

## HSPS Tripos Part IIA

### SOC 4: Concepts and Arguments in Sociology

#### Paper Guide 2021-2022

Course Organiser: Dr. Diana T. Kudaibergenova ([dk406@cam.ac.uk](mailto:dk406@cam.ac.uk))

In this paper, students will have an opportunity to pursue their specific interests in Sociology by exploring concepts and nature of sociological explanations in more depth. Each student will be able to independently explore, analyse, research and finalise their findings in a form of two 5000 words essays (one in each term). Each student will have a supervisor assigned to them to help them with each essay each term. Students have a choice in a variety of topics and themes in sociology they can explore later on in Part IIB, IIB paper, or in their dissertation.

This paper is assessed by means of two long essays of 5000 words each. Students will be asked to choose two questions from a list that is published each year by the Faculty Board. The list is divided into two Sections; students must choose one essay from each Section. The first essay must be based on a question chosen from Section I and the second essay must be based on a question from Section II.

The questions in **Section I** are all concerned with **concepts** which are important in Sociology and in the Social Sciences more generally. In the first essay, students are expected:

- to demonstrate in their essay that they are aware of the history and complexity of the concept (or concepts);
- that they can analyse the concept carefully and rigorously; and
- that, if appropriate, they can show how the concept can be used in empirical research and can examine the problems involved in doing so.

The questions in **Section II** are concerned with **sociological analysis and explanation**. The questions focus on a particular problem, phenomenon or development and invite students to think about how it could be analysed and/or explained sociologically. In this essay students are expected to demonstrate in their essay that:

- they can relate theory to empirical research;
- that they can weigh up the evidence for or against a particular view or views; and
- that, where appropriate, they can evaluate the suitability of methods used to attempt to answer a particular question.

Many of the questions on the list are phrased in a general way. This is done in such a way to allow each student, in consultation with the supervisor, to decide how to focus their answer. Rather than writing a very general essay, students are encouraged to work out a well-structured plan for their essay which enables them to focus their answer effectively and to pursue issues and arguments in some depth.

Examiners will expect students to write clearly, to analyse issues carefully and to develop a cogent argument. They will expect students **to be familiar with the relevant literature** and to **display critical, independent thinking**.

There is no single format for the essays and no fixed answer for any of the questions. However, the examiners will expect students to do more than simply summarize the literature on the topic. They will want to see evidence that students have thought hard about the issues and are able to develop sociologically informed arguments which enable students to answer the questions in a clear and rigorous way. The best essays will be those that demonstrate a highly sophisticated understanding of the issues and display an exceptional degree of insight, originality, and independent research.

Writing well is an important part of this paper. Students are expected to write clearly, spell accurately and ensure that all sentences are grammatically correct. Students should use a standard referencing system for quotations and other references and for the bibliography. Students should proofread their essays before submitting them. Casualness in presentation and errors in spelling, syntax and grammar will be penalized by the examiners. Further guidance on writing essays can be found in the 'Notes on preparing long essays for assessment' in the *Sociology Handbook*.

### **Aims and Objectives**

- To give students the opportunity to investigate sociological questions and to pursue specific issues and topics of their interest in some depth.
- To encourage students to think carefully about sociological concepts and to analyse them rigorously.
- To encourage students to think about the nature of sociological arguments and explanations and pursue their independent study of these concepts.
- To encourage students to think about the relation between theory and empirical research and to consider the suitability of the research methods used to answer particular questions.
- To encourage students to think about the kinds of evidence that can be used to support and/or criticise theories and arguments and to weigh up evidence in a careful and considered way.
- To encourage students to write clearly and to develop reasoned sociological arguments of their own.

### **Teaching**

This paper is taught primarily by supervision. There is one introductory lecture for this paper at the beginning of Michaelmas Term. All other teaching for the paper is by means of supervision. We assume that you will have three supervisions for each essay. In the first supervision you can discuss your chosen question with your supervisor in a preliminary way, define how you will approach the question and ask your supervisor for help in putting together an initial reading list. In the second supervision you can discuss your progress on the basis of a written outline for your essay. In the third supervision you can discuss a draft of your essay with your supervisor. Supervisors will not read more than one draft of your essay. You will be expected to work on your essays during full term and to be supervised during full term.

### **Registering your choices**

All students who are taking this paper, must register their choices for the first and second questions choices with Odette Rogers ([ohmr3@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ohmr3@cam.ac.uk)) by the end of first week of Michaelmas Term. For each question of your choice, please indicate a second choice (alternative choice) in case some supervisors might not be available.

### **Readings**

There are no published reading lists for each question. Students and supervisors must discuss reading lists and supervisors will suggest students some sources as well as to encourage students to look for reading resources themselves.

### **Deadlines**

One electronic copy of the first essay should be sent to [enquiries@sociology.cam.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@sociology.cam.ac.uk) by **12:00 p.m. on Monday 24 January, 2022**, one electronic copy of the second essay by **12:00 p.m. on Monday 2 May, 2022**. As with all material submitted for examination, the marking is anonymous; please do NOT put your name and college on the essay.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is citing the work of others verbatim, as if it were your own, although it does not extend to acknowledging what a supervisor will have said to you in conversation or any note on your work. It includes a paraphrase of the work of others where you do not acknowledge it in a note or some indication of the kind 'Dubois argued' in the text. It also includes cutting and pasting from the web. If you take material from websites, you must acknowledge it in the same way as from books, articles, and other paper texts.

Plagiarism is a serious offence and is more readily detected—even from an obscure textual source or a remote site on the web—than you might imagine. It can lead to the University taking disciplinary action. You must read the Faculty's guidelines on plagiarism:

<https://www.hsps.cam.ac.uk/current-students/course-materials/c-m-files/plagiarism>

### **Supervisors:**

Prof. Brendan Burchell [bb101@cam.ac.uk](mailto:bb101@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Filipe da Silva [fcs23@cam.ac.uk](mailto:fcs23@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. David Frayne [fraynedm@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fraynedm@hotmail.co.uk)

Dr. Asya Islam [ai301@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ai301@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Sazana Jayadeva [sj355@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sj355@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Hazem Kandil [hk376@cam.ac.uk](mailto:hk376@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Diana T. Kudaibergenova [dk406@cam.ac.uk](mailto:dk406@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Ali Meghji [am2059@cam.ac.uk](mailto:am2059@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Monica Moreno Figueroa [mm2051@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mm2051@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Shannon Philipp [sp2008@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sp2008@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Jorge Saavedra Utman [jsu21@cam.ac.uk](mailto:jsu21@cam.ac.uk)

Mr. Gavin Stevenson [gms46@cam.ac.uk](mailto:gms46@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Darin Weinberg [dtw23@cam.ac.uk](mailto:dtw23@cam.ac.uk)

## **Part I. Concepts**

What do we mean by “meaningful work”, or the opposite of Graeber's “bullshit jobs”?  
(Brendan Burchell)

Discuss the ways in which populism is both a concept and a polemic. (Filipe da Silva)

Academics and governments alike have been accused of equating ‘work’ with ‘waged employment’. Why is this thought to be a problem? (David Frayne)

What is social reproduction? (Asya Islam)

Is ‘intersectionality’ distinct from and opposed to ‘diversity’, as Jennifer Nash (2019) suggests? (Asya Islam)

How useful is the concept of ‘cultural capital’ for understanding educational inequalities?  
(Sazana Jayadeva)

How might a focus on ‘infrastructures’ contribute to our understanding of mobilities?  
(Sazana Jayadeva)

What is the difference between ideology and discourse? (Hazem Kandil)

Does war have a fixed social nature? (Hazem Kandil)

Why certain authoritarian regimes are more resilient than others? (Diana T. Kudaibergenova)

What makes social movement successful? (Diana T. Kudaibergenova)

Are there any differences between Western universalism and decolonial pluriversalism? (Ali Meghji)

To what extent does freedom of speech enable racism? (Monica Moreno Figueroa)

How does the concept of the ‘coloniality of gender’ further sociological understandings?  
(Shannon Philip)

What is ‘gendered violence’ and how can do we critically understand it? (Shannon Philip)

Is the body a 'flexible object'? (Shannon Philip)

What can the concept of participation contribute to the discussion of media and democracy?  
(Jorge Saavedra Utman)

Why voice matters? (Jorge Saavedra Utman)

In what ways (if any) is heterosexuality compulsory? (Gavin Stevenson)

Access the value of the concept of "microaggression" for understanding discrimination.  
(Gavin Stevenson)

What is Social Constructionism (Darin Weinberg)

## **Part II. Arguments**

Is it possible to measure how useful jobs are? Can we rely on employees to tell us if they have a bullshit job? (Brendan Burchell)

Discuss how a greater appreciation for the materiality of ideas may complicate our understanding of sociological theory. (Filipe da Silva)

How well-founded is the claim that developments in automated technology will eventually displace most workers from their jobs? (David Frayne)

How well-founded is the claim that participation in paid work is essential for human well-being? (David Frayne)

"They say it's love, we say it's unpaid work." (Wages for Housework Committee, 1975)  
(Asya Islam)

Is the crisis of care a crisis of racial capitalism? (Asya Islam)

In marketized higher education landscapes, do students become customers? (Sazana Jayadeva)

Is education a 'contradictory resource' (Levinson and Holland, 1996)? (Sazana Jayadeva)

Can social media platforms democratise access to opportunities for mobility? (Sazana Jayadeva)

Is revolution still possible today? (Hazem Kandil)

Which approach to power is most suited to empirical study of society? (Hazem Kandil)

Is nationalism one of the main sources of undemocratic development in the world today? (Diana T. Kudaibergenova)

Does the category of “ethnic minority” produce more inequality? (Diana T. Kudaibergenova)

Did W.E.B Du Bois provide an adequate theory of racial capitalism? Answer making reference to the W.E.B Du Bois digital archive. (Ali Meghji)

To what extent is fatphobia an intersectional issue? (Monica Moreno Figueroa)

‘Men are both victims and oppressors’ - argue in relation to gender and masculinities. (Shannon Philip)

Have dating apps transformed intimacies positively or negatively? (Shannon Philip)

Social inequalities are increasing due to the internet - explain critically with examples. (Shannon Philip)

Is social media a useful way for participating in democratic and/or democratizing processes? (Jorge Saavedra Utman)

How can voice exist in oppressive contexts? (Jorge Saavedra Utman)

Without the category “woman,” is feminism an incoherent project? (Gavin Stevenson)

What is “political correctness” and who (if anyone) benefits from it? (Gavin Stevenson)

What is Addiction? (Darin Weinberg)