

TU-TH 2:00-3:15
216 Lalumiere Hall

Fall 2008

SOCI 100 **Sociological Theory**

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-5 or by appointment

Social theory is the language thinkers develop so that we may talk about social forces that are not directly visible, but whose effects are visible nonetheless in social patterns. This course will deal with four recurring themes through 19th and 20th century sociological thought: social power, social structure, culture and the self. Each reading selection defines or employs one or more of these concepts as it explores some of the most difficult issues in modern society. Because social theory seeks to talk about abstractions, it can be hard to read and understand, and people often find it frustrating. But like any language, practicing the language of social theory allows us to explore deeply important issues about who we are, as individuals and as a society; it allows us to consider our place in history; it allows us to envision a better future.

Reading difficult texts and confronting new ways of thinking can be very difficult and frightening, for all of us. It is crucial that you not succumb to fear and let your fear silence you. The only way to learn the language of theory is to practice it, which means being open to the possibility that you might be wrong, and that is okay! Often, primary and secondary schooling in America inadvertently teaches us that there is one right answer, and if we don't know it then we are stupid or failures. THAT IS NOT TRUE!!! People often say, "The more you know, the more you realize you don't know," and this is true. Part of learning as an adult involves knowing that learning depends on us not knowing something in the first place – otherwise we have nothing to learn. Learning can be fun, sometimes like a roller coaster or scary movie, sometimes like a game or a pleasant evening with friends. It is crucial that we not judge each other or ourselves for trying out new ideas in discussion.

To that end, our focus in this course will be on asking questions. Our theorists pose answers to the questions they have discerned and developed in conversation with other theorists and in light of their observations of the world around them. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to see exactly what questions they seek to answer. One goal of your reading in this class will be to discern the authors' questions – an important step to making sense of their answers! A second goal will be to formulate good questions of your own, a way of refining your own thoughts while helping you to gather the information you need or want. We will work on asking questions in a variety of ways this term.

How to Read Difficult Texts: Some Pointers

1. Strive with patience.
2. Look up words you don't know in a dictionary, but don't expect the dictionary to have the final say.
3. Note (with page references) the passage's key words: words the author uses a lot or makes central. Then note (with page references) the phrases the author uses to define, describe, qualify or characterize each key word.
4. Be sure you know each pronoun's antecedent (the noun whose place the pronoun takes).
5. Take notes on what you read, and underline and annotate the reading itself.
6. Read slowly, making sure you are clear about each paragraph's point before moving on to the next.
7. If that doesn't help, try the opposite: Read fast. Don't skim, but read quickly through every word until a sentence or phrase leaps out at you, then slow down again, using that sentence as a key to the rest of the passage.
8. If you find yourself confused, try to write a helpful question about what confuses you. (See "Asking Helpful Questions.")

Asking Helpful Questions

A helpful question is *specific*, and it begins with a well-articulated *premise*. The premise is where you work to articulate as clearly as possible what you do know, to help yourself and others to see clearly what you want to know more about. For our purposes, one way to establish a premise is to summarize what you see the author as assuming and stating clearly. Another way to establish a premise is to take a key quotation from the reading, and then to interpret what you see the author as saying (another way of summarizing what you know). The premise then lays the groundwork for your real question—does the author seem to contradict him- or herself? What assumptions does the author silently make in interpreting her or his evidence? How does the author's theory help us to better understand her or his main question? What does the author's theory suggest or imply for situations she or he does not or could not have considered?

Of course, just because a good question is formulated with a premise preceding the question, that does not mean you have to think of them in that order. You will most likely begin with what you don't understand—be it a passage or a more abstract concept—and as you think about it and work on writing your question, you will begin to develop the premise. Your initial question might well be, "What the #@%\$* are they talking about?" and that's a good start if you then push yourself to the next step and try to answer that question and see how far you can get in articulating a more specific question. In working on formulating the question, you might help yourself to develop an answer. Or, in the course of formulating a good question, you may just realize that you know more than you thought you did!

Readings

There are 3 required books (and one optional one) on order for this course, as well as being available at the reserve desk:

REQUIRED:

- **Durkheim, Emile.** *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* (Translated by Carol Cosman, Oxford abridged edition, 2001). (Note: If you plan to go into academic graduate study, you may wish to get the 1995 Free Press edition, translated by Karen Fields – see me for page assignments. I do not recommend the 1965 Free Press edition.)
- **Freud, Sigmund.** *Civilization and its Discontents.* (Norton standard edition, 1961).
- **Michael Omi & Howard Winant,** *Racial Formation in the United States.* (Routledge, 2nd edition, 1994).

RECOMMENDED

- *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Norton 2nd edition, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 1978). (As with Durkheim, if there's a chance you'll read Marx again at some point in your life, you might as well buy the book now so you'll have your annotations in it later. Otherwise, the book is on reserve and you can copy the assigned readings from it.)
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In addition to the books, some readings, denoted ® in the reading list, will be available only on reserve at Raynor Library. Most of the readings are available electronically, but in one case copyright law does not permit it, so you will have to borrow it from the reserve and make your own copy – I suggest coordinating with a group for efficiency. Be sure to access all reserve readings early enough to account for any problems that might arise.

Assignments **REDO %S AS POINTS!!**

Requirements for the course include:

1. Active participation in class discussions (25%). This class may seem like a lecture, but, in fact, I bore myself if I talk too much. Attendance is absolutely mandatory, and I track it daily. You must come to class having completed the reading assignment. I may call on you without warning. This class will be a collective learning experience, where you share your understanding of the readings and of lectures with your peers. You must bring the readings with you to class for discussion every day, be it the book, a printout, or on a laptop computer (providing you can use it without becoming distracted or distracting others.) This is a large class, and I know that it can be very intimidating to speak out in such an environment. I will try and make it as comfortable for you to speak, but I also urge you to make the effort to do so. If you make yourself speak out in class just once, it will be much easier the second time around. Coming to office hours beyond the required visit constitutes another form of participation.

In keeping with Marquette policy, more than two unexcused absences will result in lowering your participation grade. Any student who misses more than eight class meetings can expect an attendance grade of F. If you are having problems or expect to be absent, I appreciate being informed, and am willing to come to a reasonable accommodation if the need arises. If you find the course materials too difficult, please come talk to me in office hours.

2. Personal Introduction (5%).

Within the first four weeks of class, you are required to come to my office hours and introduce yourself to me. Rather than making small talk (which is acceptable at the beginning or end, but may not take up the whole meeting), please come prepared having thought out – you may bring notes if you like – your response to one of the following questions:

1. What is the most difficult academic challenge you have faced, and how did you deal with it? How do you think that experience has shaped your academic life, or your life beyond school?

OR

2. What has your experience been with asking questions? Have people in your life welcomed questions and helped you to investigate possible answers, or have you experienced punishment, ridicule, or the silent treatment? What is one incident you can think of where asking a question has been particularly eventful or telling?

OR

3. Social structure, social power, culture, and the self: What interests you about one or more of these concepts at this point in your life, and why? Is there anything you have observed in your social world (family, friends, school, work, politics, other institutions) that has struck you as troubling, puzzling, frustrating, exciting? How do you think these concepts might help you to analyze these situations?

3. Two 500- to 700-word memos (10% each for a total of 20%)

Each student will be assigned two weeks' readings on which to write a brief memo, due via email (not an attachment) by **9AM on the Thursday of the week assigned**. I will use these memos to help facilitate discussion.

In each memo, you will formulate a helpful question for discussion (see above) and develop an initial answer to it. There are many ways to ask a question in a way that it will help you and others to gain clarity or facilitate discussion. A good way to start is to begin with a specific passage from the week's readings that you find interesting, troubling, or difficult, and quote that passage at the beginning of your memo. Then, discuss that passage. What questions does it raise for you, or what questions do you think it might raise for the class? If you find the passage difficult to understand, you could use this space as an opportunity to "think on paper" about what the author might be saying – how does s/he define key terms, what relationships does

s/he observe between social forces, what question is s/he trying to answer? Other possible questions might include: (a) Did he, she, or they define terms earlier, that might help us to make sense of this passage? (b) How does this author build on or disagree with another author from our course? (c) If the author's examples seem outdated, can you think of a contemporary example that might help to explain what they are getting at? Do you think that what they are saying is no longer valid, or is it valid in a different way? (d) Are there ways the author seems to contradict him- or herself? If so, how does the author attempt to resolve that contradiction? Does she or he succeed? You do not need to answer all of these questions – they are just some possible ways to articulate a helpful discussion question.

We will use students' questions as springboards for class discussion – we may discuss the design of the question itself as well as the readings. You are not required to submit your memo to the entire class, and you need not identify yourself as a question's author, although you may if you wish. However, as the semester progresses and we grow more comfortable with each other, I may call on you as the memo's author to clarify a particular point you raised. Having me ask about your memo implies no value judgment – strong and weak memos are equally likely to inspire me to ask for further elaboration.

Like the course paper, each memo should be proofread and edited so that the process of writing and revising helps you to clarify your thinking as you clarify your writing. Memos will receive lower grades if they contain grammatical or word-choice errors, incomplete sentences, or are not well-thought out. Memos will be graded on the formulation of the question, how well you ground your response in the readings, how clearly you present your ideas, and writing style (grammar and organization).

4. Course paper (25%)

You are required to write one paper of 5-6 pages, due **11 November**. If you choose, you may rewrite the paper for a higher grade after receiving my comments. Rewrites will be due **25 November**.

You have two options for the essay topic:

1. Briefly describe the essential features of a situation of struggle, frustration, or conflict with which you are very familiar from daily life – politics, family, friends, work, a religious institution, school, whatever you like. Choose three authors from our course and compare and contrast how each of these authors would explain or analyze the situation. To help get your thinking going, you might try answering questions such as: On what aspects do the authors agree, and in what ways do they disagree? Are there things which none of the authors considers?

OR

2. Write your own thoughtful question, and answer it using three authors from our readings. You may consult with me about writing the question. [cont'd] →

An outstanding paper will have the following features: (a) A strong thesis statement, (b) an appropriate selection of authors, (c) quotations from each of the three authors you write about, (d) effective explanations of how the arguments you highlight relate to the authors' larger points, (e) clear, effective organization, (f) an elegant synthesis of the situation you analyze and the authors you use to do your analysis, and (g) excellent word choice, grammar, sentence structure, and editing. (If you choose option 2, you will also be graded on the quality of your question.)

You **MUST** use quotations from the readings to support your claims, and you may engage the passages you quote to explore their meaning in relation to the other readings you write about.

Your essay must be 5-6 pages, in 12-point normal-sized font (not Courier, for instance), with 1-1.25" margins, double spaced (that's the biggest option most word processors provide by default), and word-processed. You must put your name on your paper, give it a title, and number and staple your pages. Please be sure to spell-check and proofread your work; it can be very helpful to have a friend read over it to be sure it is free of typographical and grammatical errors. Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* is a very handy little guide to writing well.

Papers are due at the BEGINNING of class. The paper will be counted as a day late if you submit it after the beginning of class. Late papers will lose one-half letter grade for each day they are late.

4. Final Examination on 10 December, 8-10 am (25%)

This will be a comprehensive examination, to assess your grasp of key concepts. In the last week of class, as part of our reviewing for the exam, we will work on writing some of the exam questions.

A NOTE ON WRITING:

Written assignments are your opportunity to develop, apply, and demonstrate your mastery of the knowledge and skills you are gaining in this course. They are, in effect, your chance to learn -- and apply what you have learned -- by practicing the language of social theory. Therefore, be sure to use the concepts, categories, and theories from the course in your paper and exams. You must organize your paper around a central argument or point. You must aptly illustrate that point with examples, and you must show a keen understanding and critique of the course texts.

LATE PAPER POLICY:

Late papers or memos will lose 1/2 grade for each day they are late, beginning after the beginning of class on the due date. Memos are due at 9 am on the Thursday of the assigned week via email (not as an attachment).

LOGISTICS: I assume that, as a college student, you know how to use a word-processor or computer, including how to keep a back-up copy of all of your work. You should keep back-ups of all work conducted for this course, at least until the final grades are in and you have no questions about them. (If there is a chance you might ever ask me for a recommendation letter, you should save your work with my comments to show me at that time.) I also assume you know how to use a printer, and how to schedule your time such that you will be able to turn in your work at the appropriate times.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Please note that I will strictly adhere to Marquette's policy on academic honesty, which can be found online.

READINGS:

WEEK 1

26 August Introduction
28 August Marx, Karl. "Wage Labor and Capital," pp. 203-17 in *The Marx Engels Reader*
[we will assign memo weeks and working groups as well]

WEEK 2

2 September Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," pp. 70-77, 93-101 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*
4 September Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" and "The German Ideology," pp. 143-155, 172-175, 186-187 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*

WEEK 3

9 September © Weber, Max. "Class, Status, Party." *From Max Weber*, pp. 180-195
11 September © Weber, "Domination and Legitimacy." *Economy and Society v. 2*, pp. 941-955

WEEK 4

16 September Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Introduction, pp. 3-21
18 September Durkheim, EFRL, Book I, Chapter 1, pp. 25-46

WEEK 5

23 September Durkheim, EFRL, Book II: Chs 1-2, pp. 87-108
25 September Durkheim, EFRL, Book II: Chs 3 and 6, pp. 109-120, 140-152.

WEEK 6

30 September Durkheim, EFRL, Book II, Chapter 7, pp. 153-178
2 October Durkheim, EFRL, Conclusion, pp. 310-343

WEEK 7

7 October
9 October

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Chs II-III
Freud, Chs IV-V

WEEK 8

14 October
16 October

Freud, Chs VI-VII
Midterm BREAK—yippee!

WEEK 9

21 October
23 October

RESERVE DESK Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." Pp. 157-169, 171-183
RESERVE DESK Rubin, pp. 184-210

WEEK 10

28 October
30 October

® Blumer, Herbert. "Society as Symbolic Interaction" [S/b Goffman]
® West, Candace & Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender"

WEEK 11

4 November
6 November

Michael Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, pp. 9-35, 48-50 [s/b vii-x, 1-5, 53-61]
Omi & Winant, Chapter 4: "Racial Formation," pp. 61-76

WEEK 12

11 November
13 November

Paper due at the beginning of class. We will discuss your papers in class.
® Anderson, Benedict. "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," AND
® Chatterjee, Partha. "Whose Imagined Community?" Pp. 282-296 in *The New Social Theory Reader*, 2nd ed. [before O&W?]

WEEK 13

18 November
20 November

® Bourdieu, Pierre. "Social Space and Symbolic Power" [put earlier in semester if I'm keeping]
® Foucault, Michel. "The Means of Correct Training," pp. 188 -205 in *The Foucault Reader*.

WEEK 14

25 November
27 November

Final papers due.
THANKSGIVING—no class

WEEK 15

2 December
4 December

Evaluations, and review for final
Review for final

10 December

FINAL EXAM, Wednesday, 8-10 am

Have a great break