

Sociology: Final State Exam – examples of questions from the previous years

A. General Sociology

The exam takes 90 minutes.

Choose to answer ONE of the following two questions. Your answer should consist of an essay that demonstrates your knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological theories, your ability to think critically about them, and your ability to link them to concrete topics of sociological study.

A. Consider macro versus micro sociological approaches. What are micro sociologists' key criticisms of macro-sociology? What are macro sociologists' key criticisms of micro-sociology? Identify a sociologist you believe does the best job linking macro and micro. Include a reasoned argument to support your choice.

B. Consider the following classical theorists and their perspectives: Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim (functionalism), Marx, Weber, Simmel, and Pareto (conflict), or Simmel, Weber and Durkheim (micro-sociological approaches). Pick any one of the abovementioned groupings, and discuss the ways in which that theoretical perspective has been interpreted and carried on in the work of contemporary (post-World War Two) sociologists.

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A. Marx, Weber, Simmel, Pareto, Habermas, and Wallerstein are all known for contributing to the development of conflict theory. In your opinion, which two of these theorists have made the most valuable contributions to our understandings of social conflict? Provide a reasoned argument to support your choice.

B. What is sociology? Compare the most relevant concepts of the three classical sociologists: Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

B. Field Sociology – various topics

Cultural Sociology:

Choose to answer ONE of the following two questions. Your answer should consist of an essay that demonstrates your knowledge and understanding of a range of cultural sociological theories, your ability to think critically about them, and your ability to link them to concrete topics of sociological study.

- A. Make an argument for or against the Strong Program. You should involve the following theorists or groups of theorists in your answer (but can involve more if you like): Jeffrey Alexander, Philip Smith, Clifford Geertz, Philippe Bourdieu, The Birmingham School, Michel Foucault, and the “production and reception of culture.”
- B. Discuss the process of classification and the relationship between symbols, binaries and discourses. You should refer to at least three major theorists in your answer.

Contemporary Sociological Theory

Your short essay has to contain: (a) a short recapitulation of a core idea from the following citation, (b) an interpretation of this core idea grounded in a wider theoretical context of the sociology of contemporary social theory, and (c) a critical commentary.

"Among so many changes, I shall consider one: the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle. Today we are rather inclined to ignore it; perhaps, in its time, it gave rise to too much inflated rhetoric; perhaps it has been attributed too readily and too emphatically to a process of 'humanization', thus dispensing with the need for further analysis. And, in any case, how important is such a change, when compared with the great institutional transformations, the formulation of explicit, general codes and unified rules of procedure; with the almost universal adoption of the jury system, the definition of the essentially corrective character of the penalty and the tendency, which has become increasingly marked since the nineteenth century, to adapt punishment to the individual offender? Punishment of a less immediately physical kind, a certain discretion in the art of inflicting pain, a combination of more subtle, more subdued sufferings, deprived of their visible display, should not all this be treated as a special case, an incidental effect of deeper changes? And yet the fact remains that a few decades saw the disappearance of the tortured, dismembered, amputated body, symbolically branded on face or shoulder, exposed alive or dead to public view. The body as the major target of penal repression disappeared."

(Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books.)

Social and Cultural Aspects of Democratic Transition (Post-socialism)

Your short essay has to contain: (a) a short recapitulation of a core idea from the following citation, (b) an interpretation of this core idea grounded in a wider theoretical context of the sociology of contemporary social theory, and (c) a critical commentary.

"National minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands are bound together in a single, interdependent relational nexus. Projects of nationalization or national integration in the new nation-states, for example, "exist" and exercise their effects not in isolation but in a relational field that includes both the national minority and its external national homeland. In this relational field, minority and homeland elites continuously monitor the new nation-state and are especially sensitive to any signs of projects of "nationalization" or "national integration." When they perceive such signs, they seek to build up and sustain a perception of the state as an oppressively or unjustly nationalizing state. And they might act on this perception. The minority might mobilize against the perceived projects of nationalization and might seek autonomy or even threaten secession. The homeland, claiming the right to monitor and protect the interests of its ethnic co-nationals abroad, might provide material or moral support for these initiatives and might lodge protests with the nationalizing state or with international organizations against the perceived projects of nationalization. This protest activity will react back on the nationalizing state, although it will not necessarily dissuade it from its nationalizing projects, and it might even lead to their intensification. The minority might be accused of disloyalty, the homeland of illegitimate interference in the internal affairs of the nationalizing state."

(Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. Nationalism Reframed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)

C. Methodology of Social Sciences Question

Choose to answer ONE of the following two questions. Your answer should consist of an essay that demonstrates your knowledge and understanding of a range of social scientific methods and methodologies, your ability to think critically about them, and your ability to link them to concrete topics of sociological study.

- A. Advocate for a mixed methods research design.
- B. Design a research study for applying a cultural sociological perspective to the study of a concrete media event that is global in scope. You should offer a description of both the methodology and the method(s) you would utilize. In addition, please provide a brief description of the event; it can be current or historical.