Course Description

This course introduces students to the major themes of French social theory in the twentieth century, from the sociological writings of Émile Durkheim to the rise of a post-Marxist theory of democracy. The course is designed to provide students with a lucid but rigorous grounding in the predominant schools and movements that have animated French intellectual life over the past century. Although this course is classified as a lecture course in intellectual history, the very identity of the course as “historical” should be taken with a grain of salt. As students alive to the interdisciplinary character of these movements, we will not confine ourselves to any one mode of analysis but will instead borrow freely from all disciplines as the subject requires, from sociology and philosophy, history and political theory, tracing out the major lines of argument and dispute that have preoccupied some of the greatest theorists in the French intellectual tradition. The course is organized into five thematic units, as follows: 1, the French sociological tradition; 2, the challenge of French existentialism; 3, the emergence of structuralism; 4, the genesis of post-structuralism; and 5, power, distinction, democracy. Major readings are by the following authors: Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, Kojève, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Fanon, Foucault, Althusser, Derrida, Barthes, Bourdieu, and Lefort.

Course Requirements

The course readings are typically of moderate length but they will require lively critical engagement: they cannot be read casually or at spare moments. Students will be expected to attend all lectures and sections, and they will also be expected to participate actively in section discussion. The basic requirements are as follows:

- Full attendance of all lectures and weekly sections
- Active participation in weekly sections; five brief response papers (turned in to your TF)
- Three paper assignments, to be turned in at the specified times as indicated below

Grading Policy

The course-grade as determined at the end of the semester breaks down into the following components with percentages as indicated:

- Section participation: 30%
- Paper 1 (5-7pp.) 20%
- Paper 2 (7-9pp.) 25%
- Paper 3 (7-9pp.) 25%

Please note that attendance at all lectures and sections is a requirement. If you must miss a section, please be certain to notify your TF in advance to explain the reason for your absence. Late papers without prior clearance with the TF will be marked down at the TF’s discretion.
**Books Available for Purchase**

The following books are available for purchase from the Harvard Coop. ISBN information is provided here for students who prefer to comparison-shop. Shorter selections will be available for downloading as pdfs on the password-protected course website:

- **Emile Durkheim**, *The Division of Labor in Society* (trans. Lewis Coser)  

- **Emile Durkheim**, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*  
  (Oxford University Press, 2008) USA, abridged edition;  

- **Marcel Mauss**, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*  
  (Norton, 2000); ISBN: 9780393320435

- **Jean-Paul Sartre**, *Nausea*  
  (New Directions, 1969); ISBN: 0811201880

- **Claude Lévi-Strauss**, *The Savage Mind*  

- **Michel Foucault**, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*  

- **Michel Foucault**, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, An Introduction*  

- **Michel Foucault**, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*  
# Course Syllabus

## PART I — THE FRENCH SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION

### Lecture 1:
**Introduction:** French Social Thought from Positivism to the Symbolic  
**Readings:** none  
**Date:** Tues., 27 Jan.

### Lecture 2:
**Durkheim and Society as an Object**  
**Date:** Thurs., 29 Jan.

### Lecture 3:
**Durkheim on the Promise and Pathology of Modern Society**  
Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Modern Society* (1893), selections, as follows: Introduction, and Chs.1, 2, and 3.  
Durkheim, *Suicide* (1897), selections, as follows: “Preface,” “Introduction,” and “Anomic Suicide.”  
**Date:** Tues., 3 Feb.

### Lecture 4:
**Durkheim and the Rise of the Symbolic**  
**Date:** Thurs., 5 Feb.

### Lecture 5:
**Durkheim on Metaphysics, Ideology, and Social Solidarity**  
Durkheim, “Individualism and the Intellectuals” (1898), and “The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions.” (1914)  
**Date:** Tues., 10 Feb.

### Lecture 6:
**French Social Thought after Durkheim: The Reproduction of Social Solidarity**  
**Date:** Thurs., 12 Feb.

## PART II — THE CHALLENGE OF FRENCH EXISTENTIALISM

### Lecture 7:
**Jean-Paul Sartre and the Origins of Existentialism**  
Sartre, *Nausea* (1938), all.  
**Date:** Tues., 17 Feb.

### Lecture 8:
**Alexandre Kojève and the Origins of Existential Marxism**  
Kojève, “In Place of an Introduction” in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. (1947)  
**Date:** Thurs., 19 Feb.

### Lecture 9:
**Jean-Paul Sartre and the Tasks of Existential Phenomenology**  
Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), selections, as follows: “The Origin of Negation”; “The Look”, “Quality as a Revelation of Being” and “Conclusion.”  
**Date:** Tues., 24 Feb.

### Lecture 10:
**Jean-Paul Sartre and the Burdens of Freedom**  
Sartre, “The Humanism of Existentialism.” (1946)  
**Date:** Thurs., 26 Feb.

§ *First Paper Due, Monday, 2nd March, 4pm.*
Lecture 11: Existentialism and Alterity: Beauvoir and Fanon  
Tues., 3 Mar.  
Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction” to The Second Sex. (1949)  
Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (1952): Chs. 6, 7, and 8.  
Sartre, “Preface” to Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth. (1963)  
Fanon, “Conclusion” to The Wretched of the Earth. (1963)

Lecture 12: Existentialism, Humanism, Marxism  
Thurs., 5 Mar.  
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Freedom” from The Phenomenology of Perception. (1945)

PART III — THE EMERGENCE OF STRUCTURALISM

Lecture 13: The Origins of French Structuralism  
Tues., 10 Mar.  
Ferdinand de Saussure, Course on General Linguistics (1915), selections, as follows:  
Part One, Chs. I-III; and Part Two, Chs. I-VIII.

Lecture 14: Foundations of French Structuralist Anthropology  
Thurs., 12 Mar.  
Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship (1949), selections, as follows: Ch. 1, “Nature and Culture” and Ch. 2, “The Problem of Incest.”  
Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques (1955), selections, as follows:  
“1: Setting Out,” “28: A Writing Lesson,” and “38: A Little Glass of Rum.”

§ Spring Recess, from Saturday 14th March through Sunday 22nd March

Lecture 15: Lévi-Strauss: Culture as a Symbolic System  
Tues., 24 Mar.  
Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (1962), selections, as follows:  
Preface; Ch. 1 “The Science of the Concrete”; Ch. 2, “The Logic of Totemic Classifications”; Ch. 4, “Totem and Caste”; and Ch. 9, “History and Dialectic.”

Lecture 16: From Structuralism to Post-Structuralism  
Thurs., 26 Mar.  

PART IV — THE GENESIS OF POST-STRUCTURALISM

Lecture 17: Foucault: Reason and Unreason as a Symbolic System  
Tues., 31 Mar.  
Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization (1961), selections, as follows:  

Lecture 18: Foucault/Derrida: The Internal Critique of Structuralism  
Thurs., 2 Apr  
Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness.” (1967)

§ Second Paper Due, Monday, 6th April, 4pm.
| Lecture 19: | Foucault: Structuralism and the Historicity of the A Priori  
| Tues., 7 Apr. | Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1966), selections, as follows:  
| | “Preface”; Ch. 3, “Representing”; Ch. 7, “The Limits of Representation”;  
| | Ch. 9, section VIII *only* “The Anthropological Sleep”; and Ch. 10, “The Human Sciences.” |

| Lecture 20: | The Philosophy of May ’68: Anti-Humanism and Emancipation  
| | Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author.” (1968)  

| Lecture 21: | Foucault: Social Order and the Critique of Modern Surveillance  
| Tues., 14 Apr. | Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), selections, as follows:  
| | Part One, Ch. 1, “The Body of the Condemned”; Part Three, Ch. 3, “Panopticim”;  
| | and Part Four, Ch. 3, “The Carceral.” |


**PART V — POWER, DISTINCTION, DEMOCRACY**

| Lecture 23: | The Will to Knowledge and the Invention of the Soul  

| Lecture 24: | Pierre Bourdieu: Power, Culture, and the Habitus  
| | selections, as follows:  
| | “Introduction”; Ch. 1, “The Aristocracy of Culture” (pp.10-56 *only*); and Ch. 3, “The Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles” (pp.169-175 *only*). |

| Lecture 25: | The End of Revolution and the Rebirth of Liberalism  

§ Please note: There will be required sections during the week of April 27-May 1st.

29th April: Last Day of Spring Term  
30th April—6th May: Reading Period

§ Final Paper Due 6th May, 4pm