

Title of the course: Sociological Theory. *Money, capital and modernity in Karl Marx and Georg Simmel*

Name of the Chair of the course: Vincenzo Mele

Compulsory/optional course: optional course in “Sociological theory”

Year of the course and semester: Fall semester 2018

ECTS credit: 6

Number of hours: 42

General information and objective of the course

By the end of the semester, students are expected to be able to:

- - understand theoretical ideas of the key theorists of modern and contemporary sociology
- - make connections between contemporary theories and classical theories
- - have a sense of the historical and intellectual circumstances in which each of these thinkers emerged
- - compare similarities and differences between the perspectives of different thinkers
- - identify relative strengths and weaknesses of given theories
- - discuss contemporary social phenomena in light of the theories learned in course

Syllabus of the course: Sociological Theory. *Money, capital and modernity in Karl Marx and Georg Simmel*

The year 2018 marks the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth and the 100th anniversary of Georg Simmel's death. This course wants to take the occasion to reflect on the relation between their works and diagnosis of modern society and culture.

The relevance of Marx's writings to Simmel's oeuvre is out of question: in the premise of his major work, *Philosophy of Money* (1900), Simmel declares his intention "to construct a new storey beneath historical materialism" (from the *Preface*). The continuities between Simmel's work and Karl Marx's *Capital* are most striking at the level of the diagnosis of modern society: the analysis of alienation, commodity fetishism, and capital's quantifying and accelerating tendencies are not only critically discussed but also expanded in Simmel's investigations of the paradoxes of modern culture, to the point that David Frisby once said, *The Philosophy of Money* is a *Capital* written in dialogue with Kant's *Transcendental Aesthetic* instead of Hegel's *Logic*. These analysis, however, have very different philosophical and political foundations: whereas Marx relied on the tradition of Left Hegelianism, English political economy, and French socialism, Simmel dialogued mainly with neo-Kantianism, neoclassical economics, and vitalism. To what extent, then, do Simmel's investigations on money supplement, widen or contradict Marx's analysis of capital? Do their different philosophical and methodological starting points prevent a productive dialogue between their arguments? How to reconcile Marxian analyses of class and exploitation with Simmel's focus on pathologies affecting the totality of modern individuals? In what way can the confrontation between their perspectives become relevant for current sociology and social philosophy?

This course will try to reflect on these aspects of the relation between Marx and Simmel.

I. WEEK

Capital, money and the experience of modernity in the work of Marx and Simmel: an introduction

II. WEEK

Marx: The Materialist Conception of History

III. WEEK

Marx: The *Grundrisse*

IV. WEEK

Marx: *Capital* I, Unpublished Ch. VI: The Critique of Capitalist Alienation

V. WEEK

Marx: Primitive Accumulation, Capitalism and Surplus Value

VI. WEEK

Marx: The Last Studies

VII. WEEK

Simmel: *On Social Differentiation*, metropolis and modernity

VIII. WEEK

Simmel: *The Problem of the Philosophy of History* (I and following versions)

IX. WEEK

Simmel: *Philosophy of Money*: lineaments of a theory of value (analytical part)

X. WEEK

Simmel: *Philosophy of Money*: the construction of individuality in the sequence of purposes (synthetic part)

XI. WEEK

Conclusion: not all that is solid melts into air? Marx, Simmel and solid/liquid modernity

A detailed class calendar and readings will be available on the moodle platform of the course.

Pre-requisites, exams and assessment

Pre-requisites: intro to sociology, philosophy, social and political thought

Assessment:

One paper (a minimum of 10 pages) is required as a final paper. The paper will focus on Marx and Simmel concepts included in the readings. Then the student can discuss the reception and the literature on the topic, ending with some open questions to show how the problems are still relevant (or not relevant) today.

Exam: final oral exam and/or presentation can be given in English or Italian

Structure of the course

INTRODUCTION: MONEY, CAPITAL AND THE EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY (Prof. Mele)

KARL MARX: CAPITAL AND MODERNITY (Prof. Musto)

GEORG SIMMEL: MONEY AND MODERNITY (Prof. Mele)

CONCLUSION: NOT ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR: MARX, SIMMEL AND SOLID/LIQUID MODERNITY (Prof. Mele/Prof. Musto)

Professor' s office hours

Prof. Vincenzo Mele

Tuesday, 16-18

Prof. Marcello Musto

TBD