

International Politics
Political Science 120

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MWF 10:50-11:50
Car 206

Course Description:

This course has multiple goals. Some revolve around introducing the understandings, protocols, terrains of debate, and inchoate confusions that constitute the field of international politics/relations. For example, the course materials

1. introduce students to different perspectives or intellectual frameworks for making sense of what conventionally has been called international relations (though many prefer terms like international, transnational, global, or world politics) and to cultivate skills in applying perspectives in aid of understanding events, processes, and/or practices;
2. introduce some of the multiple forms of social science research and some of the debates about the nature of the social sciences;
3. introduce competing notions of power and explore their implications for analyzing world affairs;
4. help students see international relations as an important study of a more general set of issues: the relations of self and other and the problems and possibilities of living with difference;
5. help students think about what kind of subject we are hailed to be by the different authors/perspectives.
6. In sum, I hope that the lessons learned from the class will be (a) sociological/theoretical, in that we will better understand how the world works; (b) meta-theoretical, in that we will reflect a bit on how we study the world; and (c) practical, in that we will think about who we are and how we are to live in the world as it is and might be.

The course also emphasizes the development of skills necessary to intellectual inquiry (and perhaps life), particularly deepening reading, thinking, and writing skills.

Course Assignments:

Course assignments are designed to allow (or is it compel?) you to think along with the texts about the issues of difference—about identity and its relation to difference; about

conflict and violence; about power; about negotiation and compromise; about forms of domination and forms of resistance; about sources of possible unity and continuing division.

The weight of assignments in the final grade:

Critical essay I	20 points
Critical essay II	20 points
Class participation	20 points (other non-graded assignments will be counted against the participation grade if not completed)
Final take-home exam	40 points

A brief description of each component of the grade can be found below. Additional details will follow.

A. Critical Essays

Two (4-5 page) critical essays, analyzing one of the major readings or some specified part of the readings for the course. A discussion of critical essays can be found in Appendix 1. Essays will be evaluated according to the depth of insight, the clarity and care of argument, and the quality of writing. You are responsible for both an initial draft and a revised, final draft.

B. Final Take-Home Exam

The final exam will involve two parts. First, you will respond to Muppidi's book using one of the perspectives we have studied. Second, you will draw on (choose among and defend the choice of) a theoretical perspective or some amalgam of perspectives to interpret some recent events in world politics (materials will be supplied). You are required to use a different perspective from the one you used in part I of the final exam.

C. Class participation

Students are expected to come to class, having read and thought about the readings and prepared to discuss them. See Appendix 2: "Notes on Reading." Engaged attention and active participation will both be weighed in your favor, with special emphasis on the *quality* of student participation. That is, it is important to be engaged on a daily basis, but comments should be to the point. Weight is given to comments that extend discussions by pointing to deeper insights or integrating earlier comments. Or, importantly, that launch new lines of discussion when the previous one has become exhausted.

D. Working with Preceptors

I presume that all of you will benefit from the assistance of the preceptors. They will schedule regular "office hours" where they will be available to discuss course readings or

other issues you are facing during your first term at the College. As the due dates for essays/the exam near, preceptors will be available for extended hours—to assist you with ideas, help you think through outlines you have prepared, and help you re-think and revise drafts. You are required to meet with a preceptor before the first essay is due. Meetings with preceptors are most productive when you are prepared. To facilitate (or coerce) the habit of thinking through arguments, drafting, and revision, instead of knocking out essays the night before, you are required to email me an initial draft of your essay the night before the writing workshop held the Monday before the Wednesday due dates for the essays.

Course Readings:

1. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (Harper and Row, 1986)
2. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (Verso, 2003)
3. Himadeep Muppidi, *The Colonial Signs of the International* (Columbia/Hurst, 2012)
4. Other readings can be accessed through Moodle.

Course Outline

Sept 3 (W) **Introductions, a First Discussion**
Why don't people(s) get along?

Preamble: The Problem of Difference

Questions:

What does Todorov mean by difference? What forms can it take?

How do individuals or collectivities respond to difference? Why is it double—a double movement? What role does this understanding of difference play in Todorov's narrative?

Can we move beyond the double movement? How?

What are the implications for international relations? Following Todorov, is conflict endemic—inevitable or necessary? What are the causes of conflict? What kinds of conflicts should we expect? How, following Todorov's ideas, might we resolve conflicts? How might we avoid them? What sorts of institutions would minimize conflict and facilitate resolutions?

What are the implications for our own identities and how we live in the world?

How does Todorov go about supporting his argument? What are his sources of evidence? What are the strengths and limits of his method?

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| Sept 5 (F) | Todorov, Part I |
| Sept 8 (M) | Todorov, Pt. II |
| Sept 10 (W) | Todorov, Pt III. |
| Sept 12 (F) | Todorov, Pt. IV, Epilogue |

Liberal Modernity: Promises of Competition/Harmony

Kant is often taken to identify the self-understanding of modernity—modern individuality and modern society/politics. He also reflects on the implications for international politics. How do we know the universal? What does it mean to be a modern individual and citizen? What is our relationship to other individuals? What is the relationship of political communities to each other? How do we arrive at peace? What steps are involved? What does a peaceful world look like? What principles are involved? What institutions? What kinds of selves? What kinds of others?

We might read Keohane and Nye, Wendt, and Held as contemporary observers and theorists of modern liberalism in a Kantian mode. What do they add? What do they leave out? More precisely, how do Keohane and Nye suggest that conditions of interdependence change the calculations of states and the possibilities for action? Wendt and Held speak to the possibility of community beyond that possible in a society of states. What are the mechanisms involved in creating such a community? What sorts of identities are required? Or, to make it more personal, who are we and how might we be different? How is difference/identity constructed? More specifically, what are the conditions for a global civil society? How do we move towards the universal in the contemporary era? Who are the key actors? What are the enabling principles and institutions of a cosmopolitan democracy? What are the barriers to realizing transnational or cosmopolitan democracy?

How would Todorov intervene in this discussion? Do Kant and the liberals resolve the problem of the double movement? Does a global community resolve the problem of difference?

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| Sept 15 (M) | Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent” |
| Sept 17-20 | Blaney leading evaluation teach at Whitman college (read ahead; look at articles on writing for Sept 30) |
| Sept 22 (M) | Kant, “To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” |

Sept 24 (W) Keohane and Nye, “Understanding Interdependence” (2 chapters from *Power and Interdependence*)

Sept 26 (F) Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it”

Sept 29 (M) Kant and Todorov on modernity? Thoughts toward essays.
Bring in one paragraph towards a paper

Resources on writing:
Campbell and Huxman, “The Resources of Organization”
Harvey, “Paragraphs”
Videos: Christiansen, “What is a Thesis?” and “Argument”; and
Krier, “Paragraphs”

Oct 1 (W) **Draft of Essay 1 due** [by email to preceptor and Blaney] (no class meeting)

[Reflect on the relationship between Todorov and liberal thinkers. Compare Todorov’s argument to liberal claims in some fashion. That is, use Todorov to investigate or evaluate the liberal thinkers or vice versa. Narrow your focus to a key argument that you develop carefully; that is defend a thesis about the relationship between Todorov and the liberals; defend your thesis with reasoning, textual evidence, and reference to facts about the world. 4-5 pages.]

Oct 3 (F) Workshop on Writing: evaluating Introductions
Before class: watch videos: Severy-Hoven, “How to revise and Academic Essay,” pts 1 and 2

Modern Realism: Power and the Limits of the Human Condition

Modern realists might be read as a response to Enlightenment visions of perpetual peace, including the optimism about international law prior to World War Two (e.g. Carr) or more recent post-Cold War imaginaries of cosmopolitan governance (e.g. Mearsheimer). Why do they temper Enlightenment optimism? What are the key arguments? Is it a difference in temperament? How does this realist disposition differ from Todorov’s?

What do realists mean by anarchy? Where does anarchy come from? How does it shape identity? What do realists count as power? How does power function in

world politics? How is power related to conflict? Do Carr and Mearsheimer differ from Todorov on the issue of power? From Kant?

Can conflicts be resolved? Is peace possible? What mechanisms are available to us in a state-system? Can they work? Must we move beyond a state-system?

What is the purpose of war for states? For the state system? Who are we called to be in a world in which war is a feature of world politics?

Think about the differences between Carr, Waltz and Mearsheimer.

To deepen our thinking, we might ask: How do realists conceive of difference differently than liberals? What differences make a difference? Or, further, what divides Todorov, Kant and Mearsheimer on the question of difference?

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| Oct 6 (M) | E. H. Carr, “The Harmony of Interests”; “Morality in International Politics” |
| Oct 8 (W) | Final draft of essay 1 due |
| Oct 10 (F) | Waltz, “The Third Image” |
| Oct 13 (M) | Mearsheimer, Chapters 1 and 2 |
| Oct 15 (W) | Mearsheimer, Chapters 9 and 10 |
| Oct 17 (F) | Realism v. Liberalism? Contrasts, Overlaps; common strengths and weaknesses
(bring in one paragraph towards a paper) |

Theories of Domination

Critical Political Economy

In contrast to Mearsheimer, how does Marx think about the role of wealth? What are the key factors in human history for Marx and the Marxists? Think about contrasts with Todorov, Mearsheimer, and Kant, Wendt, etc. What actors do the Marxists add? Who are we in a Marxist cosmological vision?

How does the process of production shape world politics, according to Cox? What is the principle of governance or rule in critical political economy? How is the role of the state different in Cox than Mearsheimer’s realism and the Kantian liberals?

Wood gives us a historical account that elaborates the logic of capitalism in its global role? Contrast that with Kant? Think about Wood in relation to Cox.

How do Marxists use historical evidence? Does their method differ from earlier thinkers? Does this explain the differing conclusions?

- Oct 20 (M) Marx. "Preface," *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*; *The Communist Manifesto*
- Oct 22 (W) Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders"
- Oct 23-26 **Fall Break**
- Oct 27 (M) Wood, Preface, Introduction, chapters 1 and 2
- Oct 29 (W) Wood, chapters 3, 4, 5
- Oct 31 (F) Wood, 6 and 7
- Nov 3 (M) capital, capitalism, international relations, conflict
Graff and Birkenstein, "Entering the Conversation"
Bring in one paragraph towards paper
- Nov 5 (W) **Draft due [by email to preceptor and Blaney] (no class)**
- Nov 7 (F) workshop on writing; topics sentences and transitions
Booth, et al., "Revising and Organizing your argument"
Elbow, "Quick Revising" and "Thorough Revising"
- Nov 10 (M) **Essay 2 due** (no class meeting)

[Reflect on the relationship between realism or critical political economy and liberal thought in IR. That is, use realism or critical political economy to investigate or evaluate the claims of liberal thinkers or vice versa. Narrow your focus to a key argument that you develop carefully; that is defend a thesis about the relationship between realists/critical political economy and the liberals; defend your thesis with reasoning, textual evidence, and reference to facts about the world. 4-5 pages.]

Feminism/Postcolonialism

How do feminists use the term gender? What intellectual and political work does "gender" do? How is feminism an analysis of

hierarchy? What do we see differently if we use a feminist optic to view the world? More specifically, how do they expand our view of the character and location of international politics? How do we think about actors and their constitution, including ourselves?

Is knowledge gendered? Is security gendered? How does gender intersect with political economy?

Think about Cohn's method. What does field work allow us to see that other methods might miss?

Nov 12 (W)	Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals"
Nov 14 (F)	True and Jaquette "Feminist Problems with International Norms"
Nov 17 (M)	Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses"
Nov 19 (W)	McCracken and Peterson, Feminism and Political economy
Nov 21 (F)	women, gender and IR: how might we rethink IR
Nov 24 (M)	Pieterse and Parekh, "Shifting Imaginaries; Decolonization, Internal Decolonization, Postcoloniality"
Nov 26-Nov 30	Thanksgiving Break (begin reading Muppidi)
Dec 1 (M)	Muppidi, pp. 1-70
Dec 3 (W)	Muppidi, pp. 71-126
Dec 5 (F)	Muppidi, pp. 127-164
Dec 8 (M)	workshop on final exam
Dec 10 (W)	no class
Dec 13 (Sa)	Final Exam due

Appendix 1: Writing Critical Essays in Foundations of International Politics¹

Writing a critical essay requires making an argument which defends or supports a thesis about some text(s), author(s), or school(s) of thought. The terms “argument,” “thesis,” and “critical” are not easy to define, but I will give it a try.

An argument defends or supports a thesis.

*An **argument** thinks through a problem or issue in a careful, informed, and logical fashion.* This requirement distinguishes an argument from an opinion. Opinions are an expression of the intuition or feeling we have about something which are unsupported by reasoning or other evidence. The addition of reasons transforms an opinion into an argument, possessing a narrative line, telling a plausible story, involving an explanation, or deducing conclusions from premises. Thus, a critical essay is not an opinion paper; it is an essay developing an argument. Do not ignore your feelings or intuitions; they may be the inspiration or source of an argument. Your task is to transform your feelings or intuitions into arguments by grounding them in reasoning and evidence.

*A **thesis** is the point of the argument, the claim you want to make about an author, text, school of thought, or some topic.* It is the view you wish to defend in contrast to other possible views; the defense of a specific explanation of some feature of political life; your specific answer to some controversial question. Or, a thesis might identify your particular critique of an author or school of thought. It is often helpful to state the thesis clearly in an introductory paragraph. By anticipating the conclusion you will reach, you make it easier for a reader to follow your argument because she knows the point of it from the beginning.

What makes an essay critical? I think a **critical** essay involves at least three tasks: (1) an **analytical** task. *Critical analysis requires you to take apart the apparent wholeness or unity of your subject/topic, and then to reassemble it in your own terms.* Therefore, you should state clearly the argument or position of the author or school of thought in question. The point, however, is not to summarize the text, listing the main points of the argument. Rather, analysis involves an appreciation of the interrelation of the points; it involves judgment and selection. You need to show how the major points are interlinked to try to form the logical structure of an argument, supporting a particular thesis. Or, you can show how the points are interconnected into a more or less coherent way of understanding international political life.

(2) an **evaluative** task. *As a critical reader, you must determine the importance of an author’s or school’s argument or point of view as well as its soundness.*

¹With thanks and apologies to Sherry Gray, Naeem Inayatullah, Ruth Turner, and Leslie Vaughan

Important arguments help us “make sense” of our experiences and our lives. You need to ask of the author, text, or perspective : (1) does it reveal some important feature of political life formerly hidden to us?; and /or (2) does it help us understand the reasons for certain features of political life about which we were unsure or confused?

The soundness of an argument depends on how well it is defended. A sound argument compels your judgment. It is easiest to define sound argument in the negative--in terms of the weaknesses it avoids. Important kinds of weaknesses you need to look for include: (1) faults in reasoning, where conclusions do not follow from prior steps in the argument, where steps in the argument are missing, where assumptions are not credible, or where an argument requires us to accept contradictory statements; (2) gaps in coverage or a concern with what is overlooked, ignored, not adequately accounted for by the author or school of thought--the silences in the argument; (3) faults in evidence, where there is little or no evidence to support the argument or where the evidence contradicts the statements made as part of the argument; and (4) prescriptive weaknesses, where the author fails to acknowledge his/her normative commitments or where normative commitments cloud the author's clear judgment or where ethical commitments or prescriptions for action are confusing or self-defeating. If the author avoids these problems, defending his or her thesis well, you need to show how it is the authors does that.

(3) a **constructive** task. *If you identify weaknesses, you should suggest alternative ways of looking at the issues(s) of concern and the advantages or importance of the alternatives. Even better, show how to correct mistakes in reasoning, evidence, and coverage. Or, if you highlight the author's strengths, draw out implications of the argument beyond those treated by the author.*

In the first case, fill in gaps and show the importance of doing so; suggest how to avoid a particular contradiction and how this changes the line of argument; note plausible alternative assumptions and the implications of these; fill in silences and suggest what we can now see that was hidden before; provide lacking evidence and highlight new and important conclusions we might then draw. Here, you must draw upon your theoretical or political imagination. By this phrase, I do not mean to suggest that you create alternatives or fill gaps out of thin air. Rather, your capacity to create or construct is grounded in the breadth of knowledge and depth of analytical skills you possess.

In the second case, apply the author's or school's argument in new domains. Show how it illuminates issues of contemporary importance unknown to the author in his or her time or place. Demonstrate connections or overlaps with other important lines of argument; draw out the new insights that can be gain by highlighting these connections or overlaps. Show how these arguments were building blocks for other important thinking/thinkers.

Sometimes these three tasks may need to be preformed comparatively across authors or schools of thought. That is, you may be called upon to evaluate the relative plausibility of assumptions, adequacy of definitions, quality of reasoning, and/or efficacy or plans for action in comparing authors, texts or perspectives.

When thinking about your own writing, you need to keep in mind that *an excellent critical essay performs all three of these tasks very well*. But, how do you know if you have performed these tasks well? The easy, but unhelpful, answer is that you just know a good essay when you see one. The best strategy is to test drafts of your own essay using these criteria. *Ask yourself:*

What is the point (thesis) of your essay? Is it stated clearly? Is it an important and interesting thesis? Is it challenging and deep? Hint: a thesis containing an evaluative and constructive element is normally more challenging and deep than one without.

Have you defended the thesis well? Have you given reasons to support your case? Have you reasoned well? Does your presentation follow a logical progression? Or does the story flow in the right order? Have you left out important steps? Does the evidence you bring to bear make your case?

When you put together or try to re-think an outline or when you re-read the first draft of your essay, think about how the various parts of it fit together. *The introduction should inform the reader of the point and plan of the essay* so that the reader can follow where you are going. In the **body** of the essay, *each sentence and paragraph should do its work*. What I mean by this is that each sentence should contribute its part to making the point of the paragraph. Each paragraph, likewise, should make its own small point which works as a segment of the larger argument you are making. Signposts that tell the reader what work a paragraph or two are going to do are often quite helpful. If some sentence or paragraph does not seem to be doing any work, why is it there? If some paragraph or sentence seems to depend on an idea you have placed later in the essay, consider adjusting the order of your presentation. Jokes told in the wrong order are not funny. Arguments developing in the wrong order are often confusing and unconvincing. Re-thinking outlines and re-writing drafts accordingly should improve the quality of your final work. Finally, *a good conclusion is part summary and part drawing things together for the reader* so she is reminded of the point of the essay, the major steps in getting to that point, and why that point is an important one.

No one writes an excellent critical essay in a first draft. An essay that performs the analytical, evaluative, and constructive tasks well takes several drafts, as you critically evaluate your own work. Also, while writing is partly a solitary activity, it is intrinsically social in that it is normally meant to be read by others. Thus, you may want to share drafts with your peers, involving other readers in the process of critically evaluating drafts.

I have expressed roughly these same points in a rubric that I will hand out.

Appendix 2: NOTES ON READING

Learning to read is not something accomplished in elementary school. It is a lifetime occupation. Something like this sentiment is the premise for a course organized around the kind of thick books we will read this semester. We might say, then, that one of the objectives of this course is to assist you in learning to read better. But what does “to read better” mean? We usually summarize what we mean with terms like reading more “deeply,” or more “analytically” or “critically.” Some might even provide a checklist of skills or procedures that add up to “reading critically.” I doubt that such checklists quite capture what we are getting at. And what we are getting at varies somewhat from field to field and perhaps even from text to text, not to mention the always shifting fashions of academe. Nonetheless, I propose two principles (and some accompanying pointers) that I hope will be helpful, that might--if made into habits--help you to read better.

I. READ ACTIVELY (AND AGAIN AND AGAIN)

We all know that reading is not the same as understanding; we have all read and not understood more than once in our lives. Understanding seems to involve additionally a more active engagement with a text, internalizing or appropriating it for ourselves. We also know that there are degrees of understanding beyond what is achieved after a first, even engaged reading. A second reading (or even a third), consulting another author’s interpretation, and a discussion of the text may all lead to greater understanding. And so on to the limit: a lifetime of confrontation with a text or a set of texts.

Some suggestions to make reading more active and effective:

(1) Pause to think

If reading and understanding are not immediately connected, then something more is needed. I suggest often taking a pause to think about what you have just read. Mull it over, say it back to yourself in your own words, think about how it connects to an earlier section, make a guess about what will follow, and try to figure out why it seems strange, or why the author would state the obvious, or why it makes you sad or angry or happy.

(2) Write back to the author

One of my colleagues suggests that the first step to reading well is to throw away your highlighter; it gives you too little voice. He notes that the margins of the text are blank. This is the space for you to fill--with your summaries, interpretations, free-associations, questions, complaints, counter-arguments. If you can’t bring yourself to mark up the text, do the same thing on a separate sheet (noting the corresponding page numbers in the text so you can match them up later). You might think of this as a way of recording your thinking during the “pause.”

(3) Read it again

Understanding may not accompany an initial reading of a text. Often you must read it again. Indeed, a second reading may allow you to focus more attention on what the author means (or what these words mean to you) and less on just getting through all the words on the page. A shorter text may allow re-reading from beginning to end. For a longer, more difficult text, a complete second-reading may not be possible. Re-read what seem to be key passages, or sections that left you initially confused. Return to earlier sections that now should make more sense after having read the entire book. Use your marginal notes to clue you into which sections require special attention. Write over your initial marginal notes with new summaries, questions, counter-arguments.

(4) Write your understanding

Developing your own understanding (or “reading”) of the author requires that you begin to systematize your responses to his or her text. Usually, systematizing means putting your thoughts into an ordered, written form (paragraphs and pages) so that they are available for scrutiny by you and other readers. [note: this is not simply voluntary; you are required to write systematic essays in the course.] You may find a latent ordering of your thoughts in a pattern that shows up in your marginal notes (e.g. you continually comment on Plato’s elitism or Aristotle’s sexism). Or, you might return to a particular section that initially spawned a stream of thinking/marginal notations: a nascent counter-argument, the beginnings of a comparison with another text, or the seeds of an application of an idea to a contemporary issue. In any case, your task is to “make sense” (at least provisionally) of this issue, problem, or insight for yourself and for other readers. I will try to give you some more pointers about what it means to make sense of a text (or some piece of a text) below. At this point, what I want to suggest is that writing a response is another opportunity to “think though” the meaning or implication of the text. Additional opportunities for thinking through the issues arise when you re-read your written document and when you revise it. This is a not-very-subtle hint that “good” papers are not simply thought and written; they are re-thought and re-written.

II. RESPECT THE AUTHOR (BUT NOT TOO MUCH)

Reading “better” involves negotiating our relation to the author. On the one hand, our reading might be stunted if we approach an author as if s/he has all the answers for us. When we take this stance, we make ourselves too passive in relation to the text. We wait for the author to provide us with our assumptions, define the problem, and give us the solution. We accept what s/he says at face value. We internalize uncritically. We reduce our “writing back” to the author to summary or matters of interpreting what s/he “really meant.” I have suggested above that we should claim a different, more active, relation. Indeed, being an active reader entails adopting a stance of greater critical “distance.” We don’t wait simply for the author to give us the answers; we think ahead about where the issues might lead. We question what the author presents to us. We reserve judgment. We demand to be convinced. If the text remains persuasive to us (in some measure at least) in spite of our active, resisting, skeptical stance, this might be seen as testament to the text’s quality.

However, we should also be generous to authors and texts. It is difficult to write persuasive and insightful texts. We all have blind spots. We are all products of our time and place. Our failure to be persuaded, to make a connection with the text, should not lead us immediately to deny the author's achievements or the value of the text.

We may appreciate the depth and clarity of an author's reflections on problems and questions though those problems don't concern us. It behooves us to pay careful attention to what an author thinks s/he is working at, how s/he sets out to achieve it, and the skill with which s/he executes this purpose. And our respect for the author may grow from our appreciation of the limits we all face in interpreting our existence in the world.

There are certain rules of thumb or conventions that we generally follow in interpreting texts. I will state them, following my practice above, as a list of pointers.

(1) See the text as a relation of “parts” and “whole”

The idea that the authors we read are engaged in “making sense” of the world implies that they intend for their work to exhibit a kind of unity that connects the text's purpose--we might call it the text's “thesis” or “point”--to a supporting structure of evidence and reasoning. In a large and complicated text, an over-arching point will be supported by a scaffolding of materials, including a set of sub-theses, and these, in turn, may be undergirded by an even finer set of points. We often refer to this structure of points and sub-points as the “argument” of the text, although we may use that term to describe only a discrete piece of that structure as well. Understanding a text in part is about being able to see this structure--how one point builds upon another to a conclusion or, to complicate it only slightly, how two points in conjunction may be the support for a third, more encompassing conclusion. Reading well is being able to grasp this structure of argument and to reconstruct it for yourself. How do you do that?

(2) Identify the varying roles or functions of the “parts”

The previous section has already introduced an architectural metaphor, which I will extend here. Different parts of the argument may have different purposes just as any building is a composite of different materials and features. Thus, when reading you should attend to the role different facets of the text play logically and rhetorically in making that text a whole.

Most simply, perhaps, certain paragraphs (or longer sections) may function as an introduction, introducing the line of argument to follow (either in the text as a whole or in the next section of the work). A paragraph (or more) might instead function as summary, either as a conclusion of a text (or a part of the text) or in mid-argument (as a way of making sure that the reader has not lost the thread of the argument [note: now an argument appears as a fabric instead of a building, but hopefully you get the idea despite the mixing of metaphors]). Thus, a summary paragraph may be used to signal a transition from one section or segment of the argument to another, though it will often

then hint at what is to come next. Individual sentences may function also as transitions, connecting paragraphs and ideas both backwards and forwards.

The argument of the text will be built in pieces or blocks. These building blocks also vary somewhat in character. We might make a distinction between the premises and the final conclusion derived from these premises, but, in a complicated argument (with many steps), conclusions in one step may serve as premises of another. Some premises may have the status of an assumption or first principle in that the reader is asked to accept this proposition without evidence or prior argument--to take it for granted. One kind of first principle is a definition. Definitions may be given explicitly or introduced without mention in the context of certain phrases. In addition, a discussion of method (often seen as the foundation of the entire structure) or an autobiographical statement of motivation (a different sort of grounding of the structure: the social positioning of the author) are examples of a special kind of first principle, invoking philosophical issues of how we know what we know. Ordinary premises will be treated either as empirical--supported by evidence which the author presents or assumes is readily available to the reader--or derived from earlier steps in the argument as already noted.

As you read and think about the text, try to become increasingly conscious of the role or function that various sentences, paragraphs, and larger sections play. But this is still too passive a relation to the text. You should also ask: Do the parts fulfill their function well? But how do you decide?

(3) Look for cracks in the edifice or looseness in the weave

If we assume that authors attempt to “make sense,” we may hold them to that criterion. As a structure, we expect the argument to be erected on a sufficient foundation, its framing to be complete, and its various components or materials to be securely fastened together so that the edifice stands strong. As a fabric, we expect the argument to be tightly woven, without tears in the cloth or gaps in the pattern, and to be both beautiful and useful. These extended images can be translated into a set of questions you should keep in mind as you read and think through an author’s work:

--What is the author’s purpose or thesis? What questions motivate the work? Is the author clear about these?

--Can we discern a motive or purpose of which the author appears unaware? Why this blindness? Is this a historical or personal problem?

--Does the text fulfill its purpose or answer the central questions it poses (implicitly or explicitly)?

--In what way does the author succeed or fail in the tasks set? Did s/he begin from false assumptions or utilize the wrong method? Do the definitions of terms mislead us? Did s/he reason well, drawing warranted conclusions from the premises? Is the author ambivalent on some key issues or inconsistent in his/her stance on others? Does

s/he leave out key issues or include extraneous materials that disable the argument? Did the author mis-represent the weight of the evidence?

--Did the author take into account strong counter-arguments? Are alternative arguments stronger or easily deflected? What do they explain differently and better? What do they explain that the author ignores? What do they leave out that the author includes?

--If the author fails, how do we account for that? Did s/he just screw up? Is the task insurmountable or the question unanswerable? Did a systematic bias defeat the argument? Is his or her historical vision too limited? Do we really see more and better?

--Is the work useful for us? Did the author ask the right questions? For her or his time? For ours? Do her answers provide guidance for us? How and why?

--Does the style of the text suit the purpose? Is it clear or hard to read? Why is that? Is it elegant or pleasing? How so?