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## SOC 0150: SOCIAL THEORY (W)

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**COURSE MEETS:** TUES.-THURS. 2:30-3:45 P.M. FALL TERM 2004  
**ROOM:** 2200 W.W. POSVAR HALL (FORMERLY 2E51 FORBES QUAD)  
**PROFESSOR:** DR. LISA D. BRUSH  
**OFFICE LOCATION:** 2425 W.W. POSVAR HALL (FORMERLY 2J28 FORBES QUAD)  
**OFFICE HOURS:** TUESDAYS 12:00-1:00 P.M. AND BY APPOINTMENT  
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### WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?!

This course is about Big Ideas: Big Ideas in social theory, Big Ideas about inequality, Big Ideas that explain social change. The Big Idea of the course itself is this: What do you do when you encounter a Big Idea? My premise is that although raw brain power helps, fruitfully engaging with Big Ideas involves *skills* and *strategies* that university-educated people can learn and develop. It's not how smart you are but how you are smart. I want you to finish the semester better able to recognize, analyze, critically evaluate and appreciate, and develop and express Big Ideas in theoretical texts. That includes both theoretical texts you *read* and theoretical texts you *write*. The readings in this course are exclusively the Big Ideas of the classical social theorists expressed in their own words (albeit frequently in translation). This is a writing intensive course, which means you will have an opportunity to explore Big Ideas not only by *reading* and *talking* but also by systematically *writing* about them. We will explore the conventions, expectations, and skills of reading and writing social theory as a way of learning what it takes to encounter Big Ideas with intellectual appreciation and critical confidence.

### WHAT'S THE POINT OF THEORIZING?

A theory in its most simple form is an idea that guides and explains observations of the world. Every discipline of observation – from astronomy to zoology – has theories that both guide observation (that is, “discipline” the observer about what to look for and what “counts” as data or knowledge) and provide characteristic or “disciplinary” explanations. In sociology, the idea is to observe and explain “social things” or “social facts” – the phenomena, character, and dynamics of the social world.

Each of us has the ability to theorize. Moreover, we do so regularly, often without realizing it. We theorize by asking and answering questions about the social world. We ask these questions because we must understand society in order to determine how we will act. Our answers are informal social theory. Often family, political, economic, or religious systems provide us with ready-made answers to our questions about why things are the way they are and our place in the social order. We may revise these answers based on our experiences, or the experiences of people we know, coming to our own conclusions. The answers are vitally important because our social actions are based on

our understanding of how society works. It is much more difficult to act strategically – to preserve or change the world – without some sense of how things are and why.

This is where the Big Ideas come in. Formal social theorizing is a way to grapple systematically with questions about social life.

"Theories are sets of logically interrelated statements that attempt to order, describe, and explain the causes and consequences of personal, social, or other relevant events. Powerful theories also try to predict the occurrence of events before they happen. Their power is measured by the robustness of their predictions under as many varied conditions as possible. This means that theories are generally abstract and use the interrelationships among general concepts rather than concrete variables. The more abstract a theory gets, however, the less it can be applied directly to any phenomenon that needs to be explained. Conversely, the more concrete a theory gets, the less it can be applied to complex phenomena under different social conditions." (Aysan Sev'er, *Fleeing the house of horrors* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002], p. 43)

Social theorists observe the social world and seek to explain it. The purpose of social theory is to provide a lens through which people can analyze and understand the social world. The Big Ideas at the root of social theories are important because they provide templates for understanding and action. Politics are always based on social theory, although political actors may not acknowledge their foundational theoretical assumptions or influences. We will discuss and write about both the theory of politics and the politics of theory.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The substantive objective of this course is to introduce you to some Big Ideas in the history of sociological theory. We will read excerpts from the “classics” by the “founding fathers” of sociology (Marx, Durkheim, and Weber). We will also read selections from the theoretical writings of some of sociology’s “other parents” – that is, contemporaries, followers, or challengers of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim who also developed theories dealing with social change, but whose works have generally not been consecrated as part of the canon. Each of these thinkers, however, addressed themes that have become part of the central concerns of sociology, such as inequality, racism, women’s subordination, sexuality, or identity. Because this is a writing intensive course, we will consistently use written expression, feedback, and revision to clarify thinking, enhance and assess learning, develop insights and opinions, and appreciate and understand new ideas.

## LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify and explain the significance of many of the central concepts and arguments – the Big Ideas – in classical social theory.

- Use fundamental categories of theory to assess some of the most influential contributions to the sociological canon and to enhance your comprehension, appreciation, and exposition of Big Ideas.
- Recognize some Big Ideas not generally included in the canon and understand the factors behind their exclusion.
- Compare and contrast the ways different theorists use the same or similar concepts to build or present their Big Ideas.
- Assess different classical approaches to “inequality” as a problem in social theory.
- Identify and use strategies for encountering Big Ideas related to the social world.
- Present, sustain, and defend a Big Idea – a theoretical argument, comparison, or analysis – in a piece of written work.

## A WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSE

### LEARNING TO WRITE

The writing-intensive aspects of this course are a little bit about the mechanics of written expression. The writing-intensive aspects of this course are a lot more about the means and methods of writing in the social sciences in general and in sociological theory in particular. The theoretical essay is a particular genre of exposition, just as a short story, book review, cover letter, position paper, policy brief, or lab report is a particular genre. Learning to write in this disciplinary genre is a skill that should serve you well if you are working on a major in sociology. It also should help you with other analytical writing tasks.

I expect at the minimum that your prose will conform to the practices of Standard Written English. SWE is a formal idiom with standardized grammar, spelling, punctuation, and forms of exposition. If you do not already have a style manual, I strongly recommend that you purchase one. If you intend to write in a social science discipline or idiom, I recommend either the APA style manual or the Chicago style manual. Strunk & White’s *The Elements of Style* is a classic (and much shorter!) general style manual, suitable for writers in both the sciences and the humanities. If you are a major in the natural sciences, I highly recommend the Council of Scientific Editors’ manual, *Scientific Style and Format*. Lynne Truss’s *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* is too gimmicky for my taste, but it is a best-selling and humorous look at grammar. Anne Lamott’s book *Bird by Bird* has interesting advice for writers, with helpful remedies for writer’s block. Both Ray Bradbury and Ursula K. Le Guin have published wonderful collections of essays about the craft of writing, especially the eternal question: “Where do you get your ideas?” My current favorite is *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing* by Claire Kehrwald Cook. Her appendix on grammar is superb and the rest of the book is wonderful. The course packet includes the “Guidelines for submissions” from the top disciplinary journal, the *American Sociological Review*. If all else fails, use that as your style guide. We will read George Orwell’s polemic on good writing early in the semester. If you follow his general advice, you cannot go too far wrong. In class, we will discuss

some of the discipline-specific issues involving your choices as a writer (for example, person and “direct address,” tense and the “anthropological present”).

The skills of disciplinary and genre writing are just that – skills. Theoretical exposition will undoubtedly come more easily to some of you than to others. Talent does not hurt! However, it is no substitute for practice. I will do my best to provide you with good instruction, including clear expectations and constructive feedback. Remember, though, that the key element *you can control* is your seriousness of purpose and your dedication to practice.

#### WRITING TO LEARN

Writing is about having something to say. In this course, writing is about developing something to say about the Big Ideas of classical social theory. In this course, you will write to show me what you are thinking and learning. More importantly, you will write as a way of engaging intellectually with Big Ideas. You will match wits with some of the great minds of classical social theory. Through writing, you will learn to become a thoughtful participant in a conversation about urgent issues of inequality and social change. The writing assignments are designed to help you use disciplinary forms to clarify your thoughts, organize your responses, ask questions, recognize points of confusion and contradiction, build a sustained argument, marshal and evaluate evidence, and draw convincing conclusions. Orwell argues that clarity of thought and clarity of expression are one. He is right. I want you to be able to say what you mean and mean what you say. Writing is an excellent means to those ends.

#### SOME TIPS

- Avoid ambiguities but explore contradictions.
- If you are unsure about your conclusions, state the alternatives clearly and make what you see as the strongest argument.
- Don't be afraid to stick your neck out.
- Remember it is difficult but possible to express complex ideas in clear, concise prose.
- Above all, put yourself in your readers' shoes. Will they understand what you mean?
- I will let you know if I can't tell what you mean. Learn from comments and feedback.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Do</i> prepare an outline or list of points to make before you write.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Do not</i> stare at a blank computer screen when you are at a loss for words. Unblock by writing the first thing that comes into your head. Then REVISE.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Do</i> read over your work with fresh eyes (and read out loud) to revise and proof your text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Do not</i> make your text too complex or simplistic. Suit your writing to both your topic and your reader.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Do</i> keep in mind the point you are making while you write, and use clear language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Do not</i> pad your work with irrelevant anecdotes or quotes.</li> </ul>

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### DISCUSSION

Participating in discussions is one of the best ways to learn. You are expected to contribute your insights to the class. The culture of the class will, I hope, be a congenial one for discussion. I will work to maintain such a culture by swiftly countering displays of contempt and by practicing principles of pedagogical equity to the extent possible. I cannot help you learn if you do not participate in discussion, however. Doing excellent written work – even in a writing-intensive course – is not enough to demonstrate adequate performance in a university course. I will therefore call on people – at random if necessary – to participate in discussion.

Preparation is paramount. To meet the learning goals of this course, you will need to read the materials for every class session carefully and thoughtfully. Most of the readings are quite short, but do not be fooled. As a general rule, the shorter the reading is, the more challenging it is! Most selections require more than one reading. (One of the criteria of a “classic” is that it stands up to repeated readings. I have been reading some of these texts for an embarrassingly long time. For example, I first read Marx when I was in high school. This was before most of you were born. I learn something every time I read these classics, and I learn from every discussion.) Be sure to allot enough time to go through each reading at least twice BEFORE class and to take notes (in the margins, on 3x5 cards, in a notebook, on your computer, or however you prefer). Use these notes to prepare yourself for discussion, so that you will have “something to say” (or at the very least some question to ask) when you come to class. You are also likely to find it helpful to read over the text, your reading notes, and your notes from our class discussions AFTER each class. Bring your text to every class session for ready reference.

Whatever you do, don't just sit there. Say anything you can defend against reasoned argument. Treat your colleagues' contributions with respect. That means taking them seriously and challenging them as well as extending basic courtesy. You have my professional pledge that I will do the same for you.

## ATTENDANCE AND Q-CARDS

To help organize your participation and preparation, and to allow you to help set the agenda for discussion, you are required to maintain a collection of Q-Cards. On a file card (I will provide these), write your name (along with any preferred nickname, if that is how you want us to address you, Sparky!) on one side. On the flip side, keep a neatly-written record of key questions about the readings. Date each question and be sure to give a specific page reference if appropriate. You may ask questions of fact, context, clarification – anything that gives articulate form to your curiosity and engagement with the text. Take for granted that this will get easier as we go along. Also assume that if your Q-Card is drawn, you may have to elaborate the question as well as suggest a tentative answer.

At the beginning of every class session for which you do not have another written assignment due, I will collect the Q-Cards, which we may use to shape the discussion. I may call at random on people from the submitted questions. I may address questions in a subsequent class session. I will take attendance by checking the Q-Cards. This means you will need at least two cards "in circulation" at any given time (one to leave with me and the other to have with you as you read). Over the course of the semester, you are allowed three "free passes" – you may withdraw from the question pool (by not handing in a question) or decline to answer when I call on you. *Attendance is mandatory: If you have more than three classes for which I have no recorded question or written assignment (either because you "passed" or because you were physically absent), you will lose 2 points from your accumulated total toward your final grade for each additional absence.* Attendance and participation will contribute 15% of your total grade.

## CONCEPT IDS

To build your skills, do the theoretical spadework for your essays, promote preparation, and demonstrate your learning in this class, you will produce a series of brief (50 words or less) Concept IDs. In a Concept ID, you identify and give the significance of a concept you choose from the reading for that session. An important part of reading and responding to theoretical texts involves noticing important concepts, understanding how theorists use them, and grasping their significance in a broader theoretical scheme. You will write seven Concept IDs over the course of the term, identifying and giving the significance of concepts you choose from the reading. These assignments will contribute 15% of your total grade in this course.

Submit your Concept IDs electronically via e-mail to [lbrush@pitt.edu](mailto:lbrush@pitt.edu). Send each one as an attached Word file *by noon on the day it is due* (see due dates in schedule of readings below). Include your name, date, and a word count in the file. I will not accept late assignments. I will cheerfully accept early submissions.

I will evaluate your Concept IDs using the following rubric:

	Far exceeds expectations (2 points)	Exceeds expectations (1.75 points)	Meets expectations (1.5 points)	Fails to meet expectations (1 points)
Identification & definition	You identified, defined, & contextualized a significant concept using examples & comparisons to demonstrate your constructive engagement with the Big Idea.	You adroitly referred to textual examples in order to identify & define a significant concept. You nailed the Big Idea.	You correctly identified a concept & provided a justifiable definition. You identified the Big Idea.	You did not correctly identify or define a concept from the reading. You missed the Big Idea.
Significance	You critically & creatively placed the concept in the context of the author's work, the discipline, problems of inequality, & your own views.	You assessed the practical, political, & theoretical significance of the concept.	You accurately represented the practical or theoretical significance of the concept.	You neglected to mention the significance of the concept or the theoretical weight it bears in the text.
Technical exposition	Aside from any minor lapse from SWE, your prose was lively, your images vivid, & your account well-organized, substantiated, instructive, & interesting. Your writing had both heft & grace.	You had only infrequent, minor lapses from SWE & your exposition was well-organized, concise, detailed, & consistent with disciplinary idiom.	You had minor lapses from SWE, adequate but awkward organization or turns of phrase, & proper citations.	You had serious & frequent lapses from SWE, incomprehensible organization, improper citations, or other serious stylistic problems. Please proofread!

### THEORETICAL ESSAYS

You will also have the opportunity to demonstrate your grasp of the materials covered in this course and your progress toward meeting the learning goals through three theoretical essays of approximately 1500 words each. Each of these three essays will be worth 20% of your final grade. They will consist of structured writing assignments. You will have some choice of topic, and we will discuss the processes of writing and revising them in class.

We will also discuss the essay form. For now, note that an essay is an analytical, reflective, and persuasive piece of expository prose. An essay consists of an introduction, a body of evidence and arguments, and a conclusion. In the introduction, you set up a question or debate. In the body, you provide specific arguments and supporting evidence (and deal with any counter-arguments or counter-examples if possible). In the conclusion, you discuss implications, make recommendations, or explore ramifications. In this class, your essays will answer (or at least grapple with) central questions raised by classical social theory.

Approach the three essays as cumulative. You will have an opportunity to revise and resubmit Essay I. Use comments on the text of Essay I to improve your approach in Essays II and III. You may do this most efficiently by viewing the questions as linked and the essays as constructed from substantive and thematic issues you glean throughout the semester.

The week before each Essay is due (see schedule of dates below), you will give a brief verbal progress report as part of the review session. At the very least, be prepared to give your choice of question and a brief account of your proposed answer.

I will evaluate your theoretical essays using the following rubric:

	Far exceeds expectations (5 points)	Exceeds expectations (4 points)	Meets expectations (3.5 points)	Fails to meet expectations (2.5 points)
Engagement with the question	You used your answer to the question as an opportunity to say something interesting about social theory, inequality, or the intellectual history of the discipline. You made me say, "Gee, I wish I'd thought of that!" You made the Big Idea your own.	Your answer was thorough & persuasive, addressed alternative possible answers or debates, & shed an interesting light on the subject. You nailed the Big Idea.	You developed an answer to the question. You picked up on the Big Idea.	You did not answer the question. You missed the Big Idea.
Engagement with the material	Your answer demonstrated that you have critically & constructively engaged with the Big Idea, the author's work, the discipline, problems of inequality, & views consistent with & different from your own.	Your answer showed an excellent technical grasp of the material as presented in the reading & explored in class discussion.	Your answer appropriately quoted the text & referred to ideas raised in discussion.	Your answer gave no evidence that you did the reading or listened to the discussions.
Connections	Your essay creatively connected the question & your answer to broader	Your answer demonstrated an awareness of how	You put your answer in the context of	Your answer listed points but failed to connect

	issues in social theory & everyday life. You are Rembrandt.	the question & your answer contribute to social theory. You can paint by numbers.	course material. You were able to connect the dots.	them. You did not find a dot.
Technical exposition	Same as rubric above.	Same as above.	Same as above.	Same as above.

Submit your theoretical essays electronically via e-mail (to lbrush@pitt.edu) as an attached Word or .rtf file by noon on the days they are due (see due dates in schedule of readings below). Include your name, date, and a word count in the file. I will not accept late assignments. I will cheerfully accept early submissions.

### EVALUATION

Grades for this course are based on a point system. A total of 100 points are possible. Your final grade will be based on the total points you earn out of the possible 100. You will earn points based on how well you can demonstrate, by meeting the course requirements, having learned and understood the material. Grading will be criteria-based, not norm-based, and there will be no curve. That is, if you demonstrate (through your accumulated points on the essays and participation in discussions) mastery of 90 percent or more of the material (that is, accumulate 90 or more points), you will earn an "A."

<i>Accumulated points</i>	<i>Letter grade</i>
90 or more	A
87-89	B+
80-86	B
77-79	C+
70-76	C
67-69	D+
55-66	D
Below 55	F

***Remember, after your three "free" absences or passes, each time you miss class or withdraw from participation you will lose 2 points. You can easily turn a passing grade into a failing grade by failing to attend. I can't tell you how cranky this will make me – I dislike failing students, especially when it is so clearly avoidable.***

Note: You may accumulate up to 5 bonus points for significantly contributing to the learning community. This includes contributions to class discussions, questions to the instructor during lectures or challenges to the instructor or your classmates. To be considered, your comments must be relevant to the discussion and delivered with respect for your classmates. All questions will be welcomed.

## COURSE MATERIALS

The required text for this course is:

Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, Kathryn Schmidt, and Indermohan Virk (eds.), *Classical Sociological Theory* (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

The book is available in paperback at the University Book Center. Unfortunately, it is not in the library and I have not been able to put it on reserve. Fortunately, it is not prohibitively expensive. It is an excellent collection of excerpts from what are essentially primary source documents. In the Schedule of Readings and Meetings below, I refer to assignments from this book as *CST*, pp. xx-xxx.

We will be supplementing *CST* with selections from Frederick Engels, John Stuart Mill, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. For reasons we will explore in discussion, these selections are not included in the book. I am also assigning an essay on writing by George Orwell, one of the finest English prose stylists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These materials (and some other items) are available in a course pack available for purchase at minimal cost at the Book Center.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR COURSE PACK

- From Engels, Friedrich, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: International Pubs., 1970).
- From Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, *Women and Economics* (New York: Small and Maynard, 1898).
- From Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, *The Man-Made World, or Our Androcentric Culture* (New York: Charlton Company, 1911).
- From Mill, John Stuart, *The Subjection of Women* (London, 1869).
- Orwell, George. "Politics and the English language." From *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javonvich, 1946/1953).

### SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND MEETINGS

- 31 August – Organizational meeting.
- 2 September – *CST*, pp. 1-15. Reader, Orwell.
- 7 September – *CST*, pp. 19-33.
- 9 September – *CST*, pp. 34-43. Concept ID 1 due.
- 14 September – *CST*, pp. 44-75. Concept ID 2 due.
- 16 September – *Rosh Hashana*. Class cancelled. A sweet and healthy 5765 and *l'shana tova* to all.
- 21 September – *CST*, pp. 76-90. At the end of class, I will hand out instructions and question options for Essay I.
- 23 September – Review and discussion. Be prepared to give a verbal progress report on Essay I.
- 28 September – Essay I due.
- 30 September & October 5 – *CST*, pp. 103-127.

- 7 October – CST, pp. 128-149.
- 12 October – CST, pp. 150-161. Concept ID 3 due.
- 14 October – CST, pp. 165-187.
- 19 October – CST, pp. 188-205. Concept ID 4 due.
- 21 October – CST, pp. 206-214.
- 26 October – CST, pp. 215-222. Resubmit revisions of Essay I.
- 28 October – Reader, Engels.
- 2 November – Reader, Mill. Concept ID 5 due.
- 4 November – Reader, Gilman, from *Women and Economics*.
- 9 November – Reader, Gilman, from *Androcentrism*. At the end of class, I will hand out instructions and question options for Essay II.
- 11 November – Review and discussion. Be prepared to give a verbal progress report on Essay II.
- 16 November – Essay II due.
- 18 November – CST, pp. 235-252.
- 23 November – CST, pp. 273-286.
- 25 November – Thanksgiving Holiday. Be thankful you are not a turkey.
- 30 November – CST, pp. 289-303. Concept ID 6 due.
- 2 December – CST, pp. 304-318.
- 7 December – CST, pp. 331-338. Concept ID 7 due. At the end of class, I will hand out instructions and question options for Essay III.
- 9 December – Review and discussion. Be prepared to provide a verbal progress report on Essay III.
- Final Essay due by the start of the scheduled final exam period: Thursday, December 16, 2:00 p.m.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Enrollment in this course makes you a member of an academic community. The University of Pittsburgh enforces expectations for the members of its academic communities. These standards are designed to ensure the integrity of your education and of the evaluation process. Read the *Guidelines on Academic Integrity: Student and Faculty Obligations and Hearing Procedures* with great care. The expectations of academic integrity are central to the intellectual liveliness and standards of this academic community. As a student, you have a responsibility to be honest and to respect the ethical standards of your chosen field of study. You will have violated these standards if you:

- Refer to unauthorized materials (in other words, don't cheat).
- Provide unauthorized assistance (in other words, don't help someone else cheat).
- Receive unauthorized assistance (in other words, don't cheat).
- Possess, buy, sell, copy, or use unauthorized materials (in other words, don't buy a draft of your assignments from a "paper mill").
- Act as or use a substitute in an evaluation setting (in other words, although you may work in pairs or small groups, don't write an assignment for someone else, or have someone write an assignment for you).
- Present as your own, for academic evaluation, the ideas or words of another person without proper acknowledgement and citation of sources (in other words, don't plagiarize).

Academic integrity is not limited to these points, but these are the most important elements. They will be enforced without fail in this course. Do your own work. Figure out what you want to say and say it in your own words. Cite your sources when you quote or paraphrase. Violate these community standards and you will flunk so fast your head will spin.

### REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

If you have a disability that makes it impossible for you to complete the requirements for this course in the manner specified in the syllabus, please see me with documentation from the Office of Disability Resources and Services (216 William Pitt Union; x8-7890) and we will make appropriate arrangements.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sections of this syllabus are adapted with permission from materials developed by Drs. Gianpaolo Baiocchi and Thomas Fararo, and by Ms. Catherine Wilson. The writing tips are adapted from Heller & Hindle's 1998 manager's manual (pp. 61 and 129). The grading rubrics are adapted with kind permission from materials developed by Dr. Jonathan Sterne. Lorraine Higgins, Beth Matway, and Jean Carr provided useful comments on the writing-intensive aspects of the course.