

Thursday, February 12, 2026

## Official Exam 1 Review Sheet

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### Vocabulary/Key Terms (A-Z)

- Abstraction/Standardization
- Atomization
- Binary Opposition
- Blasé (Simmel)
- Calculative Rationality
- Cardo Maximus
- Core
- Cultural Essentialism
- Decumanus
- Division of Labor
- Economic Determinism
- Gemeinschaft (Toennies)
- Gesellschaft (Toennies)
- Haussmannization
- Hegemony
- Human Nature
- Ideal Type
- Intellect (Simmel)
- Materialism
- Means of Production
- Mode of Production
- Modernization Theory
- Money Economy (Simmel)
- Objective Spirit (Simmel)
- Periphery
- Prisoner's Dilemma
- Prosthetic (Simmel)
- Relational History
- Reserve (Simmel)
- Semi Periphery
- Social Engineering
- State of Nature (Hobbes)
- Subjective Spirit (Simmel)
- Telos
- The Enlightenment
- Utopia

# Questions

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## Readings & Lectures

### 1. Can opinions be wrong? Why or Why not?

Opinions are an expression of preference or taste, and are subjective and unfalsifiable in nature, eg. "I prefer Merlot to Cabernet". In this sense they cannot be factually incorrect or correct.

### 2. Is theory ever divorced from "practice" or "the real world?" If yes, how? If not, why not?

Theory and practice are inextricable; "Practice" and material conditions produce theory, which itself is reified through *praxis*.

### 3. When Hourani says that "power relations are inscribed into the urban fabric," what does he mean (recall Beirut map lecture).

Through looking at the structure of urban life, mainly in terms of the spacial organization of the city, one can understand the power dynamics implicit in its design and extrapolate from it a broader understanding of the power relations of a city's society. See: French Lebanon.

### 4. What are the similarities in the writings of Toennies, Marx and Simmel? What are the main questions they are trying to answer?

They are trying to define and reconcile with the inherent problems of modernity and capitalism, such as alienation. They are similar in the sense that they address this question critically, seeing capitalism as the source of the disruption of the social order which creates alienation and the debasement of social life.

### 5. What are the binary oppositions that Toennies and Simmel use in their analyses of the rise of modernity?

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (Toennies); Subjective and Objective spirit (Simmel).

### 6. What is a teleological theoretical framework?

A theoretical framework based on the analysis of purpose (telos). An example of this is the Hegelian theory of history.

### 7. For Toennies, do all in Gemeinshaft enjoy equal freedom? If so how? If not, why not?

No, because Gemeinschaft societies are hierarchical and anti-egalitarian in nature.

**8. How, according to Toennies, does the ruling elite and the lower classes relate to each other in modern capitalist society?**

In Gesellschaft, the will of the working class and the will of the bourgeois are contradictory. Power is exercised downward through formal means such as laws and a legal system. Gesellschaft is typified by Kurwille, which is exploitative in nature.

**9. What was life like in Hobbes' "State of Nature"? Why was it imagined to be so? If we take him seriously, can "man" ever escape the state of nature?**

"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short", "war of all against all" - Hobbes. This was thought to be the case by Hobbes due to the relative natural equality of man, so that the threat of death or violence was constantly present, and there was no state or government to control, mediate, or organize man. The state of nature is due to the absence of a higher order of power, and man leaves the state of nature when he develops the state and contract. Man can never escape the state of nature in the sense that it would require transcending human nature altogether to escape the brutish and short type of life while in the state of nature.

**10. What is Gemeinschaft? What is Gesellschaft? How are they organized in a teleological framework?**

Gemeinschaft- "community", Typified by Wesenwille- "essential will" (will towards goals of the collective)

Gesellschaft- "society", Typified by Kürwille- "arbitrary will" (will towards goals of the individual)

This is Toennies' teleological framework, the telos being the societal movement or evolution towards Gesellschaft.

**11. What is Simmel's primary question?**

"An inquiry into the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its products, into the soul of the cultural body, so to speak, must seek to solve the equation that structures like the metropolis set up between the individual and the super-individual contents of life. Such an inquiry must answer the question of how the personality accommodates itself in the adjustments to external forces. This will be my task today." -Simmel. Fundamentally Simmel is trying to reconcile the individual with the structural in modern life, as the structural is greater in this opposition.

**12. For Simmel, what is the purpose of money? What does it enable in society?**

"Money is concerned only with what is common to all: it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality to the question: How much?" -Simmel.

The purpose of money is to reduce and quantify everything in terms of a ubiquitous standardized value for the purpose of exchange. Money enables not only commerce but the ability to make the previously unquantifiable quantifiable.

**13. For Simmel, what is the purpose of standardized time?**

The purpose of standardized time is to support the operations of the money economy.

**14. What does Toennies have to say about Freedom in Gesellschaft?**

“Everyone is what he is, through his personal freedom, through his wealth and his contracts. He is a servant only in so far as he has granted certain services to someone else, master in so far as he receives such services. Wealth is, indeed, the only effective and original differentiating characteristic;” -Toennies. To Toennies, wealth directly corresponds to freedom in Gesellschaft.

**15. What does commodification mean?**

The process by which things are transformed into commodities through capitalism. Its value becomes relative to the marketplace.

**16. What drives the “race to the bottom” in working people’s wages and lives?**

**How does society, through politics, develop ways to ameliorate the immiseration of the working class?**

The race to the bottom is a game-theoretic concept of agents competing for incrementally lower and lower compensation in the context of the labor market. Cost reduction and inter-firm competition play a role. The race to the bottom is driven fundamentally by the scarcity or abundance of labor. The political process itself, especially the system of democracy, is a way to ameliorate the immiseration of the working class through the process of voting, in which the working class can express its self-interest.

**17. Hourani suggests that the basic problem with media in the United State is not that it biased (though that is a problem that result). What is the basic problem? Why is it a problem?**

The problem with US media is that it is downstream from the actions and movements of power, so that corporate media is beholden to the current power structure due to its ability to use money to compel them. This creates a media ecosystem that functions as an extension of regime power.

**18. Why is it that under capitalism, we are formally (that is, legally) free, but not in control of our lives? In other words, what is the relation between freedom and**

**unfreedom in capitalism? How do Toennies and Simmel (and Marx) each address this question?**

Under capitalism, the relations of capital dominate over social, formal, or nominal relations. The agency of the individual is generally limited to the value of their labor, or to the amount of accrued capital they possess. Economic and structural forces also may compel them or dictate their lives. Freedom in capitalism is defined as freedom to act within the existing power structure according to its boundaries. Under capitalism one is unfree in the sense that their self-determination is controlled by economic logic. Toennies and Simmel address this by comparing traditional society to modern capitalism in the context of capital deceptively or superficially transforming the social order. Marx addresses this through the concepts of commodity fetishism and alienation. In short: personal autonomy is limited by one's economic context.

**19. What is the Simmel's "Objective Spirit"? What is the "Subjective Spirit?" What is the relation between the two?**

The objective spirit is the impersonal and rational spirit of modernity and the money economy, the subjective spirit is the inner experiential and personal spirit that expresses itself as a person's incomparability. The subjective spirit emerges as a reaction from the objective spirit.

**20. What is Materialism? Is Toennies a materialist? Why?**

Materialism is the theory that posits that social and economic relations, as well as historical developments, emerge from material conditions. Toennies *is* a materialist, due to his consideration that the role of the *will* in society proceeds from its material conditions.

**21. What is the "structural power of capital" over the state?**

See: Gramsci. The structural power of capital is the notion of capital having power over the state, and its integration into the state itself, having power over the state in both in a coercive and implicit sense. Capital has an ability to influence or compel the state through the structure and logic of the economy, as often the state and the private sector are interdependent.

**22. What causes capitalism to constantly revolutionize the means of production? Of what is produced? What effect does this have on society?**

The monetary motive of the Bourgeois (or anyone who control the means of production) is the source of the impulse to technologically develop and innovate upon the means of production, increasing the efficiency of production over time.

The foundational structure of capitalism incentivizes capital accumulation due to the need to constantly expand and outcompete. Similarly, products and commodities are iterated upon due to the need to create new profit vectors when existing markets become inefficient or saturated. Capitalism artificially creates consumer demand (and thus the need for new products) both psychologically and by design. In short, it is the drive towards endless growth. This process can lead to technological and scientific revolutions but also the disruption of the social order and economy.

**23. What are the prosthetics identified by Simmel (and by Hourani)? What do they do in the creation and spread of modernity?**

The prosthetic is the augmentation and replacement of man's abilities and ways with the impersonal or external, brought about through technology and the money economy. "Man does not end with the limits of his body or the area comprising his immediate activity. Rather is the range of the person constituted by the sum of effects emanating from him temporally and spatially." -Simmel. The products of the money economy intended for consumption are prosthetic in the sense that they displace a natural or premodern function of man, the employment of prosthetics in turn perpetuate the spread of modernity through the contribution to the growth of its power structures. Examples of prosthetics: the money economy, digital technology, etc.

**24. What was a *Feddan*?**

An agricultural unit of land area measurement defined by the area that can be tilled by a yoke of oxen in a given timespan. Such metrics began the process of the standardization of space.

**25. According to Hourani each of our theorists outline posit different zones or areas of freedom and unfreedom in traditional and modern societies. What are they? In what ways is "man" free in traditional society? In modern society? In what ways is "man" unfree?**

Le Corbusier, *Pack Donkey's Way* vs. *Man's Way*. Simmel, *Subjective Spirit* vs. *Objective Spirit*. Toennies, *Gemeinschaft* vs. *Gesellschaft*. Theorists frame tradition and modernity in different ways, each differing in their conception of freedom in society. The "zones" of freedom in tradition and modernity are the ways in which man is free or unfree. In traditional society, man is unfree in the sense of communal obligation to the collective, and the responsibilities of traditional relationships. The community enforces moral behavior strictly, and mutual proximity encourages prosocial behavior. Man is free in traditional society in the sense that his "subjective

spirit” is nourished and allowed to develop free from the structural forces of mass society or capitalism. Modernity presents man with material freedom, and freedom from social obligation. This is, in essence, the freedom of individualism. Man becomes unfree in modernity as well, he becomes “leveled” and integrated into the machinic structure.

**26. What, according to Le Corbusier, is the essence of “man”?**

The essence of man is rational; *reason* in the classical sense.

**27. What is the “iron cage of rationality?”**

The rationalization of social life and order, according to its purpose in the money economy (i.e. commerce), as well as the harmony of capitalism. The iron cage of rationality is in part a product of the Enlightenment impulse of making the world calculable, and modernization, as old traditional bonds of community were disrupted and replaced with bureaucratic and transactional relationships. Although free from premodern social obligations, the metropolitan is now confined by a new suffocating and soulless structure.

**28. How does the “Subjective Spirit” relate to the division of labor?**

Specialization and the division of labor present in urban and industrial capitalism deteriorates the “subjective spirit”; as the individual increasingly devotes his faculties to specialized labor, the objective is expanded at the expense of the subjective and personal.

**29. How does the positioning and architecture of MSU’s large dorms reflect the ethos of modernism? Its aesthetic?**

The positioning of MSU’s dorms reflect the High Modernist primacy of function over form, and the segregation of buildings according to their purpose. Dorms are positioned within proximity to each other and at a distance from other buildings, and possess only the architectural features deemed necessary for its use. The aesthetic is repetitive, featureless, geometric, and minimalist, being an expression of functionalism but also egalitarianism and “leveling”.

**30. What is the tension at the heart of the US political order between individual and group identities? How is that tension playing out in contemporary politics? In relation to immigration? In relation to definitions of what it means to be a ‘true’ American?**

Much of the U.S. political order is shaped by the central dialectical tension between Individualism as an ideology (not the Individual themselves), and Collectivism or the (re)affirmation of group identities, sometimes referred to as “identity politics”. This

plays out in contemporary political discourse through the emergence and reassertion of group identities existing within, and contrary to, the broader individualistic social order. In the context of immigration, both pro-immigration and anti-immigration discursive positions embody the assertion of respective group identities, those being what Nativists identify as “real” Americans, and immigrant ethnic groups.