

24.635: Topics in Critical Social Theory Spring 2024

Description:

This course explores topics arising within critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, disability studies, working class studies, and related interdisciplinary efforts - both historical and contemporary - to understand and promote social justice.

Description for 2023: We will go through the chapters of my forthcoming book *Doing Justice to the Social*, from Oxford University Press. I will be writing brief postscripts to the published papers.

Instructor:

Prof. Sally Haslanger

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Office hours: please use my Calendly for scheduling (<https://calendly.com/shaslang/>)

Time/Place: Tu 2-5pm, 32-D831

Texts will be available on Canvas: <https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/24970>

Zoom link for snow days, illness, etc.: <https://mit.zoom.us/j/91395753236>

Bibliography on related topics: <https://tinyurl.com/criticaltheorybib>

Requirements for enrolled students:

- Completion of all the required reading and active participation in class is expected.
- Tuesday mornings by 10am (when class is held later in the day), each student should contribute at least two questions/reflections on the readings on a shared google doc. (Listeners are also encouraged to contribute.)
- Proposals for a term paper (1-2 pages) are due **Tuesday, April 16**. Proposals should articulate a question to be addressed, a tentative outline of an argument for a tentative conclusion, and a short bibliography.
- For those intending to complete the course on time, full drafts of papers must be submitted by **Tuesday, May 7**. Final papers are due **Tuesday, May 21**. For those taking an incomplete in the course, drafts of papers are due **Tuesday, May 21**. Term papers should be 5,400-7,500 words long.

Schedule

Background reading is not required, but is strongly recommended. Further reading (on Canvas) is for those who have a special interest in the topic and who may consider writing a term paper on a related issue.

Tuesday, February 6: Introduction and overview

Background:

Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the 60s."

Part 1: Practice First Ontology of the Social World

Tuesday, February 13: Practices

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice?" (Chapter 1)

William Sewell, Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation."

Tuesday, February 20 – No class (MIT Monday)

Tuesday, February 27: Ideology and Social Meaning

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Ideology, Culture, and Social Meaning" (Chapter 2) and

"Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements" (Chapter 7)

Tommie Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory."

Tuesday, March 5: Social Cognition

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Cognition as a Social Skill" (Chapter 3)

Kim Sterelny, *The Evolved Apprentice*, Ch. 1

Tuesday, March 12: Ideological Oppression

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Disciplined Bodies" and "Studying White Black" (one or the other will be Chapter 4)

Sandra Bartky, "Foucault and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power."

Part II: Structures and Structural Explanation

Tuesday, March 19: Structural Explanation

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?" (Chapter 5)

Debra Satz and John Ferejohn, "Rational Choice and Social Theory."

Tuesday, March 26 – No class (Spring Break)

Tuesday, April 2: Methodological Individualism?

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Failures of Individualism: The Materiality of Social Systems" (Chapter 6)
Joseph Heath, "Methodological Individualism"

Tuesday, April 9: Structural Injustice

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Structural and Systemic Injustice: Is There a Difference? (Chapter 8)
David Estlund, "What's Unjust About Structural Injustice?"

Tuesday, April 16 – No class (Patriot's Day Break)

Part III: Social Critique

Tuesday, April 23: Critical Theory and Practice

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Taking a Stand." (Chapter 9)
Robin Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique: On the Critique of Ideology after the Pragmatic Turn"

Tuesday, April 30: Naturalized Epistemology of Value

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Culture and Critique" (Chapter 10)
Kieran Setiya (2023). "Human Nature, History, and the Limits of Critique."

Tuesday, May 7: The Epistemology of Justice

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Political Epistemology and Social Critique" (Chapter 11)
Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement."
Jane Mansbridge, "Oppositional Consciousness"

Tuesday, May 14: How to Carry On?

Required:

Sally Haslanger, "Going On, Not in the Same Way," (Chapter 12) and "Hope, not Optimism" (manuscript)
Kieran Setiya, *Life is Hard*, Ch. 7.
Rebecca Solnit, *Life in the Dark*, Ch. 1.