

Written Assignment #2

At the beginning of *Security, Territory, and Population*, Foucault proposes one imperative that he holds as “categorical and unconditional”: “Never engage in polemics.”

From Wikipedia:

Polemic (/pəˈlemɪk/) is contentious rhetoric intended to support a specific position by forthright claims and to undermine the opposing position. The practice of such argumentation is called *polemics*, which are seen in arguments on controversial topics. A person who writes polemics, or speaks polemically, is called a *polemicist*. The word derives from Ancient Greek πολέμικός (*polemikos*) 'warlike, hostile', from πόλεμος (*polemos*) 'war'.

Polemics often concern questions in religion or politics. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polemic>)

Now, while this assignment is *not* specifically about Foucault (although you may certainly discuss Foucault in your assignment if your main argument warrants it), his imperative highlights a certain contrast: sometimes we read theoretical work that is, like Foucault, somewhat descriptive and analytical, but which avoids taking pronounced stances on questions of politics or (social) justice. On the other hand, some critical theorists *do* write with an overt sense of inequality, social or political justice, liberation, or emancipation embedded in their work. Between the two poles, there is an entire spectrum of approaches to doing critical theorizing.

I want you to write your second short written assignment on this topic of polemics, justice, and the nature of critical social science. This is a short, argumentative essay, so you will have to do some reflection and come up with your thesis statement. (Remember, the thesis statement is essentially the same thing as your *main argument* and your *conclusion*.)

The following are some reflection questions to help you think about this topic. **Do not write a paper that simply answers all of these questions in sequence. These questions are simply intended to help you start thinking about this topic, so that you can come up with one concise, unified, argumentative thesis statement that will form the heart of your short paper:**

- To do critical sociological or criminological work, is it sufficient to simply expose the workings of power in a descriptive, non-polemical way? Or does critical academic work require the overt deployment of some ideal such as justice or liberation?
- What role should ideals such as justice, liberation, or emancipation play in critical academic work? Is it possible to do critical academic work without a stance (be it explicit or implicit) on what is just and what is unjust?
- Is it problematic when we assume that the more polemical justice- and liberation-based approaches are more “critical” than the more descriptive, analytical approaches? Do we need to challenge this distinction? (i.e. When analytical, non-polemical authors shed light on previously unrecognized forms of moral regulation, social ordering, or governmentality, should we consider this an inherently *critical* endeavour as well?)

In short, your thesis might engage with only one element—or multiple elements—of the questions above. What is most important is that your thesis is coherent, unified, and supported by your argumentation (and your supporting argumentation, in turn, is rooted in your readings of the course materials.)

Write a paper that engages with this question through a discussion of multiple readings from the course. You can cite and use as many readings from the entire course as you like, but **you must use at least two readings from the last six readings of the course (i.e. Intersections of Criminal Justice; Ecocide and Social Harm).**

Make sure your paper has an introduction (which includes your specific thesis statement) and a conclusion. If/when my PowerPoint lectures tell you what a particular author says in one of our readings, and you find this particular information useful for your paper, do not cite my PowerPoint in that situation. Clearly, the most appropriate thing to do in that situation is to cite the original author of the course reading.

For this brief assignment, I will not require you to make use of scholarly sources outside of the course readings. (You may use external scholarly sources if you so choose, but make sure that you do make use of the course readings.)

Formatting and References

Even though this paper is short, make use of an official style guide. Choose from the **APA, ASA, or Chicago** format. You should include a list of references at the end of your paper that includes all of the references you cite. It is important to cite references consistently and correctly throughout your paper. You will upload the paper to the assignment folder that I create on UM Learn. Please submit it as either a **Word file or PDF. Mac users will therefore need to convert their Pages files to one of these formats.**

Due Date

Write this short piece and upload it to the designated assignment folder on UM Learn on or before **December 6th.**

Happy writing!