

HSPS Tripos Part IIA

Soc 4: Concepts and Arguments in Sociology

2020-21

Course Organiser: Dr. Jeff Miley (tjm52@cam.ac.uk) & Valentina Ausserladscheider (va283@am.ac.uk)

This paper gives you the opportunity to pursue your interests in Sociology in some depth and to think carefully about the nature of sociological explanation and analysis. With the help and guidance of a supervisor, you will have a chance to engage in independent reading and research and to work on topics that you might wish to study further in Part IIB, either by choosing a relevant IIB paper or by writing a dissertation.

The paper is assessed by means of two long essays of 5000 words each. You are asked to choose two questions from a list that is published each year by the Faculty Board. The list is divided into two Sections; you must choose one essay from each Section. Your first essay must be based on a question chosen from Section I and your 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. You are expected to demonstrate in your essay that you are aware of the history and complexity of the concept (or concepts); that you can analyse the concept carefully and rigorously; and that, if appropriate, you 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 you to think about how it could be analysed and/or explained sociologically. You are expected to demonstrate in your essay that you can relate theory to empirical research; that you can weigh up the evidence for or against a particular view or views; and that, where appropriate, you 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 allows you, in consultation with your supervisor, to decide how to focus your answer. Rather than writing a very general essay, you are encouraged to work out a well-structured plan for your essay which enables you to focus your answer effectively and to pursue issues and arguments in some depth.

Examiners will expect you to write clearly, to analyse issues carefully and to develop a cogent argument. They will expect you 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 you to do more than simply summarize the literature on the topic. They will want to see evidence that you have thought hard about the issues and are able to develop sociologically informed arguments which enable you 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 and originality.

Writing well is an important part of this paper. You are expected to write clearly, spell accurately and ensure that your sentences are grammatically correct. You should use a standard referencing system for quotations and other references and for the bibliography. You should proof read your 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 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.
- 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. Unless there are exceptional circumstances where your Director of Studies has provided evidence that you were unable to work for a significant period of time during term, supervisors can refuse to read drafts outside of full term.

Supervisors

The email addresses of supervisors are:

Prof. Brendan Burchell (bb101@cam.ac.uk)

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

Dr. Hazem Kandil (hk376@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Ali Meghji (am2059@cam.ac.uk)

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

Dr. Monica Moreno Figueroa (mm2051@cam.ac.uk)

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

Dr. Shannon Philip (sp2008@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Marcin Smietana (marcin.w.smietana@gmail.com)

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

Dr. Gavin Stevenson (gms46@cam.ac.uk)

Registering your choices

All students taking this paper must register their choices for their first and second questions with Odette Rogers (ohmr3@cam.ac.uk) by the end of the first week of Michaelmas Term. For each question, please indicate a second choice in case there is a shortage of supervisors for your first-choice question.

Reading

There are no published reading lists for the questions. Reading for each question will be suggested by your supervisor, who may encourage you to look for additional readings and sources yourself.

Deadlines

One electronic copy of the first essay should be sent to enquiries@sociology.cam.ac.uk by **12:00 p.m. on Monday 1 February, 2021**, one electronic copy of the second essay by **12:00 p.m. on Monday 3 May, 2021**. 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>

Assessment

The marking criteria for the assessment of long essays are available on the website.

Questions

SOC 4 Concepts and Arguments in Sociology - topics 2020-21

Part I – CONCEPTS

What is theoretical about critical race theory? (A. Meghji)

“Antiblackness is the notion that the construction of blacks as nonhuman structures the status of all other racial groups” (Ray et al. 2017, 149). Discuss in relation to two or more racialised groups. (M. Moreno Figueroa).

Why is ideology a source of power? (H Kandil)

How is war a social product? (H Kandil)

What might it mean to examine *queerness as a horizon* (Munoz, 2009)? Do you agree? (G. Stevenson)

“Though white fragility is triggered by discomfort and anxiety, it is born of superiority and entitlement.” (Diangelo, 2018: 2). Do you agree? (G. Stevenson)

How useful is the distinction between formal and informal labour markets? (B. Burchell)

Is a post-work society possible and/or desirable? (B. Burchell)

What does trust have to do with technology? (E. McPherson)

What can the concept of *queer kinship* contribute to sociological analysis? (M. Smietana)

Is materiality a useful concept in the study of intellectual life? (F. Carreira da Silva)

Is ‘gender’ a colonial construct? (S. Philip)

Is ‘queer’ a radical sociological concept? (S. Philip)

Is there a difference between neoliberalism and neocolonialism? (S. Philip)

Is cultural class analysis useful for studying contemporary political economy? (M. Sparkes)

Is the notion of meritocracy merely a myth? (M. Sparkes)

What are the strengths and limits of the concept of the “capitalocene” for helping us understand the climate crisis? (J. Miley)

In what ways is abolition “a theory of change, a theory of social life” (Gilmore 2018)? (J. Miley)

Part II – ARGUMENTS

Is racialised capitalism theory useful in understanding contemporary inequalities? (A. Meghji)

To what extent is the Black Lives Matter movement transnational? (M. Moreno Figueroa)

When is a revolution successful? (H. Kandil)

Can we rid society of physical violence? (H. Kandil)

Is fat a feminist issue? (G. Stevenson)

Should feminism be an empathy-building project? (G. Stevenson)

Why might the reduction in working time be important? (B. Burchell)

Which is more important: the quality of jobs or the eradication of unemployment? (B. Burchell)

Do information and communication technologies benefit people in coronavirus lockdown? (E. McPherson)

Is human reproduction a threat to the environment and/or non-human species? (M. Smietana)

How stable is populist rule? (F. Carreira da Silva)

Can studying men and masculinities inform feminist understandings of society? (S. Philip)

How can sociology critically analyse the relationship between criminality and inequality? (S. Philip)

In what ways is the internet amplifying existing inequalities and creating new forms of violence? (S. Philip)

To what extent does stigma naturalise structural inequality? (M. Sparkes)

How is the relationship between capitalism and democracy evolving? (J. Miley)

What are the sources of strength of, and main obstacles faced by, the movement to decolonize the university? (J. Miley)