

## HSPS Tripos Part IIA

### SOC 4: Concepts and Arguments in Sociology Paper Guide 2023-2024

Course Organiser: Dr. Thomas Jeffrey Miley ([tjm52@cam.ac.uk](mailto:tjm52@cam.ac.uk))

#### Course Description

In this paper, students will have an opportunity to pursue their specific interests in Sociology by exploring concepts and the 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, in a 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 **arguments, 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 **Dr. Thomas Jeffrey Miley** ([tjm52@cam.ac.uk](mailto:tjm52@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 **12:00pm on Monday 22 January, 2024**, one electronic copy of the second essay by **12:00pm on Monday 29 April, 2024**.

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.hsp.s.cam.ac.uk/current-students/course-materials/c-m-files/plagiarism>**

## QUESTIONS FOR SECTION 1: CONCEPTS

1. *Can the concept of populism ever account for the historical cases classified as "populist" in the literature?*
2. *How does Angela Davis define Abolition Feminism and why does she argue we need it now?*
3. *To what extent can Islamophobia be understood as a form of racism?*
4. *What is capitalism?*
5. *Is the Marxian approach to class wrong, outdated or just neglected?*
6. *Foucault had nothing original to say about power. Discuss.*
7. *Is Russia's war in Ukraine colonial in its nature?*
8. *All states are inevitably authoritarian. Discuss.*
9. *How does the concept of "care" link to relational and affective forms of social justice?*
10. *Home is where your loved ones are. Discuss with reference to homelessness.*
11. *What is the purpose of critique?*
12. *What is "primitive accumulation"?*
13. *Critically assess the concept of "border imperialism."*

14. *What, if any, is the relationship between stigma and inequality?*
15. *Critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of social constructionism?*

## **QUESTIONS FOR SECTION 2: ARGUMENTS, ANALYSIS, AND EXPLANATION**

1. *What does it mean to say that ideas have a materiality of their own? Answer by reference to one sociological concept.*
2. *What are the differences between using "transgender" as a noun, a verb or an adjective, and what do these differences tell us about contemporary feminist politics?*
3. *Assess Angela Davis' (2003) claim that prisons are 'obsolete'.*
4. *Where is the primary locus of power in the contemporary United States of America: Silicon Valley, Wall Street, or Washington DC?*
5. *How useful is the concept of neoliberalism for the understanding the contemporary era? Discuss with reference to the USA and China.*
6. *In the light of the current war in Ukraine, there are multiple campaigns to "decolonise Russia." Why or why not is this project possible?*
7. *Should Artificial Intelligence be used to care for the vulnerable?*
8. *Will entrepreneurship help us solve problems like cancer, ageing, or climate change?*
9. *Is finance going to help us tackle climate change?*
10. *How can we understand Threads, Meta's new social media platform?*
11. *How is "accumulation by dispossession" implicated in the production and reproduction of global inequalities?*
12. *Analyse the claim that racism is one of the main causes of the Anthropocene.*
13. *Assess the claim that meritocracy is merely a myth.*
14. *Critically evaluate the contributions of sociology to our understanding of addiction.*

### **List of supervisors**

Dr. Filipe Carreira da Silva (fcs23@cam.ac.uk)

Prof. Sarah Franklin (sbf25@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Scarlet Harris (sh2232@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Stuart Hogarth (sh339@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Diana T. Kudaibergenova (dk406@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Nomisha Kurian (nck28@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Johannes Lenard (jflenhard@gmail.com)

Dr. Ella MchPherson (em310@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Jeff Miley (tjm52@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Mathew Sparkes (ms2268@cam.ac.uk)

Prof. Darin Weinberg (dtw23@cam.ac.uk)