



## Course information 2018–19

### SC1185 Reading social science

Students are expected to undertake a great deal of independent reading during their studies and this course prepares them for this work.

#### Exclusion

This course may not be taken with SC1158 Reading social science (half course)

#### Aims and objectives

This course has two specific and related aims:

- To develop transferable skills for the close reading and comprehension of complex original material. This will give students confidence to recognise and understand important arguments and ideas.
- To give students a sound introduction to some of the key arguments that have shaped social scientific thought from its inception in the Enlightenment up to the present day.

Through its detailed focus on primary texts, the course will make complex material accessible and enable students to gain the confidence to read original material.

#### Assessment

This course is assessed by a three-hour unseen written examination.

#### Essential reading

For full details please refer to the reading list.

The essential reading for this course is the subject guide and reading pack provided. The extracts are from:

Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau *The Social Contract*

Adam Smith *The Wealth of Nations*

#### Learning outcomes

At the end of this course and having completed the essential reading and activities students should be able to:

- ✓ use investigative skills to engage with the substance of hugely significant and challenging texts from across social and political thought
- ✓ read the selected texts critically and select key steps in the arguments for closer evaluation
- ✓ describe several major positions on the relationship between individual and society
- ✓ critically present several key positions on how modern social relations are distinct from pre-modern relations
- ✓ present in clear terms several explanations of the form that social power takes

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *The Communist Manifesto*

Georg Simmel *The Metropolis and Mental Life*

Freud *Civilisation and Its Discontents*

Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Frantz Fanon. 1957. *Black Skins, White Masks*

Foucault *Discipline and Punish*

Giorgio Agamben. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*

Students should consult the appropriate *EMFSS Programme Regulations*, which are reviewed on an annual basis. The *Regulations* provide information on the availability of a course, where it can be placed on your programme's structure, and details of co-requisites and prerequisites.

## Syllabus

This is a description of the material to be examined. On registration, students will receive a detailed subject guide which provides a framework for covering the topics in the syllabus and directions to the essential reading.

### 1. Social order, cohesion and power

These themes are concentrated in the political writings of Hobbes and Rousseau. These two texts pose specific and opposed arguments about human nature and the nature of society. The two counter-posed views that group life is, or is not, dependent on a sovereign are a significant basis for further debates about the role of power in social life.

### 2. Economic organization and social life

The theme of how capitalist society is socially organized is particularly important in two texts: Smith and Marx & Engels. Students will learn to trace how Smith looks at the structure of social relations as a logical outcome of individual actions. In contrast, they will work through how Marx and Engels see the same force of economic competition as resulting in opposed classes, and not in an organized market. The theme of an unequal and divided nature of society has strong reverberations in the texts by Adorno & Horkheimer, Fanon and Agamben.

### 3. Subjectivity and institutional life

This theme is about how individuals' experiences and senses of identity are constituted by the broader forms of institutional life. The text that tackles this most richly is the extract by Foucault, but it plays a significant role in Adorno & Horkheimer, Fanon and Agamben. Students will need to understand the meaning of individual subjectivity which is distinctively interpreted by the texts just listed. Similarly they will learn to separate different understandings of institutional life.

### 4. Urban life and late capitalism

These topics involve two significant elements in contemporary life across the globe, most notably through the writings of Simmel and Adorno & Horkheimer. Urbanization is a feature of life that has steadily increased and arguably intensified since the industrial revolution. Simmel's writings explore the new forms of social life that come about with the rise of 'the metropolis'. Freud and Adorno & Horkheimer examine the disunities that arise with the emergence of capitalism in its consumer form.

### 5. Sovereignty and social inequality

These two themes are extensions of the earlier themes. For students to make sense of the later texts, such as Agamben, it will be important that they have analyzed the earlier writings on power and capitalism. The themes are comparative. Agamben's understanding of sovereignty can be fruitfully contrasted with Hobbes' and Rousseau's. In terms of social inequality, Fanon's writings offer a rich comparison to Marx & Engels, and to Adorno & Horkheimer's.