Classical Theoretical Foundations of Studies in European Societies

Course Description

St. Petersburg
2007
**Time:**
05.03 – 16.03.2007, Mo – Fr, 10h00 – 12h30

**Lecturer:**
Prof. Dmitry V. Ivanov

**Aims of the Course:**
The course is aimed in analysis of theoretical discourses which formatted field of social sciences in 18th – 19th centuries and remain patterns of reasoning and points of reference for current social studies. The general aim of the course is to provide students with knowledge of the historical development and conceptual legacies of modern social sciences and to foster students’ analytical skills. By the end of the course students should:

- know basic principles and concepts of the most influent in modern social sciences theories created in domains of philosophy of history, political economy, and early sociology;
- be able to find and critically interpret basic theoretical ideas and conceptual roots and influences in texts on social issues;
- be able to reveal interrelations between theoretical discourses and historical conditions and tendencies of modernization of European societies.

**Teaching Methods:**
Students attend classes, read the recommended literature, and prepare assignments on the basis of the texts. Students may be asked to write short (2-3 pages) essays and make oral presentations on the current topics. In the class lecturer gives brief presentation of problem(s) to be considered, makes introduction and conclusion on text(s) and moderates the group discussion of outlined questions.

**Examination Requirements:**
The final written exam is based on all course issues and materials and includes evaluation of:
1) the student’s contribution into class discussions (including one oral presentation with handout materials and one Power Point presentation),
2) the course essay (10-12 pages),
3) the knowledge of principles and concepts of different classical theories (test).
List of Themes:

1. Introduction: Discursive Formation of European Modernity
2. Enlightenment Thought: Philosophy of History
3. Enlightenment Thought: Political Economy
4. Social Science: Positivism
5. Social Science: Historical Materialism
6. Classical Sociology
7. Counter-Modernist Thought: Cultural Criticism
8. Conceptual Legacies of Today’s European Studies

Topics for course essays:

1. Social Effects of the Division of Labor (A. Smith, K. Marx, E. Durkheim)
2. Origins and Social Consequences of Capitalism (K. Marx, M. Weber)
4. Foundations of Liberalism (J. Locke, A. Smith, H. Spencer)
6. Relations between Humanity and Sociality (T. Hobbes, J. Locke, K. Marx, F. Nietzsche)
05.03, 06.03 – Theme 1. **Introduction: Discursive Formation of European Modernity**

General and elementary foundation of ‘Studies in European Societies’ is a view of Europe as an object for scientific research. Such scientific approach presupposes theoretical argumentation – development of models of human reasoning and behavior, and empirical evidence – observations of people’s life. Tradition of rational knowledge (based on theoretical argumentation and empirical evidence) of society have emerged in the specific cultural environment. Specificity of European societies as they were developed in 17th – 19th centuries was determined by industrial capitalism, mass democracy, and secular ideology of enlightenment.

It is the development trajectory of European societies that is conceptualized in forms of knowledge institutionalized in that period: political economy, philosophy of history, social science. Problems, conflicts, debates arisen in European countries were reflected in conceptual controversies between ‘state’ and ‘civil society’; ‘social order’ and ‘social progress’; ‘solidarity’ and ‘individualism’ etc. Such dilemmas provide framework of reasoning and paths of argumentation about social, cultural, political, and economic issues as well as represent in the intellectual domain sociocultural shift from traditional society to modern(ized) society.

These patterns of discourses have revealed, influenced and even constructed Modernity as historically and culturally specific type of social life. The basic concepts and framework of argumentation in the current studies aimed in European societies are deeply rooted in the consciousness of modernity as it contrasted (positively or negatively) with traditionality.

Classical foundations of social science(s) can be identified with rational knowledge and sociocultural Modernity as patterns of thinking and general points of reference. Philosophy of history, political economy, social science of 18th – 19th centuries remain classical even after strong criticisms on Eurocentric and modernist world-view and formation of multicultural and postmodernist discourses in the late 20th century.

**Questions and tasks for discussion:**

- How can the term ‘modernity’ be defined in relation to society and to patterns of thought?
What does mean ‘modernity’ in different domains of activity – in economy, politics, arts, knowledge?

What are main features of Weber’s concept of rationalism and its role in emergence of Western civilization?

Answer Durkheim’s question about ideology of French revolution of 1789 as a theory of modern European society.

How could geographic and cultural aspects of the European identity be distinguished?

Readings to class:


Further readings:


Saiedi N. The Birth of Social Theory: Social Thought in Enlightenment and Romanticism. Lanham (Maryland): University Press of America, 1993


06.03 – Theme 2. Enlightenment Thought: Philosophy of History

Rationalist vision of social life was presented for the first time in the philosophy of history developed among others by T. Hobbes, J. Locke, I. Kant, G. Hegel. In works of
leaders of Enlightenment thought the ‘human natural freedom’ ordered by ‘rules of reason’ is considered to be a foundation of society. Hobbes in his treatise ‘Leviathan’ (1651) influenced by the civil war in England formulated the main problem to be resolved through (re)construction of the human history: how could the commonwealth (society) arise when the men were free and had individual wishes? The Hobbes’ model of ‘public contract’ presupposing restriction of individuals’ natural rights and transfer of rights to a sovereign formatted basic analytical as well as ideological controversy ‘political authority & bureaucracy vs. people’s autonomy & democracy’.

The history of humankind was theorized by critics and at the same time followers of Hobbes – Locke, Kant, and Hegel in different models of the development of human condition from the ‘natural stage’ to the ‘civil stage’. The common feature of the central for all Enlightenment philosophers concept of civil society is representation of the latter as an objective reason providing combination of society’s power and individuals’ freedom. The meaning of history is generally defined in classical works on philosophy of history as a progress in notion of freedom.

Having been formulated in the context of struggle between absolutist state and bourgeoisie in the 17th – 18th centuries, dilemma ‘political authority & bureaucracy or people’s autonomy & democracy’ remain a cornerstone of conceptual framework of social studies. Analysis of social structures, processes, problems in modern Europe can be reduced to analysis of balance / relations between ‘civil society’ and ‘state’.

Questions and tasks for discussion:

- What are key propositions of Locke’s theory of the beginning of political (civil) society?
- Formulate differences between concepts of natural and civil states developed by Hobbes and Locke.
- What are according to Habermas main features of Hegel’s concept of modern society?
- What are historical events that can be identified as referents of theories of state and civil society developed by Hobbes, Locke, and Hegel?
- What did term ‘civil society’ mean in philosophical discourse of 17th – 18th centuries and what does it mean in current scientific and political discourses?
Readings to class:

Further readings:

13.03 – Theme 3. Enlightenment Thought: Political Economy

Classical political economy as it has been founded by Adam Smith is more a theory of society than a theory of economy. Presented in ‘*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*’ (1776), the Smith’s theory contains as its basic elements: inspired by Hobbes and Locke notion of the nation’s wealth as a power of political body, the concept of social order favorable to the wealth creation, and the concept of role of the state policies.

The central point of classical political economy is proposition that division of labor is economically productive and socially constructive. The fundamental social role of the division of labor is its support to social order as interdependence and cooperation of free individuals and its contribution into economic and cultural progress. Society is viewed as a ‘commercial society’ based on exchange among individuals as producers and consumers of goods / services. The competition among people looking for their private interests and ignoring proclaimed by authorities so called nation’s interest leads by a natural way to the general prosperity of society. Civil society regulated by the ‘invisible hand’ of competition does not need ‘visible hand’ of state governing. The state should perform only functions of ‘night guard’ providing conditions for the normal existence of the civil society.

Smith’s theory of self-regulated civil society was developed in debates with mercantilism and concepts of state absolute sovereignty. Being the representations, reflections, and solutions of the 18th century economic and social problems, Smith’s concepts
have formatted modern economics as discourses about relations and contradictions between capital and labor, market and welfare state, market liberalism and state interventionism. European ‘mediate way’ policies of ‘social market economy’ actually are based on principles borrowed from A. Smith: the most efficient instrument of providing welfare is competition that socializes profits when creates possibilities for all to be consumers.

Questions and tasks for discussion:

- What are according to Smith sources and conditions for growth of the nation’s wealth?
- How can be identified positive and negative social effects of free competition regime in the modern economy?
- Try to evaluate utility of Smith’s models of market as an ‘invisible hand’ and state as a ‘night guard’ in relation to current economic processes in European countries.
- Which ideas of classical political economy can be used as arguments for and against contemporary welfare system?

Readings to class:


Further readings:


13.03, 14.03 – Theme 4. Social Science: Positivism

Foundations of scientific (as contrasted with metaphysical) approach to social processes / problems were formulated by A. Comte in his system of positive knowledge. According to Comte the positive (based on observed facts and practically useful) knowledge must displace prejudices and speculative discourses. Scientists ought to elevate politics to the rank of a science of observation developing a new branch of knowledge – social science.
Formulated in ‘Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for Reorganizing Society’ (1822), Comte’s project of ‘social physics’ (later named by him ‘sociology’) has taken functional structures providing stability of society (‘social order’) and structural changes provoking transformation of society (‘social progress’) as objects of studies and targets of policies. Main concept of Comte’s theory, the ‘law of three states’ of social evolution actually is generalization of three phases of French history in the late 18th – early 19th century: ancient regime, revolution, restoration.

French version of positivist social science (A. Comte) is based on value of social consensus while British version (H. Spenser) is oriented to value of individual freedom. Following Comte, Spenser in ‘Social Statics’ (1851) developed the concept of social state of humankind as the state of consensus maintained when individuals’ needs were satisfied. Depicting evolution of society as the ‘super-organic stage’ of general evolution of the nature, Spenser in contrast with Comte did not introduced specific revolution phase between ancient and modern social orders because he took as a model of evolution British history in the 19th century which provided him only with facts about ‘step-by-step’ reforms.

Developing the theory of evolution from the ‘military society’ to the ‘industrial society’, founders of sociology reformulate in scientific terms the problem initially presented in the Enlightenment thought. That general for modern European thought problem is ‘How is it possible to balance social solidarity / stability and individualism / competitiveness?’

Questions and tasks for discussion:

- What is a place and role of ‘social physics’ (sociology) in Comte’s system of scientific knowledge?
- How can scientific status of current sociology be defined?
- What is a difference between metaphysical theories of Enlightenment theories and positive theory proposed by Comte?
- Compare approaches of A. Comte and H. Spenser to society’s evolution.
- Distinguish components of concepts of industrial society elaborated by Comte and Spenser and main features of current society in European countries.

Readings to class:


**Further readings:**


14.03, 15.03 – Theme 5. **Social Science: Historical Materialism**

Alternative form of social science was proposed by K. Marx and F. Engels in the concept of historical materialism. Marx’s project of social science was developed in ‘*Paris Manuscripts*’ (1844), ‘*Theses on Feuerbach*’ (1845), ‘*The German Ideology*’ (1846), his political economy was presented in ‘*The Capital*’ (1867), and Marxian revolutionary ideology was formulated in ‘*The Manifesto of Communist Party*’ (1848).

According to historical materialism, the base and driving force of human history is production of means of subsistence. Producing their means of subsistence, men are producing their actual mode of life and form of expressing their life. The labor is basically social relationship. Production of material conditions of life is simultaneously production of society ‘relations of production’ are social relations arising in the production process.

Marx in his own way has interpreted key conceptual problem of European Modernity ‘order vs. progress’: social order is considered to be a system of relationships based on mode of material production and social progress is viewed as a revolution driven by struggle among social classes. The history is considered as the society’s development process marked by progressive stages of material production. In Marxist theory the modern social order – capitalism is an obstacle to social progress, and the human condition which can combine solidarity and freedom must be reached through radical revolution abolishing capitalism, division of labor, class differentiation, and exploitation.
Orthodox Marxism based predominantly on political economy and communist ideology points out the revolutionary role of the class conflict while Neo-Marxism oriented to social theory (re)constructs Marx’s initial idea of emancipation of humankind.

Actually historical materialism can be interpreted as a theory of the European revolutions of 1848. The well grounded theory of the rise of industrial capitalism was generalized by Marxists and presented as the theory of the whole human history. Concepts of formation and revolution express specificity and properties of bourgeois mode of life, so Marxism can be qualified as radical bourgeois world-view.

**Questions and tasks for discussion:**

- What are main points of Marx’s critical approach to Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy?
- How depends according to Marx form of society on form of property?
- Compare concepts of division of labor developed by Marx and Smith.
- Compare approaches of Comte and Marx to driving forces of society’s evolution.
- Which concepts and arguments of Marxism can be effective tools of analysis of today’s European societies?

**Readings to class:**

Marx K. *The German Ideology*, pp. 1-66


**Further readings:**


15.03, 16.03 – Theme 6. **Classical Sociology**
Projects of social science elaborated by Comte, Spenser, and Marx tended to become hermetic philosophical systems, and sociology as special branch of scientific knowledge had to be constituted through development of properly scientific concepts of subject-matter and method. The famous works of E. Durkheim, M. Weber, F. Tönnies, G. Simmel published at the end of the 19th century and at the initials of the 20th century have become classics of sociology because they have influenced current research activities and formatted patterns of reflections on subject-matter and methodology of scientific investigation of social life.

Durkheim in ‘The Division of Labour in Society’ (1893), ‘The Rules of Sociological Method’ (1895), ‘Suicide’ (1897) presents subject-matter of sociology as constituted by social facts that are modes of activity, thinking, and feeling which exist apart individuals and have coercive power in relation to individuals. Method of sociology is experimental method because social facts must be considered as things. Social facts avoid the researcher’s control and the only possibility for sociology to be experimental science is comparative method.

Weber in ‘Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ (1905), ‘Economy and Society’ (1921) proclaims that social actions constitute the subject-matter of sociology. The cause of action is the subjective meaning which is not observable but can be interpreted. The properly sociological method of interpretative explanation should be exercised through construction of ideal types.

Durkheim’s concept of social facts and Weber’s concept of social action provide two different approaches to relationship between structures and agency in social life. The common for all classics of sociology subject-matter is modern society contrasted with traditional one. According to Durkheim the modern society is defined by specific type of structure – integration through division of labor. In Weber’s terms specificity of the modern society is rooted in rationality of actions. Sociological studies, theoretical as well as empirical, have contributed into modernist controversial discourses about ‘order’ and ‘progress’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘individuality’ etc.

Questions and tasks for discussion:

- What are corresponding types of social integration distinguished by Durkheim?
- How does Weber use his typology of social action to explain the emergence of the industrial capitalism and political bureaucracy?
- How can sociology developed by Durkheim and Weber be characterized in relation to early social science proclaimed by Comte and Marx?
- Compare concepts of modern society elaborated by Durkheim and Weber.
Try to characterize contemporary European societies using Durkheim’s concept of two types of solidarity.

Readings to class:

_Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society. Selected Writings_. The University of Chicago Press, 1973, Chapters 6-8, pp. 63-133


Further readings:


_Durkheim E. The Division of Labour in Society_. London: Collier, 1964


16.03, 17.03 – Theme 7. Counter-Modernist Thought: Cultural Criticism

Disappointment with industrial economy, liberal democracy, and mass culture was provoking not only social critique (as in cases of Comte and Marx) but also critique of rationalism, evolutionism, and humanism as foundations of the modern thought. Negatively interpreting modernization of society, some European social thinkers appealed to archaic forms of culture and biologic origins of human activities as well as to non-European forms of culture and thought. Basic for Enlightenment contradiction between natural condition (primitive, barbarian) and civil(ized) condition in critical concepts is displaced by contradiction between life / creativity of culture and machinery / functionality of civilization.

The most prominent counter-modernist philosopher of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century F. Nietzsche in ‘The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music’ (1872), ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’ (1885), ‘On the Genealogy of Morals’ (1887), ‘Twilight of the Idols’ (1888) presented his concepts of archaic ‘Dionysian’ aesthetics, genealogy of morals, ‘will to power’ and demonstrated relativity of basic values of European culture. The most controversial Nitzschean concept of
‘super-human being’ (Übermensch) can be interpreted as specific version of common for that period conceptual problem ‘traditional society vs. modern society’ reformulated as ‘culture vs. civilization’ and resolved in the ultra-modernist way: super-humanity beyond current norms and views.

Inspired by Nietzschean philosophy, O. Spengler in ‘Decline of the West’ (1918) distinguished in his theory of civilizations’ life-cycle organic growth of culture and mechanical increase of civilization. Qualifying modern European societies as late phase of so called Faustian civilization, Spengler revisited Eurocentric view of the society evolution and presented it as a false universalism.

Extended during the 20th century in the existentialist philosophy (Heidegger, Sartre), critical theory (Horkheimer, Adorno) postmodernist theory (Foucault, Baudrillard), counter-modernist current has been integrated into the modern discursive formation as a necessary reflexive and critical counter-part of rationalist & positivist mainstream.

**Questions and tasks for discussion:**

- How does Nietzsche’s concept of ‘will to power’ undermine ideology of Enlightenment?
- What are according to Nietzsche the main features of the modern society (Western civilization)?
- Compare critiques of bourgeois society by Marx and Nietzsche.
- Try to evaluate Spengler’s concept of ‘decline of the West’ in the context of current processes in Europe.

**Readings to class:**

Nietzsche F. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. pp. 1-54


**Further readings:**


Spengler O. *The Decline of the West*. Oxford University Press, 1991


17.03 – Theme 8. Conceptual Legacies of Today’s European Studies

Enlightenment philosophical and economical theories, early social science, and classical sociology have introduced society as an objective reality to be scientifically studied and managed. The conceptual means developed by classics and used till now for description, explanation, interpretation of the European societies (nation-state, civil society, individual freedom, social solidarity, civilization, evolution etc.) are conditioning framework and logic of social studies as studies of the modernized social order contrasted with the traditional one. But now the discursive formation of European modernity is strongly challenged by ideas of postmodernism and globalization.

Leaders of postmodernism in social sciences M. Foucault, J.-F. Lyotard, J. Baudrillard have proclaimed that so called rational, objective knowledge is a kind of discourse privileged not by truth content but by oppressive power arisen with Modernity. By the end of 20th century Modernity comes to its end: modernist values are distrusted, sociality based on those values is disappeared, and as a result social studies losing their subject-matter become simulation of scientific activities. Leader of opposition to postmodernist movement in social sciences J. Habermas, recognizing normative content of modernist concept of scientific knowledge, defends Modernity as sociocultural project to be continued.

Theorizing globalization, R. Robertson, A. Appadurai, U. Beck contrasted society as old subject-matter of social studies constituted and supported by nation-state with transnational flows and networks which constitute global socicultural spaces as new phenomena to be researched with radically new conceptual means.

Postmodernist discourse and theories of globalization provoke debates about relevance of classical legacy. Compromising concepts like ‘postmodern sociology’ or ‘global society’ are introduced to combine classical legacies with new developments but they can not avoid question about legitimacy of use of classical theories. Should their basic concepts be considered as classical foundations providing us with legitimate patterns of researchers’ activities or as ‘zombie-concepts’ misleading such activities under radically new conditions?

Questions and tasks for discussion:

- What are the problems the positivist social science faces?
- What are main points of Foucault’s critique of the modern scientific discourses?
• How can the term ‘postmodernity’ be defined in relation to society and to patterns of thought?
• How does Habermas argue the legitimacy of idea of modernity?
• Evaluate relevance of classical concepts of society for current social studies.

Readings to class:

Further readings:
Literature:


Berlin I. *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment.* Oxford University Press, 1978


Durkheim E. *The Division of Labour in Society.* London: Collier, 1964

*Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society. Selected Writings.* The University of Chicago Press, 1973


Habermas J. *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1987


Locke J. *Two Treatises of Government.* Cambridge University Press, 1970


Saiedi N. *The Birth of Social Theory: Social Thought in Enlightenment and Romanticism.* Lanham (Maryland): University Press of America, 1993


Spengler O. *The Decline of the West.* Oxford University Press, 1991
