

Social theory

Convener: Dr John Rundell

The Ashworth Centre for Social Theory is housed in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science and draws on high-level expertise and a wide range of related disciplines across the Faculty of Arts. The program provides a context where the theoretical and substantive issues raised in other disciplines may be critically examined and further explored. This makes social theory an appropriate choice for students with an interest in any of the social or human sciences.

The Ashworth Centre is home to a vibrant research community, publishes a journal of social and critical theory and hosts conferences, colloquia and seminar programs on a regular basis. It attracts eminent scholars to the University of Melbourne as visiting research fellows and boasts a distinguished list of international associates. A variety of career pathways is available to students of social theory, drawing on analytical and research knowledge gained in this area of study. Students interested in expanding their interests and knowledge in social theory are provided with an articulated structure of higher degree options at the University of Melbourne.

Social theory is an interdepartmental program that investigates the everyday assumptions that shape our lives and reflects in a systematic and critical manner on the ways in which social life is organised and, sometimes, transformed. Principal themes addressed in the program include contemporary theories of social and political relations, psychoanalytic theory and the nature of identity and themes that critique modernity and postmodernity, forms of agency and rationality.

Prerequisites

The social theory program commences at second year. The general prerequisite for entry is the completion of 50 points of first year in any area of study within the Faculty of Arts.

Requirements for a major

Social theory major

A major in social theory consists of nine 12.5 point subjects, totalling 112.5 points. It comprises:

- two first year subjects in any area of study (25 points) and;
- seven second/third year subjects in social theory (totalling 87.5 points), which must include the following four core subjects:
 - 136-075 Identities in Conflict (*p.3*)
 - 136-073 Critical Theories (*p.2*)
 - 136-074 Society: Revolutions to Social Movements (*p.2*)
 - 136-077 Psychoanalysis and Social Theory (*p.2*)

And three subjects from the list of optional subjects below.

For details on completing a major in philosophy and social theory see page 1.

| Core subjects | | Sem. |
|---|--|------|
| 136-077 Psychoanalysis and Social Theory (<i>p.2</i>) | | 2 |
| 136-073 Critical Theories (<i>p.2</i>) | | 2 |
| 136-074 Society: Revolutions to Social Movements (<i>p.2</i>) | | 1 |
| 136-075 Identities in Conflict (<i>p.3</i>) | | N/A |
| Optional subjects | | Sem. |
| English | | |
| 106-004 Romanticism and Revolution (<i>p.12</i>) | | N/A |
| 106-042 Postcolonial Cultural Studies (<i>p.13</i>) | | N/A |
| 106-036 Postmodernism (<i>p.5</i>) | | 1 |
| Cinema studies | | |
| 107-037 Film and the Body (<i>p.4</i>) | | N/A |
| 107-079 Feminist Film and Television Theory (<i>p.2</i>) | | 1 |
| Geography | | |
| 121-015 Development and the Third World (<i>p.3</i>) | | 2 |
| 121-016 Landscapes of Power (<i>p.3</i>) | | 1 |
| 121-019 Urbanisation and Urban Development (<i>p.3</i>) | | 1 |
| 121-026 The Mobile World: Migration and Tourism (<i>p.8</i>) | | N/A |
| 121-057 Ethnic Nationalism and the Modern World (<i>p.4</i>) | | N/A |
| History | | |
| 131-033 A History of Sexualities (<i>p.16</i>) | | N/A |
| 131-034 Gender, Culture and Identity Politics (<i>p.5</i>) | | 1 |
| History and philosophy of science | | |
| 136-052 Science as Practice and Culture (<i>p.4</i>) | | 1 |
| 136-040 Science Technology and Society (<i>p.4</i>) | | 2 |
| Philosophy | | |
| 161-013 Contemporary Political Philosophy (<i>p.8</i>) | | N/A |

| Optional subjects | | Sem. |
|---|--|------|
| 161-020 Phenomenology and Existentialism (<i>p.8</i>) | | N/A |
| Political science | | |
| 166-034 An/Other China: Theorising Everyday Life (<i>p.5</i>) | | 2 |
| 166-085 Identities & Action: Social Movements (<i>p.4</i>) | | N/A |
| Criminology | | |
| 191-428 Crime and Culture (<i>p.4</i>) | | 1 |
| French | | |
| 116-031 Culture & Identity in France & Germany (<i>p.9</i>) | | N/A |
| Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning | | |
| 702-305 Theories of Architecture (<i>p.15</i>) | | 1 |

Philosophy and social theory major

The major in philosophy and social theory combines subjects taught by the Department of Philosophy and the Ashworth Centre for Social Theory. This major offers students the opportunity to specialise in the study of those traditions of social analysis and critique that draw together both philosophical and social-theoretical expertise. Exemplary figures would include Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Weber, de Beauvoir, Habermas, Foucault, Haraway, Latour, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Butler and Spivak. Students who undertake a major in philosophy and social theory will pursue a course of study, beginning in first year, that introduces them to a variety of philosophical and social-theoretical perspectives and approaches that converge around a focus on critical social analysis. Students who complete a major in philosophy and social theory at a satisfactory level (a minimum of an H2A average within the major) may undertake combined honours in philosophy and social theory. They may also be considered for admission to pure honours in philosophy. However, students wishing to undertake pure honours in the Philosophy Department should consult with the honours coordinator for advice on how to design their course to meet departmental entry requirements for pure honours. For full details of the list of subjects which may be taken as part of this major, see *Philosophy and social theory major (p.1)*.

Combined honours entry

There is no pure honours program in social theory. This means that students must combine fourth year honours in social theory with another area of study, such as English, history or political science.

The prerequisites for entry to combined honours in social theory are:

- completion of all the requirements for the BA and;
- completion of a major in social theory and;
- an average grade of H2A or higher over second/third year subjects within the major and;
- admission to honours in another area of study within the Faculty of Arts.

Entry to honours must be approved by the convener of social theory and the Faculty of Arts honours course adviser.

Combined honours requirements

Students undertaking combined honours in social theory and another area of study must complete:

- 136-503 Social Theory Thesis (*p.2*) or 136-508 Social Theory Thesis (MYE) (*p.2*) (37.5 points) and;
- 136-447 Reading Texts in Social Theory (*p.2*), the program's compulsory honours subject (12.5 points) and;
- one honours subject in social theory from the list of core honours subjects below (12.5 points) and;
- three honours subjects in the combined area of study (totalling 37.5 points).

or

- honours thesis in the combined area of study (37.5 points)
- two honours subjects in the combined area of study (totalling 25 points) and;
- 136-447 Reading Texts in Social Theory (*p.2*), the program's compulsory honours subject (12.5 points) and;
- two honours subjects from the lists of core or optional honours subjects below (totalling 25 points)

| Core subjects | | Sem. |
|---|--|------|
| Social theory | | |
| 136-447 Reading Texts in Social Theory (<i>p.2</i>) | | 1 |
| 136-454 Theories of Modernity (<i>p.3</i>) | | N/A |
| 136-482 Imagined Societies (<i>p.2</i>) | | 2 |
| Political science | | |
| 166-445 Postcolonial Concerns, Postmodern Theory (<i>p.8</i>) | | 2 |

Optional subjects

| | Sem. |
|--|------|
| Cinema studies | |
| 107-487 Film, Modernity and the Avant-Garde (<i>p.6</i>) | N/A |
| English | |
| 106-423 Romanticism and Modernity (<i>p.11</i>) | 2 |
| History and philosophy of science | |
| 136-418 Risk, Environment and Modernity (<i>p.7</i>) | 1 |
| 136-451 Disease and Culture (<i>p.7</i>) | 2 |

For more information

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Second/third year subjects**166-034 An/Other China: Theorising Everyday Life**

See full subject details on page 5.

136-073 Critical Theories

Note: Formerly available as 136-209/309. Students who have completed 136-209/309 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 2nd and 3rd year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Coordinator: Dr John Rundell

Prerequisites: Usually 50 points of first year arts subjects. For cultural studies students these 50 points of arts subjects must include at least 25 points from a specified list of subject areas, see *Prerequisites (p.1)*.

Contact: A 1-hour lecture and 1.5-hour seminar per week (*Semester 2*).

Description: The aim of this subject is to introduce students to and critically examine the major debates in contemporary critical theories from Western Marxism to postmodernism. These critical theories include the German Frankfurt School, French poststructuralism, the Budapest School, post-Marxism and feminism, all of which are set against the background of the Enlightenment and the Romantic and Heideggerian responses to it. On completion of the subject students should have developed an understanding of the central issues and ideas of the critical theorists covered in this course and be able to convey this understanding through a critical engagement with the issues and theories in the written assessment of the course.

Assessment: A literature review, a class paper, and an essay totalling 4000 words.

136-074 Society: Revolutions to Social Movements

Note: Formerly available as 136-251/351. Students who have completed 136-251/351 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 2nd and 3rd year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Coordinator: Dr John Rundell

Prerequisites: Usually 50 points of first year arts subjects.

Contact: Up to 2.5 hours of lectures and seminars per week (*Semester 1*).

Description: This subject is primarily concerned with the ideas about society that have anchored the disciplines of sociology and social theory in the 19th and 20th centuries. It critically assesses these ideas through an examination of the works of key social theorists. Students completing this subject should have developed an understanding of the central ideas of key thinkers in the social-theoretical tradition, among them, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel and Freud; and developed an understanding of some central issues and themes about society such as power, culture, structure and self through a critical engagement with the work of these thinkers.

Assessment: A literature review or class paper, and an essay totalling 4000 words.

136-077 Psychoanalysis and Social Theory

Note: Formerly available as 136-260/360. Students who have completed 136-260/360 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 2nd and 3rd year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Coordinator: Dr John Cash

Prerequisites: Usually 50 points of first year arts subjects or first year gender studies, see *Prerequisites (p.1)*.

Contact: A 1-hour lecture and 1.5-hour seminar per week (*Semester 2*).

Description: Psychoanalysis has informed and influenced contemporary social theory in manifold ways. Psychoanalysis has been central to theorising the decentred subject, it has radically affected conceptualisations of ideology, thrown reason under radical suspicion and has contributed to a better understanding of identities; including identities of nation, race, gender and ethnicity. This subject investigates these issues in the context of a consideration of texts by Freud, Klein, Lacan, Kristeva, Adorno, Fromm, Habermas, Zizek, Mitchell, Giddens and Althusser. Students who complete this subject should gain a sound knowledge of some major traditions in psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freudian, Kleinian and Lacanian, and should come to possess an awareness of why social theory has been drawn to psychoanalysis in order to analyse subjectivities, group processes, intergroup relations, ideological formations, and forms of reason.

Assessment: Written work totalling 4000 words.

Fourth year subjects**136-503 Social Theory Thesis**

Availability: 4th year

Credit points: 37.5

HECS-band: 1

Coordinator: Dr John Rundell

Prerequisites: Admission to the postgraduate diploma or fourth year combined honours in social theory.

Contact: Regular meetings with the supervisor (*Year long*).

Description: An approved topic will be selected in consultation with the coordinator.

Assessment: A thesis of 12 000 words.

136-508 Social Theory Thesis (MYE)

Availability: 4th year

Credit points: 37.5

HECS-band: 1

Coordinator: Dr John Rundell

Prerequisites: Mid-year admission to the postgraduate diploma or fourth year combined honours in social theory.

Contact: Regular meetings with the supervisor (*Semester 1, repeat 2*).

Description: An approved topic will be selected in consultation with the coordinator.

Assessment: A thesis of 12 000 words.

136-447 Reading Texts in Social Theory

Note: Formerly available as 136-079. Students who have completed 136-079 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 4th year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Coordinator: Dr John Rundell

Prerequisites: Admission to the postgraduate diploma or fourth year combined honours in social theory, the postgraduate diploma or fourth year honours in history and philosophy of science, philosophy, sociology, cultural studies or another Faculty of Arts department.

Contact: A 2-hour seminar per week (*Semester 1*).

Description: This subject is designed to provide students with a detailed familiarity with the works of at least one of the major classical social theorists. Students who complete this subject should be able to demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of at least one significant social theorist or theoretical tradition; have developed the reading and analytical skills for such comprehension and understanding which can be readily used for other texts and subject matter; and have established a basis for postgraduate research if desired.

Assessment: A seminar paper and an essay totalling 5000 words.

136-482 Imagined Societies

Note: Formerly available as 136-082. Students who have completed 136-082 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 4th year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Coordinator: Dr John Cash

Prerequisites: Admission to the postgraduate diploma or fourth year combined honours in social theory.

Contact: A 2-hour seminar per week (*Semester 2*).

Description: This subject critically engages with questions regarding the place of subjectivity in the constitution and organisation of social and political relations, at both the theoretical and empirical levels. It involves the study of political subjectivities, including race, gender and ethnicity. By engagement with such theorists as Lacan, Castoriadis, Kristeva, Foucault, Giddens and Habermas, the subject highlights the place of the imaginary and the unconscious in the formation of ideologies and subjectivities. Students who complete this subject should possess knowledge of some major contemporary debates regarding the formation and organisation of subjectivities; an understanding of the centrality of subjectivity to the organisation of social and political relations; an awareness of the difficulties associated with analysing subjectivities in late or postmodernity; and an acquaintance with some attempts to bring contemporary theories of subjectivity to the study of empirical cases.

Assessment: Assessment will be based on an essay and an oral class presentation totalling 5000 words.

Subjects not offered in 2002

Second/third year subjects not offered in 2002

136-075 Identities in Conflict

Note: Formerly available as 136-257/357. Students who have completed 136-257/357 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 2nd and 3rd year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Prerequisites: Usually 50 points of first year arts subjects.

Semester: Not Offered

Description: This subject investigates identities in conflict by studying witchcraft accusations, Nazi doctors, Malcolm X, the bonds of love, formations of violence, ethnic and racial conflict, gender relations and everyday life in high or post-modernity. These settings highlight the social, cultural and psychological processes involved in the ongoing politics of identity and provide the context within which a series of social-theoretical issues are raised regarding the relationship between the subjective and the social. Theories of ideology, discourse, agency, structuration, violence, intersubjectivity and subjectivity are drawn upon to analyse the centrality of individual and group identities to the organisation of social and political relations. Students completing this subject should develop a recognition of the ways in which social theory can provide both a range of approaches and a series of concepts for the analysis of the politics of identity, along with a critical perspective on standard approaches to identities in conflict.

136-076 Social Theory and Political Analysis

Note: Formerly available as 136-259/359. Students who have completed 136-259/359 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 2nd and 3rd year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Prerequisites: Usually 50 points of first year arts subjects.

Semester: Not Offered

Description: This subject involves the study of theory and empirical research in social and political relations, culture and ideology, and human subjectivity and action. Students who complete this subject should possess an awareness of the ways in which social theory can provide a critical perspective on standard approaches to the study of politics, and knowledge of a repertoire of social theory concepts and approaches which can be drawn upon to analyse political processes.

136-078 The Critical Imagination

Note: Formerly available as 136-234/334. Students who have completed 136-234/334 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 2nd and 3rd year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Prerequisites: Usually 50 points of first year arts subjects.

Semester: Not Offered

Description: This subject explores the three currents that social and critical theorising grows out of: the Enlightenment, Revolutionary tradition and Romanticism. It critically assesses these currents through an examination of the works of key classical critical and social theorists. Students completing this subject should have developed an understanding of the central ideas of key thinkers in the social and critical theory tradition among them, Kant, Schiller, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche; and developed an understanding of some of the key issues and theories including their critiques of modernity.

Fourth year subjects not offered in 2002

136-454 Theories of Modernity

Note: Formerly available as 136-080. Students who have completed 136-080 are not eligible to enrol in this subject.

Availability: 4th year

Credit points: 12.5

HECS-band: 1

Prerequisites: Admission to the postgraduate diploma or fourth year combined honours in social theory or sociology.

Semester: Not Offered

Description: In this subject images of the 'city', 'progress', 'the public' and 'the nation' will be used to establish some of the features of modernity. The way modernity is understood will also be explored through various critical theories of modernity. Students completing this subject should have developed an understanding of the major conceptual debates concerning the meaning of modernity; gained an awareness of the selected philosophical and theoretical traditions through which this debate have been generated; and demonstrated this understanding through a critical engagement with the historical and theoretical literature.

