can violate the conduct without knowing it. So (re) familiarize yourself with it:

In particular, note that you have already pledged yourself (when you signed it) to the following oath:

"As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty."

"Academic dishonesty" covers a wide range of behaviors and practices, some of which (appropriately enough given the nature of this course) you may think are not such a big deal at all (e.g. copying and pasting a sentence from a Wikipedia article without citation or attribution).

Note that any violation of the Academic Code of Conduct can result in serious consequences. They range from failing the assignment, to *automatic* failure from the course, to expulsion from the

university.

The most important section of the Academic Code of Conduct is that which governs "Personal Academic Behavior." (see <http://honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code/#student> responsibilities). In particular:

- 1) All work submitted for a course is accepted as a student's own work, unless otherwise understood and approved by the instructor.
- 2) Students may not, without proper citation, submit work that has been copied, wholly or partially, from another student's paper, notebook, or exam. Nor may students without proper citation submit work which has been copied, wholly or partially, from a book, article, essay, newspaper, the Internet or any other written or printed or media source whether or not the material in question is copyrighted.
- 3) Written work that paraphrases any written or printed media material without acknowledgment may not be submitted for a course. Ideas from books and essays may be incorporated in students' work as starting points, governing issues, illustrations, and the like, but in each case the source must be cited.
- 4) Any on-line materials students use to gather information for a paper are also governed by rules about plagiarism, so students need to cite electronic sources as well as printed and other sources.
- 5) A student may not turn in the same work for two or more different courses he or she is taking in an academic term unless each professor involved has authorized students to do so in advance.
- 6) Students may not submit for one course any work that has been used to fulfill the requirements of another course previously taken at this or any other school without obtaining permission of the current professor in advance.
- 7) Students must be aware that honor code violations are not limited to the actions prohibited in the guidelines above. Any kind of dishonesty related to academics is a violation. Other examples of academic dishonesty, apart from giving or receiving unauthorized aid as described by the instructor in each course, include but are not limited to listing false reasons for taking a make-up examination, falsifying data and failing to take responsible action as required in section IV.D below.

Attendance Policy ▲

I will take attendance each day. You get three (3) unexcused absences during the semester. I will dock half a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence, for any reason after that. Furthermore, attendance rates, as an objective measure of student participation, will be used as a deciding factor in the determination of final grades, should a student's point total place her/him "the line" between letter grades. Students will be allowed to make up work missed due to absences ONLY if they are excusable, such as debilitating or highly contagious personal illness, illness of dependents, death in the immediate family, or legal obligations. To be excused for an absence the student must either notify me in advance of the class and receive my approval, OR document the absence in writing (by a doctor's note, letter from the Dean's office, etc.) on the first day the student returns to class. Evidence for excused absences will NOT be accepted at any later date. Note that if you are more than 15 minutes late, that will count as an absence. Tardiness is disruptive. It is not professional, nor will it be appreciated.

Class Conduct ▲

Here are some things to watch for:

- As a sign of respect to your fellow classmates, please avoid walking in late or leaving early.
- Also, avoid stepping out of the classroom while I'm talking (take care of any business, physiological or otherwise before class).
- Please turn off cell phones and other electronic communication devices that could produce some sort of disturbing noise before class.
- Note that Notebooks, laptops or anything that has a screen or is connected to the Internet are absolutely not allowed.
- Please don't read the paper, talk to your friends, or pass notes during class. Not only are those things disrespectful and disruptive to your classmates and to me, but they also limit your ability to participate in class discussions and understand the material.

Office Hours ▲

My office hours are TR from 12-1p. If these hours do not work for you, you can always send me an email and we can set up a time to meet.

Topics

Classica Social Theory

