

Spring 2012

Classical Sociological Theory

Essay Exam One: Marx and Dialectical Materialism

Instructor Christina Nadler

Date of Exam: February 24th

Role and Audience: For this assignment your role will be that of a college instructor and your audience is the other instructors teaching classical theory this semester.

Format: The format will be that of a speech you would give to your co-faculty members during a meeting. You can be as straight-forward as you like or you may be more creative in terms of adding in some dialogue from the audience, ie questions or comments.

Task: Their students just don't get it. 'Marx hates capitalism, it's as simple as that', they say. They also think they are being way too picky – 'conflict theorist, dialectical materialist – same diff'. Your task is to help your co-faculty members convey the nuances of Marx's argument to their students. You may want to touch on how best to explain Marx's dialectical view of history or what he finds revolutionary about capitalism. What the faculty members should come away with is at least one solid thorough piece of advice on how to advise their students about the significance of understanding Marx as a dialectical materialist, OR Marx's unique contribution to sociology's understanding of either structure/agency, individual vs. society, OR the transition to 'modernity'.

Tips: You *do not* need to demonstrate that you learned every single thing we covered in the past weeks. In the same way Marx leaves price out of his analysis of the commodity, so that he may fully focus on it as a material object of labor, you may need to exclude information to make your points *strong*.

Criteria for Evaluation: You will be graded on accuracy, evidence and quality of examples, as well as a clear understanding of the audience and your role. Your essay should be focused and it should be clear how each piece of evidence supports your argument. Spelling will count to the extent you spell important new terms correctly.

Purpose of this assignment: The purpose of this exam is to have you practice articulating an explanation of Marx's method of inquiry and how he applies it to understanding historical change. It should build your fluency in classical sociology theory, including an understanding of the vocabulary, and theories of Marx, the sociological debates about structure/agency, individual vs. society, the transition to 'modernity'. It will also help the ability to understand the nature of academic disciplines in terms of the kinds of questions a discipline traditionally poses and what questions or concepts are valued. This assignment will also contribute to your collaborative online writing portfolio, which will show the development of your familiarity with, and ideas about these theorists.

After completing the exam (optional but recommended): Please give yourself the grade you think that you have earned, with additional reflections on assignments and your thinking process. You may also write instructions you would give if giving the assignment to another student. This can be submitted with your exam or by email before the next class.

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Essay Exam Two: Durkheim and Solidarity

Instructor Christina Nadler

Date of Exam: March 6th

Role and Audience: There is a new sociology publication that is coming out comprised of fiction to entertain nerdy intellectuals. You are writing for this publication.

Format: The format is a story which can follow a standard form of introduction, body and conclusion, but you may also be more creative and format it the way you think best tells the story. Remember the audience. Note: You can revise the form after the exam and come up with something really creative and fun for your blog.

Task: You are going to write a short story the fictional day where Durkheim bumps into Marx—you can take it from there in terms of how creative you get. Seeing as they each have a distinct method for producing their theory and a distinct sociological perspective, your story can include a discussion of how they differ in method. The overarching theme of this essay should address the theorist's understanding of the 'individual and society' or 'structure and agency' and how they have seen this change throughout history, but you can put it into any kind of narrative you like

Criteria for Evaluation: You will be graded on accuracy and evidence in regard to the theories, but also for your understanding of the genre of writing and your creativity. Spelling will count to the extent you spell important new terms correctly.

Purpose of this assignment: To gain fluency in classical sociology theory, including an understanding of the vocabulary, and theories of Marx, and Durkheim as well as an understanding of the sociological debates about structure/agency, individual vs. society, the transition to 'modernity' and the ability to show how these theorists addressed those debates. This should also demonstrate an enhanced reading ability by showing the product of having done close readings of difficult texts, which would be achieved by adequately addressing the theorists' arguments. This should also enhance your critical thinking skills and make a contribution to your collaborative online writing portfolio.

After completing the exam (optional but recommended): Please give yourself the grade you think that you have earned, with additional reflections on assignments and your thinking process. You may also write instructions you would give if giving the assignment to another student. This can be submitted with your exam or by email before the next class.

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Classical Sociological Theory

Essay Exam Three: Weber **Instructor Christina Nadler** **Date of Exam: March 23rd**

Role and Audience: You are a colleague of Weber's and delivering a speech for him to other sociologists. You will be reading and writing the speech as Weber. You may use your discretion and poetic license to go out of character to make brief notes, just as if you were actually reading someone else's speech.

Format: This exam will be formatted as a professional speech.

Task: You have to deliver speech for Weber after the first publication of the Protestant Ethic to a room full of colleagues at one of the first Annual German Sociological Association Conference. He was too depressed to attend, as he suffered from pretty serious depression (maybe related to his feelings about the world?). You thought he was going to give you a prepared speech, but all you got was a copy of his book. Prepare a speech where Weber emphasizes his critique against a 'naïve historical materialism' as he does in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Be mindful, there could be Marxists in the room, so you will really want to explain how Weber makes his socio-historical argument and include, with description of each, the three aspects of Protestantism that create the ethic. You may also want to note how the explicitly 'Protestant' aspect of this ethic had faded away leaving (depressingly?) just the spirit of Capitalism.

Criteria for Evaluation: You will be graded on accuracy, evidence and quality of examples, as well as a clear understanding of the audience and your role. Your essay should be focused and it should be clear how each piece of evidence supports your argument. Spelling will count to the extent you spell important new terms correctly.

Purpose of this assignment: To demonstrate fluency in classical sociology theory, including an understanding of the vocabulary, and theories of Marx, and Weber and their differences in ideas about the transition to 'modernity'. This assignment will show your ability to trace Marx's influence on the work of Weber, and his response to Marx. This should also enhance your critical thinking skills and make a contribution to your collaborative online writing portfolio.

After completing the exam (optional but recommended): Please give yourself the grade you think that you have earned, with additional reflections on assignments and your thinking process. You may also write instructions you would give if giving the assignment to another student. This can be submitted with your exam or by email before the next class.

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Classical Sociological Theory

Essay Exam Four: Du Bois **Instructor Christina Nadler** **Date of Exam: April 24th**

Role and Audience: For this assignment your role will be that of an academic and the audience is other people interested in understanding race in the United States.

Task: *Either* write an essay that explains Du Bois's theory of Double Consciousness through an analysis of a character in the film Crash. In this essay you should address how is Marx's influence on Du Bois evident through Du Bois's concept of double consciousness? What do the theorists have in common? How do they differ? How would Marx's theory apply to the character.

Or write an essay that draws a parallel of Du Bois's critique of Booker T. Washington's Triple Paradox with a character in the film Crash who exemplifies these same or similar paradoxes. You may want to address whether or not a century between Washington and the character make a difference. Have race issues in the United States changed?

Format: The format will be a standard argumentative essay.

Criteria for Evaluation: You will be graded on accuracy, evidence and quality of examples, as well as a clear understanding of the audience and your role. Your essay should be focused and it should be clear how each piece of evidence supports your argument. Spelling will count to the extent you spell important new terms correctly.

Purpose of this assignment: Your exam will demonstrate your fluency in classical sociology theory, particularly an understanding of the vocabulary, and theories of Du Bois and Marx. It will also demonstrate your ability to compare and contrast two theorists and how one has built on the other's theories. This should also enhance your critical thinking skills and make a contribution to your collaborative online writing portfolio.

After completing the exam (optional but recommended): Please give yourself the grade you think that you have earned, with additional reflections on assignments and your thinking process. You may also write instructions you would give if giving the assignment to another student. This can be submitted with your exam or by email before the next class.

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Essay Exam Five: Freud

Instructor Christina Nadler
Date of Exam: May 8th

Role and Audience: You are on the curriculum committee of a sociology department.

Task: Make the argument for why Freud should be considered a Classical Sociological Theorist.

Format: This is in the form of a proposal to have Freud taught in the department's Classical Theory course. You may want to structure your proposal in the way a course proposal is formatted (you can google samples). You won't need to write a whole course proposal for classical theory because you are focusing only on including Freud in the course. You may want to include sections common in course proposals such as: Explanation, Focus, Rationale, and Learning Objectives. You should also touch on how you would situate Freud with the other theorists you would teach (you can pick which ones you would want in this class).

Criteria for Evaluation: You will be graded on accuracy, evidence and quality of examples, as well as a clear understanding of the audience and your role. Your essay should be focused and it should be clear how each piece of evidence supports your argument. Spelling will count to the extent you spell important new terms correctly.

Purpose of this assignment: This exam will show your ability to articulate the sociological relevance of Freud through understanding his theory of the social production of individuals and the social nature of individual psychology and subjectivity. This should also enhance your critical thinking skills and make a contribution to your collaborative online writing portfolio.

After completing the exam (optional but recommended): Please give yourself the grade you think that you have earned, with additional reflections on assignments and your thinking process. You may also write instructions you would give if giving the assignment to another student. This can be submitted with your exam or by email before the next class.