Is it our duty to seek to become a rounded, complete creature, a whole sufficient unto itself or, on the contrary, to be only a part of the whole, the organ of an organism? In short, whilst the division of labour is a law of nature, is it also a moral rule for human conduct and, if it possesses this last characteristic, through what causes and to what extent? There is no need to demonstrate the serious nature of this practical problem: whatever assessment we make of the division of labour, we all sense that it is, and increasingly so, one of the fundamental bases of the social order.

Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, 1893

I. The Course

The first quarter of the Self, Culture and Society sequence explores the emergence and evolution of complex modern societies like our own, divided through specialization and reconstituted in businesses, states, and increasingly global markets. As we consider these features of modern life and the engines of industrialization, capitalism and rationality that lie behind them, we will attempt to untangle the web of interdependence and conflict that structures our world. Our readings, which include classic works of Adam Smith, Karl Marx and Max Weber, bring competing voices to our conversation about human nature, sources of human conflict and harmony, and the possibilities and limits of human society. As we examine their arguments, we will also evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the three broad social science traditions to which they gave rise, each of which exerts substantial force over how society understands itself and guides its future.

The course is a seminar—a series of conversations—and not a lecture: the focus will be on reading, understanding, critiquing and extending social theory through argument and intellectual play in ways that make it useful for comprehending the world and guiding our efforts within it.
II. Required Readings


The following readings are available through the course chalk site.


III. Course Requirements

A. READING AND DISCUSSION (16%)

This class is a seminar, not a lecture course. Students are expected to read and reflect on the assigned readings before class, to attend each class, and to contribute to class discussion. Students are also required to develop a short, one-paragraph document posing and briefly motivating a question, often through the development of a specific puzzle or problem in the text, before one of each week’s classes. (Students will be assigned to every Monday or every Wednesday for the quarter). They will post this on the chalk site no later than 6am on the morning of their assigned weekly session. The goal of these questions should be to penetrate the text and engage with its most significant parts. Students may be invited to pose their questions in class and should have developed a reasoned (if incomplete) answer.

For example, if I were reading the fourth-session’s reading material, I might ask the following:
In chapter 2, “Of the Principle which gives Occasion to the Division of Labour” (p.17), Smith finds his “principle” in the inborn tendency to “truck, barter and exchange one thing for another” (p. 17). He argues that this market urge gives rise to the division of labor, which powers increases in productivity and decreases in prices. But what if Smith was wrong, and specialization instead creates the need to exchange (e.g., you have eggs, I have milk). Is it important—does this hurt his larger argument or make it less useful and, if so, how?

My first attempt at a response, to be shared if called upon in class, might be that if specialization or a diversity of endowments preceded trade, then it may not be as easy for people and nations to change employment with shifts in the market as Smith suggests. While this would likely not change his prescriptions for the wealth of the nation, it should increase our estimate of short-term costs borne by failed workers, companies and industries. In this way, it might make his proposals politically less feasible (next generation benefits for current generation losses).

Questions could, of course, be simpler, e.g., “What is the meaning and significance of the fetishization of commodities in Capital?” and your reasoned hunch might be that it refers to the “social” relations between goods through comparison and exchange in the market. This obscures attention to the production of those goods and the exploitative relations between people that production involved. Of course, your provisional answers don’t have to be complete or correct, but should reflect effort and a complete reading of the day’s assignment (though they need not address the entire reading).

B. ESSAYS (84%)

Students will write four essays based on the course readings. Each essay will be 4-5 pages long (typed, double-spaced) and constitute 21% of the course grade. Both the quality and clarity of your arguments will be evaluated. Essays should be turned in to my office (SS 420) by 5pm on the day that they are due. Each essay will receive a letter grade (A, A-, B+…F).

C. GRADING (continued)

Borderline grades (Class participation):
Where a student’s final grade is borderline (e.g., teetering between an A- and B+), students with strong attendance and participation will be given the higher grade. Students with weak attendance and participation will be given the lower grade. Essay grades will be posted on Chalk as we move through the quarter.

Essay Extension policy:
Extensions must be requested a MINIMUM of 24 hours before the deadline and must include a proposed new deadline. Late papers which have not been granted an extension will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., B+ to B), and will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each additional class period they are late.
IV. Calendar of Reading Assignments

(subject to additions as we go along)

Week 1. (Sept. 24, 26)

Monday: General Introduction
Wednesday: Hobbes and Locke (PDF)

Week 2. (Oct. 1, 3)

Monday: Rousseau, 151-188
Wednesday: Smith, I, 1-28, 32-43, 53-61

Week 3. (Oct. 8, 10)

Wednesday: Smith, II (repagination starts in volume II), 208-09, 213, 230, 231-41, 244-46, 282-289, 293-309, 338-40

**First paper Due on October 12**

Week 4. (Oct. 15, 17)

Monday: Marx, 70-81, 93-101
Wednesday: Marx, 149-163, 172-174

Week 5. (Oct 22, 24)

Monday: Marx, 203-217, 469, 473-491
Wednesday: Marx, 221-244, 294-312, 319-329

Week 6. (Oct. 29, Oct.31)

Monday: Marx, 247-250, 384-417, 278-292

**Second paper Due on October 30**

Wednesday: Weber, ‘Objectivity,’ 49-85

Week 7 (Nov. 5, 7)

Monday: Weber, Protestant Ethic, chapters 1-3
Wednesday: Weber, chapters 4-5

Week 8 (Nov. 12, 14)

Monday: Thompson, 56-97
Wednesday: Harvey, 119-172

**Third paper due November 15**

Week 9 (Nov. 19)

Monday: Harvey, 173-197
Wednesday: no class (Thanksgiving—enjoy Schlosser)

Week 10 (Nov. 26, 28)

Monday: Schlosser, part 1
Wednesday: Schlosser, part 2

**Fourth paper Due on December 7**