

Qualifying Examination
Theory
Fall 2024

The questions below constitute the qualifying exam for **Theory**. To complete the exam, you must answer one question from each of the three sections below in an essay format. Each answer should be a self-contained essay approximately 8–10 pages long (i.e., 2,000–2,500 words).

Answer one of the following:

1. Sociological theory has often been concerned with epistemology and its relationship to methodology—that is, how we know what we know. What are some of the major epistemological approaches found in classic sociological theory, and what are their major critiques? How do these critiques generate new methodological approaches?

2. A major debate within sociology has revolved around the relationship between structure and agency. What does this relationship look like for Marx, Weber, and Durkheim? How have more recent theorists critiqued, extended, and modified these early ideas of this relationship?

Answer one of the following:

3. Sociologists have studied the ways in which individuals interact with one and other and with society. Exploring theory on the society and self, describe the ways in which individuals come to understand their place in society. To what extent are individuals agentic in their determination of identities? How might the development of self be a function of the ways in which interactions are structured by society? In your discussion, be sure to explore the concepts that sociologists have utilize to talk about the relationship between the self and society.

4. Erving Goffman explores interactional rituals through the concept of dramaturgy. Other scholars have proposed additional ways in which to understand interpersonal interaction (e.g., Blumer, Simmel, and Mead). Select relevant readings and provide an assessment of these approaches as juxtaposed against Goffman’s dramaturgical approach. Be sure to explore the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

Answer one of the following:

5. Arguably, the development of social theory emerged from but ultimately in reaction to classical liberal theories. What these theorists articulated were complex meanings of social processes rather than individual interests added together. If “the social” stands at the heart of our discipline today, what exactly does this mean? What answers to this question are more satisfying than others and explain why.

6. Social theory is a project for historicizing the present moment in a normative register. What are some crucial historical contexts for explaining the methodological and normative stances taken in some of these texts? (answering this will require some close reading and triangulation of materials).