Course Description

We are, every one of us, social beings, from beginning to end. Short of disappearing into an Alaskan wilderness, we cannot escape society (and even then, much that comes to us from society would continue to persist – for example, the language through which we think and understand things). The individual and her society seem inextricably interwoven. On one hand, society has a deep influence in shaping who we are and determining what we can become. Our very psychologies, identities, religions, values and moral beliefs come transmitted to us through our social experience. Society presents opportunities that allow us to flourish, and obstacles that limit our potential and growth. On the other hand, we do not seem to be (and let’s hope it’s not an illusion) merely passive receivers of our social environment. We believe in free thought and free choice. We believe that we can evaluate society and the quality of our relationships. We believe we can wrestle with society, rise up and transform it, should its character no longer seem good and just. Arguably, sociality and all that comes with it is an essential aspect of the human condition. As such, no education in the humanities – of the sort Christ College seeks to provide – would be complete without serious consideration of social theory. Picking up roughly where the Freshman Program ends, in the modern period, we will examine Western scholars who provided important frameworks for analyzing modern society, with a view towards dwelling on how their thinking, imperfect as it may be, continues to undergird the way we analyze the world we live in today. Sections share a syllabus that is about 75% the same with room for individualizing in each unit, especially the application aspect.

Student Learning Objectives

This course will…

1. Draw students’ attentions to the concepts “self,” “society,” and “culture” and ask them to think deeply and critically about these concepts;
2. Help students think critically about the human condition as one that is inherently social. To think about how, as inherently social creatures, we are both the creators and the subjects of social institutions and forces that shape who we are and our life possibilities. In this, the class will introduce questions of how our social lives shape our: a) worldviews, b) identities, and c) opportunities (or lack of).
3. Introduce students to pioneering modern social thinkers, including but not limited to: Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Clifford Geertz, and Michel Foucault. To illustrate to students why the works of these thinkers remain fundamental.
4. Introduce the variety of social and cultural factors that affect individuals in varied and diverse ways including: religion, class, race, gender, and sexuality.
5. Encourage students to explore the ways in which notions rising out of these classic theorists continue to help us analyze and explain contemporary social phenomena and identities. Each year we do this by looking at a different theme. This section’s theme is power and social media.
6. Provide a forum for students to practice and improve their writing abilities and oral argumentation, with a focus on building logical and persuasive arguments.