

SOCI 3000 **Sociological Theory**

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Office hours: Tues 2-3; Thurs 10:30-12 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 appear 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, it gets easier with practice. 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. Give yourself TIME. You cannot expect to understand a difficult text by skimming it or giving it a quick look. Take your time.
2. Strive with patience. Take a break if you get frustrated, but don't give up.
3. Look up words you don't know in a dictionary, but don't expect the dictionary to have the final say.
4. 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.
5. Be sure you know each pronoun's antecedent (the noun whose place the pronoun takes).
6. Take notes on what you read, and underline and annotate the reading itself. A note in the margin about the author's point in each paragraph can be very helpful as you read, and as you review later.
7. Read slowly, making sure you are clear about each paragraph's point before moving on to the next.
8. 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, possibly working your way backwards through the earlier portions of text, using that sentence as a key to the rest of the passage.
9. 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 4 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).**
- **Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.**
- **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.)

In addition to the books, some readings, denoted © in the reading list, will be available in a course pack available at Sweeney's (1400 W. Wells). 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

Requirements for the course include:

1. Active participation in class discussions (20 pts). 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. Of course, if you are sick, particularly if your illness may be contagious, please follow common sense precautions, but please let me know beforehand that you will be missing class. If you are absent a great deal, it is helpful to have a doctor's note to explain your condition.

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 as possible 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 pts).

Within the first three 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 600- to 800-word memos (25 pts. each for a total of 50 pts.)

Each student will be assigned two weeks' readings on which to write a brief memo (600-800 words, with word count listed at the end), due via TurnItIn.com by **9AM on the Thursday of the week assigned**. I will use these memos to help facilitate discussion. The memo may be about Tuesday's reading assignment and/or Thursday's and it may compare readings from within the week or to earlier week's reading assignments. See Memo Instructions (below).

TurnItIn.com INSTRUCTIONS: If you have not already done so for another class, you will need to create an account with TurnItIn and enroll in our class. The class is listed as SOCI 3000. The class ID is **3366771** and our enrollment password is **Marx**. Please be sure you are comfortable using this website BEFORE your first memo is due. It is your responsibility to turn your memo in on time.

4. Final Examination on Friday, 17 December, 1-3 pm (25 pts.)

This will be a comprehensive, short-answer examination, to assess your grasp of key concepts. In the last weeks of class, as part of our review, we will engage in a process of writing some or all of the exam questions as a class.

Memo Instructions

In each of your two memos, you will formulate a helpful question for discussion (see above) and develop an initial, thoughtful response to it. There are many ways to ask a question such 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 the author 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 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.

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. ****If you have not proofread your memo, it is incomplete; I will therefore stop reading after 4 grammatical/spelling errors and return it to you ungraded.**** (You will then have 1 week from the date your group's memos were returned in which to submit a paper for a grade, without the benefit of comments for a rewrite.) **PLEASE** strive to make your memo grammatically **PERFECT**. Complete memos will be graded on the formulation of the question, how well you ground your response in the readings, how well you select and integrate quotations from the readings into the memo, how clearly you present your ideas, and your overall writing style (grammar, eloquence, and organization). The grading rubric for memos is attached at the back of this syllabus.

Memo Goals:

An outstanding memo will have the following features: (a) A strong thesis statement, (b) an appropriate selection of authors, (c) quotations from the reading, (d) clear, effective organization, and (e) excellent word choice, grammar, sentence structure, and editing.

You **MUST** use quotations from the readings, cited properly (Author,page), to support your claims.

Your essay must be 600-800 words. 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 & White's *Elements of Style* is a very handy little guide to writing well.

Memos are due at the 9AM on the Thursday of the week assigned. The paper will be counted as a day late if you submit it after the deadline. Late papers will lose one-half letter grade for each day they are late.

Note on Memo Assignments:

If it is not convenient for you to submit a memo on one of the weeks you have been assigned, you may trade with another student. To ensure that there is no confusion and that you each receive grades for your memos, you must **both** inform me of the trade.

REWRITE POLICY:

All good writing is actually the product of multiple revisions, so I allow rewrites, with the following caveats:

1. Your grade is not guaranteed to go up, just because you have rewritten the memo. Grades may stay the same or go down.

The best way to ensure a substantially improved grade is to improve the substance of your memo. I note grammatical, spelling and similar errors, and I often make stylistic suggestions. These are not the only changes that you will need to make if you are going to improve your grade. Begin your rewrite by reading my comments and writing a proposal of the substantive changes you plan to make. As you complete the revision of your rewrite, be sure it is free of grammatical or spelling errors, particularly any of the kinds that I identified in the first version.

2. For me to accept a re-write **you must confer with me** about your proposed changes, whether you understand my comments or not. In our discussion, I will be happy to clarify my comments or make suggestions.

3. For me to accept a re-write it must be submitted **on paper**, formatted and stapled, **with the original (and my comments) attached**, one week after the date your group's memos were returned.

LATE PAPER POLICY:

While I will send a message to confirm receipt of your memo, it is your responsibility to be sure I received it on time. Late memos or other assignments will lose 1/2 grade for each day they are late, beginning after the time they are due. Memos are due at 9 am on the Thursday of the assigned week via email (not as an attachment).

Other Policies

LOGISTICS: I assume that, as a college student, you know how to use a 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 a stapler, and how to schedule your time such that you will be able to turn in your work at the appropriate times. Any printed work of more than one page must be stapled.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Please note that I will strictly adhere to Marquette's policy on academic honesty, which can be found online. At the very least, any instance of plagiarism, cheating, or other dishonesty will be met with a zero for the assignment with no opportunity to improve the grade, and a report to the Chair of the Department of Social and Cultural Sciences and the Associate Dean of your college.

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 memos and exams. You must organize your memo 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.

READINGS:

WEEK 1

- 31 August Introduction
2 September © 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 [Group A]

- 7 September © Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," pp. 70-81, 93-101 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*
9 September © Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" and "The German Ideology," pp. 143-155, 172-175, 186-187 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*

WEEK 3 [Group B]

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

WEEK 4 [Group C]

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

WEEK 5 [Group D]

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

WEEK 6 [Group E]

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

WEEK 7 [Group A]

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

WEEK 8

- 21 October Freud, Chs VI-VII
23 October **Midterm BREAK—yippee!**

WEEK 9 [Group B]

- 26 October © Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." Pp. 157-169, 171-183
28 October © Rubin, pp. 184-204

WEEK 10 (Grp C)

- 2 November Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Pp. 1-21, 30-48, 51-58
- 4 November © West, Candace & Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender"

WEEK 11 (Grp D)

- 9 November Michael Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, pages: vii-x, 1-5, 53-61
- 11 November Omi & Winant, Chapter 4: "Racial Formation," pp. 61-76

WEEK 12 (Grp E)

- 16 November © Foucault, Michel. "The Means of Correct Training." (Pp. 188-205 in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. Pantheon, 1984).
- 18 November © Foucault, Michel. "The Repressive Hypothesis." (Pp. 301-29 in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. Pantheon, 1984).

WEEK 13

- 23 November Continue discussing Foucault
- 25 November **THANKSGIVING—no class**

WEEK 14

- 30 November **Write two Final Exam questions for discussion in small groups; we will workshop these questions in class**
- 2 December **Bring in 1 typed page—Response and Evaluation of Question**

WEEK 15

- 7 December Continue discussing questions and finalize exam selections
- 9 December Review for final
- 17 December FINAL EXAM, Friday, 1-3pm**

Have a great break!!!

Memo Grading Rubric

These memos are brief, but they are each worth a quarter of your final grade so they need to be good! On your memo, I will endeavor to provide thoughtful, helpful comments to explain the grade I have given and what it would take to improve the memo. Memos may be re-written for an average of the two grades.

Explanation of memo grades:

- A** Poses an important and clear question and provides a thoughtful, thought-provoking analysis of the reading(s) discussed. Detailed, close reading of text or a fruitful, careful comparison of two or more texts. May offer a thoughtful challenge to the reading's argument or analysis, or pushes beyond a summary of the reading. Quotations are present and have page references. Beautifully written, edited, and well-crafted—the discussion includes some sort of thesis statement or concluding statement, paragraphs follow a clear logic.
- AB** Excellent on all but one of the above measures. Could be pushed a bit farther, or reveals a minor slip of logic, or needs better organization.
- B** Fulfills basic requirements of assignment, as laid out in syllabus. May involve more summary than engagement with the text. Engages text, but might lack full detail or depth. May reveal only a cursory understanding of text in some small aspect. May contain slips of logic. May be lacking in direct quotations. May have minor problems with grammar or style.
- BC** Fulfills basic requirements of assignment, but severely lacking in one or more areas. Memos that ask numerous questions and provide answers that do not engage deep thinking risk falling into this category. May be generally correct but poorly edited or not very clear. May articulate questions very well, but reflect a shaky grasp of the readings.
- C** Makes a good point or engages with one point of reading, though perhaps not to full, logical conclusion. May have serious grammatical errors or style problems. May seem hurried or slapdash, or reflect a weak understanding of the readings. May focus more on personal experiences or opinions rather than engaging the text. May have more than one of the problems listed as qualifying for a BC.
- CD** Shows some effort, but contains serious errors or problems. May be missing direct quotations from the readings, or show very weak grasp. May have serious grammatical errors or style problems.
- D** Shows some effort. Significantly under-theorized. Not completely incorrect or without insight. May have serious grammatical errors or style problems.
- F** Shows very little effort. Significantly under-theorized. Makes incorrect assertions. Reveals little grasp of the reading. May have serious grammatical errors or style problems.