Syllabus: Social and Political Theory

Aims of the course:
To promote an understanding of the roots of modern social thought and its classic authors in their contexts.

The history of social thought from Antiquity and theology in late Medieval days to post-Modernism is accounted for from a perspective of "secularization", a process embryonic already in Thomas Aquinas. The course includes themes such as: The localization of "switchpoints" in the history of ideas, such as Enlightenment, the Controversy over method (Methodenstreit) and "1989". The early emergence of social science between Renaissance and Enlightenment. The development from early contractarianism to modern constitutionalism ("From natural law to natural rights"). Special emphasis on the background to - still crucial - paradigmatic divides around the year 1900, such as value intrusion and objectivity, and unified science vs empathetic approaches. The role of neo-Kantianism ("Back to Kant"-movement). The proper pursuit of intellectual history. The utility vs the interpretation of the classics. Intellectual migration and reciprocity over the Atlantic ocean. Critical scrutiny of recent concepts, including for instance the prehistory of the concept of "civil society".

Learning Outcome:
The intellectual history of modern SPT should “hang together” as a process; not merely appear as scattered “lighthouses in the dark”. The role of the classics in theoretical discourse (“data or colleagues?”) should be understood from different perspectives, of utility vs interpretation, as well as the potentials and limitations of the Western canon for recently conceptualized areas of inquiry.

OUTLINE OF SESSIONS:

1. How to approach the classics, or "Utility vs Interpretation of the classics", or "the proper pursuit of intellectual history".
This first session will deal with the problem of presentism/retrospectivism vs historicism/contextualism. We take our departure in Jeffrey C Alexander's eloquent essay on "The Centrality of the Classics" (1987) and confront it with the mementoes for the proper pursuit of intellectual history, which we learn from Quentin Skinner and others. There is perhaps no real solution to this perennial problem - but a fair degree of problem awareness certainly countervails a lot of theoretical overinterpretations and "premature closures". Session includes a brief review of main themes in Antiquity ("the discovery of politics") and Medieval thought (various doctrines on the division of labour between Pope and Emperor, etc). Some still very crucial concepts, such as virtue, natural law, the concept of time, etc, are Greek inventions (or become part of the Western heritage through the Greeks). Esp. modern communitarianism draws on traditions from the city state.

"Murderous Machiavelli" or "Old Nic" has been conceived rather differently in various contexts. His real significance is as an early pioneer of instrumental policy-analysis, as reflected in The Prince, his manual for statecraft (1513). This is both debateable and arguable, but traits such as non-natural law, calculability and the rational economic actor are discernible in embryonic form, elements that points ahead not only to Hobbes, but also Bentham, Max Weber, Gunnar Myrdal, as well as Parsons and Habermas, all contributing to the secularization of social thought.
Machiavelli's career and writings are accounted for, as well as his position in the long line of secularization of social thought. His pioneering modern political science takes place at the same time as the birth of the modern state itself.

Hobbes is the "Newton" of social science and elaborates the secularizing themes we met already in Machiavelli's body of thought, thus laying a firm basis for later thinkers in matters of power and legitimacy, such as Max Weber, Parsons and Habermas. Contrary to popular belief Hobbes is not an advocate for sovereign divine rule - but for rational individual utility as the basis for legitimacy of a calculable order; in this sense he is also an early "liberal", of sort.

Already his contemporaries realized his radical anti-natural law consequences. His "apostle" Samuel Pufendorf was actually also accused for heresy, resulting in the most vivid academic controversy this far in Sweden, The great Pufendorf-controversy in Lund, in the early 1670s. Pufendorf's main work *The Officio Homini* has been issued in about hundred editions, most recently in Cambridge, UK, in the early 1990s.

Similarities and differences between Grotius, Hobbes and Pufendorf are accounted for, as well as the prehistory (Thomas Aquinas) and the paradox that natural rights, as an embryo for written constitutions with defined rights and obligations, start to flourish about the same time as natural law slowly breaks apart, its philosophical basis eroding.

It is not immediately clear to neophyte readers how a utilitarian point of departure could lead to a minimal state, as in the case of Bentham and the libertarians of today, and an almost absolute state power, as in the case of Hobbes. Neither is it clear why Hobbesianism could be synonymous to atheism, yet a huge part of Leviathan being an exegesis of the bible.

4. Enlightenment and the rise of "polytheism" (including ideologies as secular religions).
Basically the Renaissance and the Enlightenment are the same, with regards to crucial elements, but two stages in a development.

Under this label we account for a number of thinkers relevant for the breakthrough of a more secularized social science, scholars such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Payne, Hume, Adam Smith, Diderot, all contributing to a distinction between belief and knowledge and an increased scepticism and less exegetics. Kant is introduced, because of his relevance for neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism. The physiocrats and the Utopians are briefly accounted for.

The essential historical context is also briefly outlined.

5. The 19th Century. From Ranke vs Comte to Schmoller vs Carl Menger.
The 19th century witnessed the birth of sociology as well as positivism (if we disregard some "early birds" in the prehistory, such as Mandeville and Montesquieu). The 19th century is both the century of history as well as of the natural sciences - and in mid century there are even strange attempts at a "merge". One might characterize the main gulf as one between history and theory. This is reflected in the differences between Ranke and Comte (they never debated with each other but are illustrative for our purposes), later to be repeated in the great Methodenstreit between the Austrian marginalist school and the younger historicist school. This is a conflict never quite resolved.

6. Karl Marx and his followers.
Marx is basically to be understand as a pre-neo-Kantian and a Hegelian - in this sense old fashioned and outmoded - but he adds to the understanding of economic life, albeit with lingering elements of metaphysics, such as monocausality and value-objectivism. He is also influenced by Ricardo, as well as French Utopianism.
The basis of his political economy are accounted for, as well as later interpretations. A paradox is that he has been much referred to in areas in which he hardly produced anything, such as theories of imperialism, and that his present presence on the academic scene seemingly is strong in the USA ("analytical Marxism"), while his European interpreters, such as Altvater and the so called *Kapitallogische Schule* and others have been "fading away". This also goes for French structuralist Marxism (Althusser, Poulantzas), which in a "symptomal reading" could be understood as a combination of historical materialist theory and modern secular neo-Kantian (or “Humeian”) methodology. Another paradox is that Marx has generated so much of epistemological and methodological debate, despite the fact that his own production in that particular field is tiny, essentially a dozen of pages in Introductory parts of pre-works to *Das Kapital* from around 1850.

Marx’s theoretical works are likely to survive both ideological and exegetical abuse and will remain classics in both political sociology and political economy.

Max Weber calls for a contextual understanding and has many teachers and pupils, due to his very strategic position in intellectual history, touching upon most of the crucial paradigmatic divisions in social theory, most important the problem of how to deal with the risk for uncontrolled value – intrusion. "Three Streite, two currents, and one predicament" is a simplifying slogan to catch his crucial location in a formative period. He is partly “moss-grown”, since he dealt with problems of his own time and ambience, unaware of our problem horizon and disciplinary identity crises today – yet in some respects quite relevant for even post-Modernist themes. He has to be interpreted in the light of context, tradition and formative influences.

"From value freedom to value-orientation, from value orientation to the ideal-type", or "From history and jurisprudence to sociology". Weber is simultaneously both a positivist and an anti-positivist, due to his synthesis between “hermeneutics”(Dilthey) and neo-Kantian nominalism Rickert). His methodology appears as a “slippery soap”.

9. Max Weber III. Receptions (Parsons, Schutz, Lazarsfeld & Oberschall, Lukács...) Just like many authors like to pose as Goethe, many scholars like to pose as Weber. In fact most central paradigms in social science are launched as interpretations of Weber, resulting in competing images and controversies of interpretation, debates with a continuing omnipresence and relevance still today. The "Durkheimian" reading by Parsons is flawed in many ways; nevertheless Weber being built into the basic foundations of sociology probably is crucial to the making of him as a classic.

10. Paradigmatic conflicts of today and some recent strands
A brief review of some recent paradigmatic divides, such as value intrusion and objectivity, approaches, such as "structuring theory" and "universal pragmatism" and concepts, such as Globalization, post-Modernism, multiple modernities, Risk society, civil society, etc...The session will include a brief thematization of neo-eclecticism, "Giddens and his critics", Rorty, Habermas, Bauman, Dahrendorf, Popper, Bourdieu and Ulrich Beck.

11. Return to the theme of secularization and "Quentin Skinner and his Critics", or "The utility vs the interpretation of the classics revisited". "The long line of secularization" has been the main organizing concept in this course; and it is now time to return to it, in light of what we have learned. One of the optional alternatives
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for residual themes below might be utilized as a case, to problematize the scope and function of intellectual history and the present day and future relevance of the classics for our theory formation.

12. Evaluation and/or residual themes.
In this session we are free to pick for scrutiny themes that have been overlooked or merely superficially touched upon, i.e. for instance such as:

a. Gunnar Myrdal's policy analysis, as a following up of Weber and Hägerström. Texts by Gunnar Myrdal himself, as well as contributions to a recent symposium on "The Myrdals and Modernity", in International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society, Spring 2001, will be utilized, in an attempt to understand piecemeal social engineering from a historical perspective.

b. Tocqueville and "the totalitarian element in democracy" (The "populist problem" which we find already in Rousseau and which might be discussed in terms of democracy vs constitutional rights).

c. "Between Renaissance and Enlightenment". Utilizing texts by Heilbronn, Björn Eriksson, thinkers such as Adam Smith, Ferguson, Vico, will be further scrutinized for their role in the emergence of pre-institutionalized sociology.

d. Herbert Spencer. Spencer is enormously influential in not the least the USA - and is also an important instance of social-Darwinian positivism and an important contemporary to Marx.

e. The Leipziger Schule. An obstructed path in German intellectual history. Lamprecht, Freyer, Gehlen and others appears as far most of positivists than is usual in the German intellectual ambience.

f. Martin Luther and early state formation As the case of Sweden illustrates, the modern state was born out of a combination of taxation, war, central bureaucracy and national bible translations, sessions 2 and 3 above won't exhaust the topic.

g. Multiple Modernities (and the Axial Age). This is a fairly recent (or recently vitalized) discussion connecting to ideas in works by Eric(h) Voegelin and more recently S N Eisenstadt, Johann Arnason and Bjorn Wittrock, to some extent Randall Collins, a theme that could in a rhetoric manner be characterized as “The West and the Rest”; also involving counterfactuals. The take off to Modern capitalism and rationality took place in the Occident, which was by no means un-evitable. It touches upon a central Weberian theme too.

h. Leo Strauss on Machiavelli and Hobbes: a counterperspective.
I think it is important to make clear to the students that my interpretation of Machiavelli and Hobbes is not exactly the only one (although pretty common) and that scholars such as Kenneth Minogue and Leo Strauss have other opinions. This should be made clear already in session 2 above - but might call for further elaboration.

i. "Post-1989" and social theory. Evidently Marx is out and Weber still going strong. This is an exaggeration though, since Weber was quite time-bound with a problem horizon alien to many of the problems of today, yet also relevant to several of them. This theme is a "multivalent" one and might also include such topics as transformation processes, secession, identity and the definition of community, etc.

j. The communitarian synthesis. The communitarian movement offers a way out of the stalemate between laissez-fair liberals and socialists, yet it is standing on the shoulders of many forerunners and it remains an issue if there is anything genuinely new in this approach. According to Zygmunt Bauman there are racist bedfellows in the communitarian bed, yet communitarianism provides a pragmatic “Greek” solution to problems of civility and pluralism.

k. Habermas vs Schmitt. Juergen Habermas’s “universal pragmatism” represents an Utopian revival, the dream of consensus through discussion, an old Socratic idea, while
Carl Schmitt sees friends and foes (“we” vs the “identity giving other”) as core concepts in politics. In Schmitt’s decisionism ultimate top-values are more an existential choice than a fruit of reason. However, there are links between Habermas and Schmitt. The Rousseauan problem of “the general will” and how to treat the dissidents, or in Tocquevillian terms the totalitarian element in democracy, seems to remain a virulent theme.

**Teaching and examination.**

The teaching consists of one formal lecture and one work-shop every week during twelve weeks. Normal rules for active participation apply to the course. The grading is based upon oral as well as written assignments, with emphasis on presentation of reaction papers and essay-writing (term papers).

**Set titles** for term papers:

1. Hobbes (Pufendorf), Locke, Rousseau and Bentham on natural law and natural rights (“From Natural law to Natural Rights”, or “The Demise of Natural Law”, or “Hobbes vs Locke”).

2. The Legacy of ??? (for instance: Comte/Saint-Simon, Marx, Machiavelli, Dilthey, Tocqueville, Durkheim) in social research and/or social engineering.


4. Homo Oeconomicus vs Homo Sociologicus (could be re-formulated to “The sociological Tradition” [in contrast to the rational choice-tradition] or “Scottish Enlightenment and the Birth of sociology”, or “The controversy over Method Today and Yesterday”).

5. Historicism vs positivism in the 19th century (could be –reformulated to for instance “Marx vs Weber” or “Neo-Kantianism vs Hegelianism”)

6. Talcott Parsons vs Paul F Lazarsfeld
Literature:

Primary sources:
A selection will be made early in the course, texts such as Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Parts of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, an essay by Marx, three essays by Max Weber, texts by S Pufendorf, Kant, J S Mill, Nietzsche, etc.


Texts from Sabine (see below). It does not matter which edition, since this book is good for use until about 1830, and later periods will be covered by other texts, such as parts of Giddens (1977), Iggers, Eliaeson, etc.

References:


"Historicism", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*.


Kelley, Donald R: "What is Happening to the History of Ideas?", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1990.


Sabine, George H: *A History of Political Theory*. Several editions, orig 1937, later eds with Landon Thorson as coauthor.


Åsard, Erik: "Quentin Skinner and his Critics", in *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 1987.

In addition a selection of texts by Q Skinner, A Giddens, H H Bruun, S Turner, Wallerstein, Whimster, Horkheimer, Wittrock, Therborn, H-P Mueller, Peter Wagner, Camic, Swedberg, R Collins, Fukuyama, Rorty, etc (to become specified).