

Summer 2018 Theory Examination

Choose and answer one question from each of the three numbered pairs below.

I.

A) How do classical sociological theorists describe modernity? What are their key concepts, and what pathologies or crisis tendencies does each identify? How do contemporary theorists revise these classical theories of modernity? What positions do the Frankfurt School, Lemert, Harvey, Lyotard, and Foucault take on whether modernity, however they define it, is over? Briefly articulate and justify which position you agree with.

B) What is the source and mechanism of power for Marx, Weber, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, and Foucault? What roles do economic inequalities and culture--broadly understood--play in these theories of power?

II.

A) Many theorists deal with the extent to which individuals may be subsumed to the social whole. Several theorists go beyond mere questions of agency, however, to equate the eradication of the social individual with the abolition of the physical self. What distinguishes those authors who focus upon actual death from those who focus merely upon social death? What are the goals of these authors in advocating for or describing the death of the individual for the needs of the whole?

B) What is the relationship between Bourdieu's theory of practice and Goffman's interaction ritual? Give at least two examples of their similarity and at least two examples of their differences (these need not be from actual data).

III.

A) In understanding the social world, some theorists go big, developing large-scale, integrative theories that focus on a few factors that are presented as explaining almost everything of importance. Other theorists eschew big, comprehensive stories in favor of focusing on mechanisms and contingency. Which approach is better? In your answer, describe the theories of at least two different theorists as illustration for each of the two distinct approaches (so, you'll be discussing at least four total authors). Be sure to provide evidence from the texts to support your claims about authors' views and approaches. Then, using the authors you selected as examples, evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of big, integrative theories versus a focus on mechanisms and contingency.

B) The work of Max Weber was famously described as a "debate with the ghost of Karl Marx." Beyond the fact that Weber's professional career commenced after Marx had died, is this really the case? Is Weber's work best understood as a response to Marx? In your answer, consider the work of these two founders of sociology and identify the research questions that they have in common: what research questions do the two thinkers share? In answering those shared research questions, what

are their main points of disagreement, and why do they disagree? Are there any key points of agreement? Based on your analysis, how apt is the description about Weber "debating a ghost"? Throughout your answer, be sure to provide evidence from the texts to support your claims about authors' views and ideas.