Sociological Methodology

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Professor

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Assignment

### *Developmental Readings*

Review Assignment #3, the course essential elements, assigned readings, and recommended readings to identify selections of books and scholarly articles to identify and select developmental reading sources and entries.

* Refer to the “[Student Guide to Developmental Readings](https://drive.google.com/file/d/161V_FaYR2BnNGCSFUlWPjUSIQzcH04Hq/view?usp=share_link)” for updated information on sample comments, rubrics, and key definitions related to developmental readings.

**Source One:** Giddens, A. & Sutton, P. (2021). *Sociology* (9th ed.). Polity Press. <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2359514/2?element_originalid=f01>

**Comment 1:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

**“**Symbolic interactionism springs from a concern with language and meaning. Mead argues that language allows us to become self-conscious beings – aware of our own individuality and able to see ourselves ‘as others see us.’ The key element in this process is the symbol. A symbol is something that stands for something else. For example, words that refer to objects are symbols which represent what we mean. The word ‘spoon’ is a symbol we use to describe the utensil that we use to consume soup. Non-verbal gestures and forms of communication are also symbols. Waving at someone or making a rude gesture both have symbolic value…Sociologists influenced by symbolic interactionism often focus on face-to-face interactions in the context of everyday life. They stress the role interactions play in creating society and its institutions…It has been criticized for ignoring the larger issues of power and social structure and how these serve to constrain individual action. it has been criticized for ignoring the larger issues of power and social structure and how these serve to constrain individual action.”  (Giddens & Sutton, 2021, p. 23)

**Essential Element:** This comment relates to the essential element Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of sociological interpretation and to my understanding of sociology. I had some education in sociology during my undergraduate time, which largely conveyed what is now understood as a functionalist view of society and social interaction. The Symbolic Interactionist perspective seems more suited for understanding micro-level social interaction.

**Contextualization:**  This approach integrates well with my understanding of meaning formation informed by my philosophical and hermeneutical studies. As the professor mentioned in his orientation video, its focus on symbols and meaning-making renders this a useful method for researching and communicating findings regarding issues related to religion. While I am a foundationalist in my epistemology, I recognize that people are more complex and hold many anti-foundational views that help construct social behavior. I have been cognizant of the interplay between people and society from my undergraduate days (“I am myself and my circumstances – Ortega Y. Gasset) This approach will help with a better understanding of how the role of subjective human experience impacts the building of social interactions.

**Comment 2:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“Functionalism holds that society is a complex system whose various parts work together to produce stability and that sociology should investigate their relationships. For example, we can analyse the religious beliefs and customs of a society by showing how they relate to other institutions because the different parts of a society always develop in close relation to one another. Functionalists, including Comte and Durkheim, have often used an organic analogy, comparing the operation of society to a living organism. They argue that the parts of society work together, just as the various parts of the human body do, for the benefit of society as a whole. To study a bodily organ such as the heart, we need to show how it relates to other parts of the body. By pumping blood around the body, the heart plays a vital role in the continuation of the life of the organism. Similarly, analysing the function of a social institution such as the education system means showing the part it plays in the smooth running of a society.”  (Giddens & Sutton, 2021, p. 19) “Functionalism emphasizes the importance of moral consensus in maintaining order and stability. Moral consensus exists when most people in a society share the same values. Functionalists regard order and balance as the normal state of society, and this social equilibrium is grounded in the moral consensus among society’s members.”  (p. 21) “…functionalism leading until the 1960s. (p. 23)

**Essential Element:** This comment relates to the essential elements Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis, Faith-Integrated Sociological Analysis, and Methods for Christian Change.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of functionalism which was initially formed over thirty years ago. Many of the traditional concepts of sociology I was taught then were functional. This helps me to understand this training by looking at the forest of the theory and not just the trees as well as understanding its shortfalls.

**Contextualization:** Given criticism of basic functionalist assumptions, such as “balance as the normal state of society” in that societies in our more contemporary times have experienced formation grounded in instability that the model did not predict, one has to recognize it as limited in its utility. Critics may also be accurate in anthropomorphizing social structures in that societies do not have needs or purposes, but individual people do. Yet people do create alliances. (See Comment 3) I do not believe functionalist approaches should be discarded. Indeed, human social interactions and social norms are not always functional. Yet periods of dysfunction, even long ones, do not necessarily invalidate the idea that societies restabilize in a new homeostasis or balance. I appreciate systemic approaches to understanding human behavior. I have experience in small group settings (congregations) where I observe traditional systemic practices (think Bowen theory) play out regularly related to function and dysfunction.

The professor asked me to which sociological tradition I was drawn. The answer is all and none. All of them capture some understanding of human interaction. All of them have their limitations. Conflict theory, for example, does help to explain how conflict shapes society. But conflict theory downplays cooperative action. Symbolic Interactionism is useful for the exploration of micro-level interaction in a more descriptive non-judgmental way. Functional theory does help us understand how social structures can take on a life of their own. And even if stability can reinforce inequalities, it does not discount that human systems trend toward some form of stability. While I don’t agree with Hegel’s evolutionary perspective toward human achievement, his dialectic observation that a particular generation will react to the dysfunction in their society by positing solutions that are usually oppositional to the existing stabilizing functions, creating a period of stability and change, which then stabilizes into a new social order, which will then generate its own dysfunction or be unable to answer new questions and situations starting the process over again. This appears supported by an understanding of human history. Hegel’s notion of evolutionary social progress through this process is flawed. Human social formation can be regressive and often is due to the corrupting power of sin over all human creations. Functional theory may not be useful for describing how we got where we are and how it all works right now, but it is useful in that stability and order are goals to seek if that stability is built upon healthy and godly principles.

The three approaches operate from two orientations. The first orientation looks at society from the macro level using empirical methods to attempt to not on describe but explain and predict with an emphasis on stability. This is limiting in that it may not grasp destabilizing aspects, though this is not likely the critical flaw, but can be compensated for once understood. The critical flaw is the limitation of its empirical approach borrowed from the natural sciences. The second orientation focuses on the micro level and is an interpretive approach that has the benefit of listening to individuals and small groups and their lived experience. However, human interpretation is often highly flawed and even emphasizing our lived experience does not often serve well in evaluating that experience against moral propositions, something important to a Christian worldview. I believe that Heddendorf and Vos would largely agree with this last observation. (cf. 2010, pp. 49-51)

I read somewhere, and I cannot now find the source, that Symbolic Interactionism could only have arisen in the fertile plastic environment of the newly forming United States as European culture was too well established. This observation leads me to think about the chicken and the egg question. I suspect that sociological theories are more reflective in nature, more the egg than the chicken, though they can become a strong influential force in social formation and re-formation. But as primarily reflective, they will always be playing catch up. This suggests that the approach of Symbolic Interactionism or Conflict Theory will be far more useful to understanding behavior from the environment in which they arose and less so when attempting to translate them to foreign environments.

The three models are akin to a cart that can help to carry understanding to market. But they only provide three wheels, which makes for a bumpy ride, and stuff will fall out as the reality of the road jostles the cart and the contents. The fourth wheel is needed, a Biblical understanding of human interactions, an understanding of the impact of sin and sinful corruption on human society. And daresay the acknowledgment of a truth that is considered a fragment of an ancient world fading from memory, a truth discounted in secular study and in much of contemporary Christianity, yet proclaimed by Scripture, nonetheless. There is an active adversary of humanity who works to corrupt all including social institutions of all kinds, Satan the deceiver.

**Source Two:** Boyer, Pascal. (2018). *Minds make societies: How cognition explains the world humans create*. Yale University Press. <https://www.everand.com/book/472063601/Minds-Make-Societies-How-Cognition-Explains-the-World-Humans-Create>

**Comment 3:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“When participants allocate goods to others but do not receive goods from these same others, the in-group bias disappears. 21 So groupishness is not a blunt instinct to follow the herd, so to speak. People behave in ways that seem to favor in-groups because they implicitly use a social exchange heuristic, a set of assumptions about how the social interaction that is presented to them (evaluating different individuals or allocating resources between them) is a form of reciprocal cooperation.” (Boyer, Pascal, 2018, p. 46) Alliances form because human cognition has a specialized capacity toward coalition building with a focus on certain goals. This is enhanced by computations that recognize the cost of supporting an alliance will likely be outweighed by anticipated gains. The vast majority of this computation is unconscious. These include computations regarding competing groups. We recognize that others are in a group and that they are “against us” moving action toward accommodation or conflict. (pp. 48-49) These judgments are related to the ability to compute the cohesiveness of each group, how committed group members are to the welfare of their group, and the stronger the cohesion of a rival group the stronger the impulse to take action. (p. 66)

**Essential Element:** This comment relates to the essential element Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of human social interaction. It provides important insights into why individuals form social alliances.

**Contextualization:** Competition and out-grouping are often perceived negatively within Christian and many progressive circles, though one can argue for an exception within conflict theorists. The author suggests that there is value in this cognitive capacity toward coalition building if there is an actual threat generated by another cohesive group. It is a valid discussion to have if perceived threats are actually threats. It is also a valid discussion within Christian circles to explore how this capacity may be sinfully corrupted. But it may not be accurate to essentially consider the process itself to be sinful. These insights contribute to an understanding of why we are inclined to define our identity, and our group’s identity and value, against other groups perceived as competing with us. But they suggest that rather than dismissing this process as entirely a negative and sinful process, it may serve a necessary function. For instance, the New Testament is filled with examples not only of crossing such boundaries as we see in Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan but also of the importance of maintaining such boundaries for the protection and integrity of the group (in this case the Christian fellowship). It is observed that Christians are called to modify this impulse with a higher cognitive approach (love) as in 1 Cor 5:9-11 Paul warns of associating with sexually immoral people, with a focus on those who claim to be Christian but follow these practices while at the same time saying we cannot avoid people of the world who so practice, for we would have to leave the world. The focus is not on the destruction of the practitioners, but a principled reaction to the practice. Taking a New Testament lens to this process helps to avoid the extremism of conflict theory while recognizing that differentiation may serve a helpful function in a sinful human society.

**Source Three:** Heddendorf, R., & Vos, M. (2010). *Hidden threads: A Christian critique of sociological theory*. Rowman & Littlefield.

**Comment 4:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

First, the Christian should want to avoid ideological thinking, not only because of its casual disregard for truth but also because of its inherent divisive and hostile quality. Second, the Christian should have such confidence in God’s plan security need not be sought in some social program or theory, especially at the expense of others. Without this security, the believer is ripe for any social movement and the claims it might make. For these reasons, ideological thinking among Christians is usually symptomatic of some deep-seated spiritual insecurity. This may be seen among Christians who are fearful of taking a “wrong” position on some social issue, believing it will reflect on their maturity as believers. Their major concern is to justify themselves with explanations that may or may not reflect the facts of the case. Others fear an objective study of these facts, believing it will reveal truths threatening to their faith. What is lacking is an informed view of the nature of science and its capacity to support and even enlighten their faith. (Heddendorf and Vos, 2010, p. 14)

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with the essential elements of Faith-Integrated Sociological Analysis and Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is both additive and variant to my understanding of understanding of the role of ideology and science in social research.

**Contextualization:** On one hand the warnings against ideology are well taken. Many human ideologies are too limiting to understand the realities of human existence. Scientism, an example utilized by the author is a good example. To extend this to establish a form of hermeneutical suspicion toward the revelation of Scripture or our ability to understand that revelation is problematic. Such an application, suggested by the author in his comments regarding Christianity discounts the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture and the role that the Holy Spirit plays in helping to form our understandings. The presence of conflicting interpretations within Christendom has less to say about Scripture and the potential for correctly understanding it, and more to say about our sinful inability to humble ourselves before God’s Word. I would argue that Scripture does indeed provide a worldview, a set of beliefs, values, and principles that are essential to understanding the world, and human behavior, and should shape our perspectives and guide Christians in analysis and decision-making. I would go as far as to argue the Ten Commandments understood as both excluding and requiring certain behaviors (For example, Martin Luther’s explanation of the Ten Commandments in his Small Catechism) form a spiritually healthy and socially viable construct for human society. And while science may “support” our faith, I find the author overly optimistic that it may “enlighten” our faith. Science is impeded by its materialistic worldview, as well as by the dominant paradigm operative in its time. (Kuhn) Science and any human-based reasoning must remain in a ministerial function whereas Scripture in its clarity and sufficiency must retain its magisterial role.

**Source Four:** Feser, E. (2022). *All one in Christ: A Catholic critique of racism and critical race theory*. Ignatius Press. <https://www.everand.com/book/609330708/All-One-in-Christ-A-Catholic-Critique-of-Racism-and-Critical-Race-Theory>

**Comment 5:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**The first thing the philosophically sophisticated reader notices in the argumentation of Critical Race Theorists is its relentless, indeed shameless, commission of a variety of textbook logical fallacies.” (p. 74)

“DiAngelo’s allegation that attributing racial inequalities to causes other than racism is itself racist, and her dismissal of all disagreement with her analysis as an expression of “white fragility,” which functions to uphold “white advantage.” Allegations of this sort are routine in the rhetoric of CRT. For instance, Kendi asserts that to attribute group differences in economic outcomes to cultural differences, or to judge one group’s cultural practices to be in some way inferior to those of another, is racist. The problem with remarks like these is that it is simply a matter of elementary logic that the truth of a claim, and the cogency of an argument, stand or fall completely independently of the character or interests of the person making it, its historical or cultural origins, the context in which it is made, and any other such considerations. To ignore this is to be guilty of a fallacy of relevance—the favorite such fallacy of CRT writers being the *ad hominem* fallacy, which itself comes in various forms. There is, for example, the *circumstantial ad hominem*, which involves rejecting a claim or argument simply because of some alleged vested interest on the part of the person advocating it.” (Feser, 2022, pp. 74-75)

The author goes on to list additional fallacies found within CRT (and in critical theories in general) including fallacies of presumption such as circular reasoning and special pleading. For example, the following observations of CRT indicate the presence of both fallacies.

“Critical Race Theory rests on several instances of the fallacy of special pleading. For example, under the influence of postmodernists like Foucault and Marxists like Gramsci, CRT writers routinely apply a “hermeneutics of suspicion” by which they claim to unmask all institutions, cultural assumptions, philosophical positions, and so on as nothing more than the instruments by which groups maintain power. What is distinctive of their analysis is an emphasis on race (rather than class, say) as definitive of these groups. Objectivity and race-neutrality are illusions, claim CRT writers. What we see as true or good reflects the racial lenses through which we look at the world rather than the world itself. The trouble is that if Critical Race Theorists followed this out consistently, then they would have to acknowledge that CRT itself does not reflect objective reality, but merely the perspective and of CRT writers and those they claim to speak for. Critical Race Theorists would claim that their position is different from others insofar as, unlike the institutions and ideas that uphold “systemic racism” and “white supremacy,” it does not reflect the interests of the powerful. But why should we believe that? After all, Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the fathers of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” and the source of Foucault’s ideas, argued that all systems of thought reflect nothing more than the “will to power” of those who uphold them, including those that claim to favor the powerless. In particular, Nietzsche held that egalitarian moral and political doctrines such as socialism are nothing more than instruments by which the weak attempt to turn the tables on the strong—whom they know to be superior, and whom they envy and resent—and thereby to get revenge over them. Such doctrines have no more objective validity than nonegalitarian views do. Why not say the same of Critical Race Theory itself? Why not regard it too as merely another mask for the “will to power,” worn by those who envy and resent whites— and thus as having no more objective validity or claim to truth than the views CRT criticizes?” (pp. 81-83) “Critical Race Theorists cannot logically have it both ways. If they insist that all systems of thought reflect only the interests of racial groups and have no objective validity, then this would undermine their own position no less than any other.” (p. 84)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential element of Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of critical theory and critical race theory in particular. These insights are indicative of weaknesses within the approach and raise issues of the credibility of conclusions that may be drawn from its employment.

**Contextualization:** CRT and critical theory in general are controversial in our contemporary society. Well appreciated in some circles, they are strongly discounted in other circles. This author has provided an objective reasonable framework for understanding the deficiencies in the approach. This is not to say that critical theories do not notice genuine problems within our society, nor are they even necessarily wrong in their interpretation of certain causal factors. But critical theories with their rejection of foundationalism, essentialism, and objective truth fall prey to rationalizations and overgeneralizations. If the lens used to examine society is turned to examine the theory itself, it does present as a rationalization for a particular application of “will to power” understood in the classical Nietzsche system. Critical theory and its sister conflict theory may be useful for helping to describe our very conflicted society and it should be considered, with a grain of salt.

**Source Five:** Piga, T. R., & De Domenico, S. M. R. (2023). The process of construction of social values: Revisiting the concept of social value from the point of view of the symbolic interactionism tradition. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, *21*(4), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1679-395120220161x>

**Comment 6:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

After all, what makes sense and matters to the groups and societies that inhabit this planet? To address this issue, we chose, within American pragmatism, the symbolic interactionism tradition, and the concept of social value, based on the sociological approach of social psychology, aiming to explain how the process of construction of this type of value occurs… “Through this theoretical integration, we propose a contemporary conceptual definition of what social value is in order to continue with the formulation of a theoretical model regarding the process of construction of social values, paving the way to understand the dynamics between the different social structures (macro) and the agency of human beings (micro) in the signification, resignification, and even abandonment of such values.” (Piga and De Domenico, 2023, p. 1)

“For symbolic interactionists, meaning is one of the most important elements in understanding human behaviour, interactions, and social processes (Fine, 2005). In Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method, Blumer (1969) sets out three basic premises: The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. [...] The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one ́s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).” (p.4)

The authors go on to propose the process of constructing social values involves the interaction between individuals, social groups, and social structures. They use four positions to explain the process.

1. Social values are created through interactions among people within social groups. Individuals give meaning to things based on their interactions, shaping these values.
2. Large social structures like gender and ethnicity affect access to social values. This influences how individuals connect with social spaces and values, restricting their interactions.
3. Social values are passed from larger social structures to smaller ones through their representatives. Members of smaller social groups then interact with these representatives, continuing the cycle of existing social values.
4. Individuals are part of multiple social groups, exposing them to different interpretations of social values. Through reflection and interaction, individuals can reinterpret, abandon, or suggest new values. This process of reinterpretation is continuous and dynamic.

Thus social values are shaped by the interaction between individuals, social groups, and social structures, with meanings constantly negotiated and (re)interpreted within proximate social structures. (pp. 8-9)

(p. 8)

**Essential Element:** This comment relates to the essential element Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This is additive to my understanding of Symbolic Interactionism but also provides a potential framework for the integration with concerns and insights found within the Functional School.

**Contextualization:** The authors have proposed a reasonable approach that would help to counter the limitations of the micro-level examination of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) while retaining the integrity of SI’s insights but enabling evaluation and interpretation at higher levels of social organization. This model offers a more comprehensive method for understanding, exploring, and communicating findings and would advocate for research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The authors note that additional research needs to be conducted to substantiate their proposal. Yet it presents an intriguing approach and model for social research and as a potential model for a dissertation at OGS. The model makes possible the exploration of integration of both macro and micro socialization forces with potential consideration for how one concentration of force (for example Large Social Structures) may be dominant at one time and how another particular concentration of force (for example proximate social structures or social groups) may be dominant in another time. For example, the model could help understand the current interplay between small groups protesting for Palestine, their immediate social structures as part of a larger campus community and institution, and their situatedness within large social structures. While at this emerging stage of the movement, the model may not have predictive capability, it does have explanatory in that it can help explore the interplay of force from the micro level (the students), the intermediate level (the university as an institution and its particular leaders), and the larger social structures coming into play (the role of community policing, the media, the local and state government).

**Source Six:** Burelli, C., & Camboni, F. (2023). The function of solidarity and its normative implications. *Ethics & Global Politics*, *16*(3), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16544951.2023.2241678>

**Comment 7:**

**Quote/Paraphrase “**If solidarity can be aptly reconceived as a function, and if functions carry normative implications, then solidarity does also. Many philosophers have sought to argue that solidarity should be seen as a normative value, whose absence we lament (Taylor 2015). Many think that when we discuss solidarity, we have in mind a sort of social bond that encapsulates mutual obligations (Bayertz 1999; Scholz 2015). If not moral in itself, solidarity has been characterized as a necessary companion to justice (Habermas 2013; cfr.; Tava 2021)…When individuals discover they have interests in common and come together, it is not only to defend those interests, but also so as to associate with one another and not feel isolated in the midst of their adversaries, so as to enjoy the pleasure of communicating with one another, to feel at one with several others, which in the end means to lead the same moral life together. (Durkheim 2013, 18) Under this respect, solidarity is not only a kind of association but also a genuine moral need…This functional ground can nevertheless do critical work, because it implies that we should want solidarity, even if we actually do not. Solidarity is an important feature enabling societies to survive through time. Some philosophers have argued instead that we do not need solidarity (Levy 2017). According to the view defended here, even if we do not want solidarity, we need it…Or, suppose a rich European state has no direct interest in helping other member states hit by the pandemic crisis; yet, without some system of mutual help, it is highly unlikely that the European Union as a political system would survive recurring asymmetric shocks (Ferrera 2017b)” (Burelli and Camboni, 2023, p. 14) “Lack of solidarity is a much more dire situation, urgently in need of reparation: it implies there is something wrong with the basic functioning of our social system, which if protracted might imperil the system’s persistence through time.” (p. 15)

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the essential element of Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis and Methods for Christian Social Change.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of functionalism and more specifically to the concept of solidarity and its value for society. My early education in sociology stressed the positive functional role of socialization as a normative force that helped with social order, stability, cohesion, and cooperative living. More contemporary voices dominating the landscape of social research advocate that solidarity is an oppressive social force used by people in power to maintain their dominance and power over others. In this view, solidarity reinforces existing inequalities within the social order. This is a viable and reasonable observation but does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that solidarity is necessarily a negative force, which is tossing out the baby with the bathwater or confusing the baby with the bathwater. Conflict theorists themselves try to build solidarity within their activist groupings to fight for their rights. The common ground here is not the function of solidarity, but what is the goal of how it is employed. A stable, cohesive, cooperative society where solidarity had the normalizing influence of reinforcing an equitable society would likely be upheld by many of the critics of solidarity. The problem is in the bathwater, the sinfulness of the human condition that coopts and corrupts all social structures and functioning for sinful goals due to sinful inclinations.

**Contextualization:** Approaching Christian social research through the lens of functional solidarity may yet be an approach that can gain credence in secular academic communities. For instance, let us consider the idea of solidarity based on the similarity of individuals (Mechanical solidarity). Postmodern and critical/conflict-oriented views would assume that saying people must be similar is oppressive, hence the opposition to the idea of “color blindness.” Yet, there is plenty of empirical evidence that we are remarkably similar even across the socially constructed divides that exist, such as race. I find it illogical that our societies subscribe so much meaning to something as limited as skin color (or other racial characteristics). In biological and medical research racial differences do not amount to as much as they do in popular society. (Utter, D. (2017, April 18). There are objective racial components to bodies that impact susceptibility to certain diseases for example, but by and large we are all far more similar to one another than we are different. Identifying those similarities in social research, for instance, how we share a certain common set of needs, could help to inform research leading to a more cohesive society built on positive factors than sinful factors.

Another approach would be to look not only at how people are interdependent in society but also how that adds value to our lives (Organic Solidarity). Here arguments could be made for the value of positive diversity based on augmented experience and diverse skills and abilities. Diversity could be advocated for not just based on opposition to the dominance of a particular group in a society but based on the pragmatic value that diversity brings while also leaving a role for meritocracy so that diversity produces real benefits to the society at large. The former found in Conflict theories is too often an overly simplistic view of society, overgeneralized and rationalized built on cherry-picked empirical data that often presents solutions that do not look different from the initially described problematic state except that now a different identified group is at the top. The latter would have more potential for actual social change that would be positive for all and help counter some of the sinful corruption of social structures.

**Source Seven:** Lelis, R. (2022). Durkheim within American cultural sociology and beyond: Durkheim and after: The Durkheimian tradition, 1893-2020 (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2020, 242 p.). *Archives Européennes de Sociologie: European Journal of Sociology*, *63*(3), 578–588. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975623000164>

**Comment 8:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

Lelis referencing Smith suggests that Baudrillard, Derrida, and Foucault inherit and continue the tradition of Durkheim. (Lelis, 2022, p. 586)

**Essential Element:** This comment relates to the essential element of Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of postmodern social theory and its commonalities with the functional position. This is not a connection I had previously made due to postmodernism's rejection of foundationalism.

**Contextualization:** I would not have drawn a serious connection between the functionalist Durkheim and the postmodern critical theorists Baudrillard, Derrida, and Foucault. This one comment led me to reconsider and reframe my understanding of the linkage between functional and postmodern critical theory even suggesting some commonality with Symbolic interactionism and its focus on symbols and meaning-making.

These three, like Durkheim, share a focus that many aspects of social life are constructs or socially constructed. While Durkheim emphasized the social construction of norms and values, Baudrillard, Derrida, and Foucault extend this idea to language, power, and the nature of reality itself. They all explore the symbolic dimensions of social life. Durkheim emphasizes symbols and their function in society, the others focusing on the symbolic meaning of language, and how symbols are used to convey knowledge but to exercise power. Furthermore, Durkheim critiqued traditional social structures and institutions such as religion and the state. Baudrillard, Derrida, and Foucault challenge traditional structures of power, knowledge, and representation, arguing that these structures are often oppressive and in need of transformation. Lastly, like Durkheim, they are interested in understanding how society maintains order and controls its members, exploring the mechanisms through which power and control operate, whether through the production of knowledge, the construction of language, or the dissemination of images and representations. The three may disagree on the value of solidarity, but reflecting on it, one can see they are not-so-distant cousins.

**Source Eight:** Sherman, J. H. (2023). Philosophy of religion in a fragmented age: Practice and participatory realism. *Religions*, *14*(3), 424. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030424>

**Comment 9:**

**Quote/Paraphrase “**Before we offer functionalist reinterpretations of religious practices and claims or apologetic justifications of the same, we need to at least understand what they really mean to those making them. “From this perspective,” Hollywood argues: the question of the ontological status of the objects of religious belief cannot be resolved by redefining the nature of divine existence in terms of regulative ideals (be they epistemological or moral). Nor can religion be equated solely with belief. For many religious people, practice takes precedence over belief; a philosophy of religion that does not account for the function and meaning of practice will never be adequate to its object. (Hollywood 2016, p. 238)…In this context, ritual no longer appears as an activity whose content needs to be indexed to some additional, more explanatorily basic category, but is understood as what it seems to be: a praxis that shapes one’s moral life, aids in the acquisition of the Christian virtues, and furthers the flourishing of the community in communion with God and all creation…The formation/transformation of moral dispositions . . . required a particular program of disciplinary practices. The rites that were prescribed by that program did not simply evoke or release universal emotions, they aimed to construct and reorganize distinctive emotions—desire (cupiditas/caritas), humility (humilitas), remorse (contritio)—on which the central Christian virtue of obedience to God depended” (Sherman, 2023, p. 4) “Ritual practices here appear as acts of formation, practices through which subjectivity, affect, virtue, and belief are cultivated and habituated—leading to what Marcel Mauss, following Aristotle, called habitus (Asad 1993; Mauss 1979).” (p. 5)

**Essential Element:** This comment relates to the essential elements Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis and the Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of functionalism and the sociology of religion. It provides valuable insight that other approaches might downplay or overlook due to their methodological assumptions. While there is value in the idea that social systems do not have needs, people do, it is also true that social systems become enculturated and take on a life of their own serving functional purposes for good or ill.

**Contextualization:** In Christian religious traditions that are highly liturgical it is often recognized that how people worship shapes how people believe. The ancient Latin term is *lex orandi lex credenda (the law of prayer is the law of belief).* The liturgical forms which have been passed down from one generation to another for around two millennia serve as teaching, discipline, and uniting functions that affect individual beliefs and practices. Symbolic Interactionism would add value to the consideration of liturgy in that it would focus on the symbols and the meaning they convey, and the social interactions that are taking place during worship between the parishioners (reinforcing one another’s beliefs) and the interaction between laity and clergy. However, the focus on the meaning of the symbol being constructed by social interaction could miss the inherited and normative function of the liturgy. It is true that social interaction thousands of years past helped to form and fill these liturgical forms with meaning, but each generation does not invent the wheel but inherits these forms so that they have shaping and normative functional influence over the participants.

 **Source Nine:** Ylä-Anttila, T. (2023). Comparative moral principles: Justifications, values, and foundations. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, *10*(1), 199. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01684-0>

**Comment 10:**

**Quote/Paraphrase The** author explains a functionalist theory, Basic Human Values Theory. “While justification theory, above, is interested in how people justify their actions, and less with causally explaining action, basic human values theory claims that values both ‘motivate action’ and ‘function as standards for judging and justifying action’ (Schwartz, 1994: p. 21)…For Schwartz, values are ‘acquired both through socialization to dominant group values and through the unique learning experiences of individuals’ (ibid.)—…“In Schwartz’s theory, there are four ‘higher-order values’ (ibid.: 3), which can be arranged as pairs of opposites: the value of conservation (stability) is the opposite of openness to change (progress), and the value of self-enhancement (selfishness) is the opposite of self-transcendence (care for others)…values represent ‘responses to three universal requirements with which all individuals and societies must cope: needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and requirements for the smooth functioning and survival of groups…this is functionalist because it “explain morality in terms of what it does, what is it for.” (Ylä-Anttila, 2023, p. 3) “Thus, morality as a societal phenomenon is not reducible to personal values. Morality is prescriptive; most people care what others think and do, that is, they have moral conviction (Skitka, 2010). As Haidt and Joseph (2004: p. 58) put it: ‘The hallmark of human morality is third-party concern: person A can get angry at person B for what she did to person C.’” (p. 4)

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the essential element Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis and Methods for Christian Social Change.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of functionalism and the limitations of other theories. The following comment stands out among the larger quotation. “Thus, morality as a societal phenomenon is not reducible to personal values. Morality is prescriptive; most people care what others think and do, that is, they have moral conviction (Skitka, 2010). (p.4) Functionalism may be underutilized due to various criticisms, but in professional disciplines, one likely reason is the rejection of metanarratives and essential principles governing human behavior in favor of views that all shared value systems are socially constructed. This latter may be true but does not necessarily have to equate to an outright rejection of functional theories. Human beings may have basic needs, like to be treated well and fairly, that we all share, hence giving rise to social phenomena related to but transcending our own personal values, thus serving a social unifying and normative function.

**Contextualization:** In an academic and popular culture consumed by postmodern anti-foundationalism, the lens of pragmatism which informs Symbolic Interactionism and to some degree Conflict Theory, may serve as a productive linkage to functionalist propositional viewpoints supporting apologetic research and claims from a Christian perspective that sees Scriptural revelation as normative. Much criticism I read in various forms regarding the propositional positions of Scripture and the Christian worldview in general focus on third-party concerns in that they usually take some form that Christians are sticking their noses into personal lives where they do not belong and we should stick to our own lives and leave society alone. But the author here points out a potential hypocrisy with this line of argument in that it is observed that people are concerned about third-party behavior, in this case, the critic is concerned about the third party who is the generalized other, in this case, the Christian.

**Source Ten:** Guizzardf, L. (2024). “Choosing the gender we feel we are is a profound choice.” Gender identities and sexual orientations among young people. *Italian Sociological Review*, *14*(1), 137–164. <https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.vl4il.641>

**Comment 11:**

**Quote/Paraphrase “**In my opinion, there are two very different, almost opposite, representations of gender. For the first, gender is something that refers entirely to the personal sphere, something extremely fluid and undefinable – something contingent in time and space – something expressive; for the second, gender is a social construct, an alienating device of power and which should be de-constructed if not completely abolished.” (Guizzardf, 2024, p. 150)

“While the interviewees in the first group refer more to the inter-subjective and personal dimension of gender, those in the second group see gender from a critical perspective, underlining especially the ‘structural’ elements (Risman, 2004) when, on the other hand, for them, gender is not ‘definable’ because it does not exist (Marcello, Agnese, Camilla) or must be constantly de-constructed (Giusi).” (Guizzardf, 2024, p. 150)

“Gender is therefore fluid and undefinable both for these reasons and because it can change over time and space. This contingency has two different but interrelated aspects: the first relates to the social expectations linked to gender, and the second to personal gender identity.” (Guizzardf, 2024, p. 151)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis and Methods for Christian Social Change.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is variant to my understanding of social demonstrating the weakness of sociological approaches in trying to develop comprehensive and truthful understanding of human behavior. This Symbolic Interactionist (SI) guided approach does describe human behavior. But it is a stretch to conclude “Gender is therefore fluid and undefinable…” (p.151) It would be a reasonable statement to conclude gender is perceived as fluid, but this essentialist conclusion does not necessarily hold. It assumes a particular definition of gender divorced from biology and connected solely to human perception, and that perception by a particular group of people. It is suspected research incorporating a wider population base would not concur with this perception.

**Contextualization:** A weakness with SI is that SI can be used to infer the non-existence or non-value of particular normative propositions, such as God’s view of gender as revealed in Holy Scripture, simply because of the presence of human perceptions that run counter to these propositions. Christian social researchers acknowledge that many people, maybe most people, don’t agree with all (or many) of the propositional claims of Scripture, that even many individuals and social entities (such as denominations) do not always align with the propositional claims of Scripture. That humans engage in particular behaviors or hold particular beliefs counter to Scripture is indicated, described, and even often rendered understandable through the social lenses of the different sociology research traditions, but just because human beings do a thing does not mean the thing is valuable, moral, or supported from God’s view. Heddendorf and Vos are correct in observing that sociological traditions cannot be completely “acceptable to the Christian” due to the natural limitations of social science coupled with our sinful inclinations to create a world we want often rejecting God’s created order and supported by rationalized worldview construction. (cf, 2010, pp. 49-51)

**Source Eleven:** Addo, J. K. J., & Dube, Z. (2020). Interactional leadership: Jesus’ model of leadership – A case of Mark 7:25–29. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, *76*(4). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.5554>

**Comment 12:**

**Quote/Paraphrase The** author interprets the engagement between Jesus and the Gentile woman in Mark 7 through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism. The author suggests the interaction described in verse twenty-five, where a woman whose daughter was possessed by an impure spirit falls at Jesus' feet, can be analyzed using Goffman's concept of personal front in dramaturgy. According to Goffman, one's personal front on the social stage consists of those aspects that are intimately associated with the performer and are expected to follow them wherever they go. In this case, the woman's personal front is characterized by her role as the mother of a demon-possessed girl, which creates an impression of uncleanness, vulnerability, and need. Falling at Jesus' feet is her "interaction strategy" coming from "the macro-social structure of the ancient Mediterranean communities, particularly the patron–client or the master-slave social system." The woman, through her request, framed the interaction with Jesus, limiting it to her need and, by extension, her daughter's. Her repetitive plea, coupled with the gesture of bowing down, created a submissive impression, desperation, and a vulnerable visual regard to Jesus. Jesus' response reflects hospitality and kindness, important parts of Akan traditional leadership. Verse 27 should be understood as affirming social categories and presenting a social processing encounter. Jesus affirms the woman's categoric characterization, implying that she was an outsider, using two characterizations: those deserving of what the woman was requesting, the "chosen people," and outsiders, characterized as "dogs." The woman's response, saying, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs," challenges Jesus to justify her request. In her interactional approach, she presents herself in a meek manner, possibly influenced by the macro-sociocultural arrangement of patron–client relationships of their time. Jesus' response, "For this saying, you may go your way," suggests that the woman's impression had met his indicator – faith in himself. Although Jesus began processing the woman's performance in the interaction from a Jewish position, he did not allow bias to influence his decision. It was not about where the woman was coming from; rather, it was about what the woman believed, the very essence of Jesus' ministry – belief in God and submission to him. His interactional processing of the woman creates the impression of impartiality, fairness, and equity to all. The emphatic statement "the demon has left your daughter" affirms the woman's earlier characterization of Jesus as powerful, a healer, an exorcist, and a mightier one. (Addo and Dube, 2020, pp. 3-7)

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the Sociological Framework for Cultural Analysis and Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Analysis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of Symbolic Interactionism (SI). The effectiveness of this application of SI to the Gospel of Mark helps to redeem the usefulness of sociological approaches after the consideration of comment 11.

**Contextualization:** This utilization of SI as augmenting a hermeneutical approach that examines the interaction within its social landscape is entirely congruent with a traditional Lutheran hermeneutic which considers the text in its historical context as one major hallmark for faithful interpretation. This author’s interpretation using SI is fascinating and motivates me to further explore SI. Though SI has limitations in its relativism and reluctance to normative interpretation (and likely dismissal of normative evidence and propositions), its descriptive capabilities extend here into creating an understanding of a social interaction. Particularly appreciated here is the stress on how Jesus does not succumb to certain social pressures. Macro-level approaches may overemphasize the power of social pressure to shape behavior, something that certainly exists. However, this micro-level analysis does demonstrate the real power of one-on-one interaction and individual action. The analysis demonstrates the complexity of human interactions. Our Western proclivity toward definition and generalization can lead to too much simplification and overlooking the holistic and complex nature of human interaction. For instance, many Bible translations label a section of Scripture. For instance, blueletterbible.org labels this story with “The Syrophoenician Woman’s Faith” but there is so much more going on than what these words imply. Ethnic identification opens a whole range of meaning. Here gender and associated gender roles in that time and place have additional meaning, yet the title does not even capture that she is there for her daughter. There is simply so much going on in this story, that simple generalizations may blind us to additional meaning. SI here helps to unpack all the various meanings and their interconnections informed from a social and historical perspective. I am going to commend this article to the exegetical professors of my seminary to see what they think about SI as a tool in the hermeneutical toolbox.

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