

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY**

CONTEMPORAY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

SOCI 402/2 Sec A

Fall 2020-2021

Dr. Clara Khudaverdian

EXAM/ESSAY #1

Date Posted: Wednesday, Oct 7th, 2020

Date Due: Midnight on Monday, Oct 26th, 2020

1)-You MUST submit your essay via Moodle. I will not accept emailed submissions.

2)-I have posted your essay question earlier in order to give you extra time to complete it. I have in fact added **5 extra days, which means that **NO ESSAYS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THIS DATE unless you are ill and can provide me with a medical note.** Please do not wait until the last minute to write your essay. Be organized and make sure you give yourself enough time to complete it.**

3)-This exam is worth 30% of your total grade.

Requirements:

- Your essay must be typed, **double-spaced, 12 font, Times New Roman**, 8-10 pages long, with page numbers, Please try do not exceed 10 pages. I will accept one extra page but please remember I have numerous essays to read online.
- You are being asked to answer a question and you are required to organize your paper into three main components: **a) an introduction**, which formulates the question and the particular approach you are taking to respond to this question; **b) a body**, in which your main argument(s) and examples are presented in a logical order and discussed; **c) a conclusion**, which may summarize some of the ideas or themes you have addressed, raise related issues which you have not touched on, make tentative conclusions or hypotheses, or speculate on the implications of your discussion.

- Make sure you proofread your work. Pay special attention to your spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. Keep your sentences short and simple. Choose words which are appropriate to your topic. Always explain key terms and concepts and use simple words whenever possible. You may want to consult a style manual for the correct use of commas, apostrophes, colons, and semi-colons. You must use a formal citation format.
- Please avoid outside sources. I want you to make your own personal argument. I am not interested in the assessment of these theories by other theorists. Your essay is about your thoughts. Explain the theorists' ideas, explore them and assess them. Build a solid argument. This is the goal.

QUESTION:

One of sociology's abiding concerns is the relationship between **the individual and society**. **What is society? What is the individual? And what is the relationship between the two?** These questions have been fundamental within sociological inquiry and are often phrased in terms of **agency (free will) versus structure (determination)**. Other times it is discussed in terms of **micro versus macro**. Generally, social theorists have contemplated the relationship between the individual and society, and the relationship between the two in order to understand and predict human behaviour.

Some questions that emerge out of such inquiry are: How do the actions of people in face-to-face encounters get translated into macro-level structures? How do structures influence or coerce actors? What makes human action possible? What constrains or influences action? Or, what determines humans' conduct? Are humans capable of agency? That is, are they capable of exerting power over an object, person or situation through the exercise of free will? Do social structures determine an individual's behaviour or does human agency?

This debate over the primacy of structure or agency has been the main focus of our lectures in this part of the term. **So far we have read the following theorists: Talcott Parsons, Pierre Bourdieu, Roger Brubaker on Bourdieu, Alfred Schutz, and Harold Garfinkel.** In addition I have lectured on **Anthony Giddens** but unfortunately the reading for Giddens has not received copyright clearance. There are **supplementary readings** (William F. Sewell and Emirbayer & Mische), which are also helpful in understanding the **structure/agency divide**.

Write an essay that explains and explores the two assumptions that are central to this debate: human beings have the power to be autonomous actors and are capable of generating change. Or, human beings' actions are determined and constrained by social structures. You may use any reading and my notes to explore these ideas. It is always a good idea to look at the strengths and weaknesses of each side of the debate.