

PhD Sociology Entrance Exam

Sample Question Paper

- This is only a sample paper and is only meant to be indicative of the type of questions that will be asked.

Read the passages below and answer the questions that follow:

Passage 1

Human beings are terrestrial creatures; they live on the ground. That much appears at first glance to be obvious. But what is the ground? As a first approximation, we might suppose that it is a portion of the surface of the earth that is evident to the senses of an upright body. 'To my senses', wrote Immanuel Kant, the earth appears as 'a flat surface, with a circular horizon'. This surface, for Kant, lies at the very foundation of human experience: it is 'the stage on which the play of our skills proceeds [and] the ground on which our knowledge is acquired and applied'. Everything that exists and that might form the object of our perception is placed upon this surface, rather as properties and scenery might be set upon the stage of a theatre. Beneath the surface lies the domain of formless matter, the physical stuff of the world. And above it lies the domain of immaterial form, of pure ideas or concepts, which the mind is said to bring to the evidence of the senses in order to organize the piecemeal data of experience into a systematic knowledge of the world as a whole – knowledge which Kant imagined to be arrayed as if on the surface of a sphere, at once continuous and finite in extent. With his feet firmly planted on the level ground and his mind soaring in the sphere of reason, the Kantian subject was above all a seeker after knowledge.¹ It was Karl Marx who subsequently put the subject to work, through a process of labour that saw the earth turned into an instrument of his purpose. The earth, Marx declared, is 'the most general instrument of labour ... since it provides the worker with the platform for all his operations, and supplies a field of employment for his activity'. What for Kant was a stage became, for Marx, a production platform, not merely furnished but materially transformed through human activity. Yet the ground still appears as a substratum for such activity, an interface between the mental and the material where the sheer physicality of the world comes hard up against the creativity of human endeavour...

With the earth below and the sky above, and supported on the ground, the Gibsonian perceiver is placed in the midst of the phenomenal world rather than banished to its exterior surface. He is, in that sense, an inhabitant. He has air to breathe, and a platform to stand on. Yet an open environment, comprising the ground surface alone, would not in itself be habitable. Arguing this point, Gibson compares the ground to the floor of a room. In an empty, unfurnished room one could stand, walk, or even run on the floor, but do little else. In any inhabited house, however, the rooms are cluttered with furniture, and it is this clutter that makes possible all the other, everyday activities that are carried on there (as well as hindering some activities like running about). Likewise, Gibson reasoned, a plain devoid of features, though it might afford standing and walking, would in all other respects be a scene of utter desolation. It could harbour no life, and could not therefore serve as an environment for any animate being. In Gibson's words 'the furniture of the earth, like the furnishings of a room, is

what makes it livable'. Like the room, the earth is cluttered with all manner of things which afford the diverse activities of its innumerable inhabitants. There are objects, which may be attached or detached, enclosures such as caves and burrows, convexities such as hills, concavities such as hollows, and apertures such as cracks and openings. Indeed it seems that any ordinary environment would be so cluttered up that its inhabitants would be unlikely ever to come directly into contact with the ground at all...

As a child I built a model railway, of which I was very proud. The most important part of the layout, however, was not the line but the landscape of hills and valleys through which it ran, made out of wire-netting, papier mâché, and plaster, all of which rested on a plane sheet of softwood mounted on a wooden frame and legs. This sheet, known as the baseboard, was indeed an underlying surface of support and the very basis of my model. But it was completely hidden from view by the 'clutter' I had constructed on it. Had the miniature people and animals that I had placed in my landscape been capable of movement, they would not have been walking across the ground of the baseboard but clambering over the scenery! It would have made no difference whether they were up on a hill-top or down in a valley, for both were part of the clutter. In the real world, by contrast, there is nothing equivalent to the baseboard of my model. It is a figment of the imagination. Making his way over hill and through valley, the walker treads the ground itself, experiencing its rising and falling in the alternation of close and distant horizons, and in the greater or lesser degrees of muscular exertion entailed in first toiling against, and then surrendering to, the force of gravity. Real hills and valleys, in short, do not rest upon the foundation of the earth's surface, as the scenery of my model rested on the baseboard, but are themselves formations of that surface. How, then, is this surface to be understood? Our example of the walker already suggests one part of the answer. The ground is perceived kinaesthetically, in movement. If we say of the ground of a hill that it 'rises up', this is not because the ground itself is on the move but because we feel its contours in our own bodily exercise. Even if we view the hill from a distance, we sense its rise in the ocular movement of our focal attention as it scans the upward-sloping line of the horizon. Moreover, far from comprising a featureless and perfectly level plane, the ground appears infinitely variegated. These variations are not just of contour but also of substance, colouration, and texture.

1. The surface is _____
 - a) A dimension
 - b) The site of human experience
 - c) Marked by tension
 - d) A matter of concern

2. What is the clutter that makes space liveable?
 - a) Mountains
 - b) Flat space
 - c) A clean slate
 - d) Ideologies

3. What is critical in our experience of the ground we stand upon is:
 - a) Geology

- b) Movement
 - c) Imagination
 - d) None of the above
4. Ostensibly about land this passage is an exploration of:
- a) Anthropology
 - b) Geography
 - c) Human Activity
 - d) None of the above

(Source: From Ingold, Tim. 2010. Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.), S121-S139).

Passage 2

SOCIAL SCIENCE deals with problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within social structures. That these three biography, history, society—are the co-ordinate points of the proper study of man has been a major platform on which I have stood when criticizing several current schools of sociology whose practitioners have abandoned this classic tradition. The problems of our time—which now include the problem of man's very nature — cannot be stated adequately without consistent practice of the view that history is the shank of social study, and recognition of the need to develop further a psychology of man that is sociologically grounded and historically relevant. Without use of history and without an historical sense of psychological matters, the social scientist cannot adequately state the kinds of problems that ought now to be the orienting points of his studies.

The weary debate over whether or not historical study is or should be considered a social science is neither important nor interesting. The conclusion depends so clearly upon what kinds of historians and what kinds of social scientists you are talking about. Some historians are clearly compilers of alleged fact, which they try to refrain from 'interpreting'; they are involved, often fruitfully, in some fragment of history and seem unwilling to locate it within any larger range of events. Some are beyond history, lost—often fruitfully so—in trans-historical visions of the coming doom or the coming glory. History as a discipline does invite grubbing for detail, but it also encourages a widening of one's view to embrace epochal pivotal events in the development of social structures. Perhaps most historians are concerned with 'making sure of the facts' needed to understand the historical transformation of social institutions, and with interpreting such facts, usually by means of narratives. Many historians, moreover, do not hesitate to take up in their studies any and every area of social life. Their scope is thus that of social science, although like other social scientists, they may specialize in political history or economic history or the history of ideas. In so far as historians study types of institutions they tend to emphasize changes over some span of time and to work in a non-comparative way; whereas the work of many social scientists in studying types of institutions has been more comparative than historical. But surely this difference is merely one of emphasis and of specialization within a common task.

Many American historians, just now, are very much influenced by the conceptions, problems, and methods of the several social sciences. Barzun and Graff have recently suggested that perhaps 'social scientists keep urging historians to modernize their technique' because 'social

scientists are too busy to read history' and 'they do not recognize their own materials when presented in a different pattern. There are of course more problems of method in any work of history than many historians usually dream of. But nowadays some of them do dream, not so much of method as of epistemology —and in a manner that can only result in a curious retreat from historical reality. The influence upon some historians of certain lands of 'social science' is often quite unfortunate, but it is an influence which is not, as yet, wide enough to require lengthy discussion here. The master task of the historian is to keep the human record straight, but that is indeed a deceptively simple statement of aim. The historian represents the organized memory of mankind, and that memory, as written history, is enormously malleable. It changes, often quite drastically, from one generation of historians to another— and not merely because more detailed research later introduces new facts and documents into the record. It changes also because of changes in the points of interest and the current framework within which the record is built. These are the criteria of selection from the innumerable facts available, and at the same time the leading interpretations of their meaning. The historian cannot avoid making a selection of facts, although he may attempt to disclaim it by keeping his interpretations slim and circumspect. We did not need George Orwell's imaginative projection in order to know how easily history may be distorted in the process of its continual rewriting, although his 1984 made it dramatically emphatic, and, let us hope, properly frightened some of our historian colleagues.

All these perils of the historian's enterprise make it one of the most theoretical of the human disciplines, which makes the calm unawareness of many historians all the more impressive. Impressive, yes; but also rather unsettling. I suppose there have been periods in which perspectives were rigid and monolithic and in which historians could remain unaware of the themes taken for granted. But ours is not such a period; if historians have no 'theory,' they may provide materials for the writing of history, but they cannot themselves write it. They can entertain, but they cannot keep the record straight. That task now requires explicit attention to much more than 'the facts.'

1. What constitutes the basis for the study of man?
 - a) History
 - b) Society
 - c) Politics
 - d) History, Society and Biography

2. What causes a change in the task of the historian?
 - a) New Techniques
 - b) Political change
 - c) Grants
 - d) Changes in Frameworks

3. C. Wright Mills talks about epistemology. What is that?
 - a) A theory of knowledge
 - b) A field in sociology
 - c) An irrelevant matter
 - d) A way to connect sociology and history

4. Theory enables...
 - a) The selection of relevant facts from innumerable facts
 - b) Very little
 - c) A definition for sociology
 - d) The sociological imagination

(Source: C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* @ 1959, Oxford University Press).

Passage 3

What is a public? It is a curiously obscure question, considering that few things have been more important in the development of modernity..... Several senses of the noun *public* tend to be intermixed in usage.

The public is a kind of social totality. Its most common sense is that of the people in general.....

A public can also be a second thing: a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public. Such a public also has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space.

I will return to both of these senses, but what I mainly want to clarify in this essay is a third sense of *public*: the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation—like the public of this essay....The distinctions among these three senses are not always sharp and are not simply the difference between oral and written context

The idea of *a public*, as distinct from both *the public* and any bounded audience, has become part of the common repertoire of modern culture....I would like to bring some of our intuitive understanding into the open in order to speculate about the history of the form and the role it plays in constructing our social world.

1. A public is self-organized.

A public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic; it exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists *by virtue of being addressed*.

A kind of chicken-and-egg circularity confronts us in the idea of a public. Could anyone speak publicly without addressing a public? But how can this public exist before being addressed? What would a public be if no one were addressing it? Can a public really exist apart from the rhetoric through which it is imagined? If you were to put down this essay and turn on the television, would my public be different? How can the existence of a public depend, from one point of view, on the rhetorical address—and, from another point of view, on the real context of reception?

These questions cannot be resolved on one side or the other. The circularity is essential to the phenomenon. A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this

reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence.

A public in this sense is as much notional as empirical. It is also partial, since there could be an infinite number of publics within the social totality. This sense of the term is completely modern; it is the only kind of public for which there is no other term. Neither *crowd* nor *audience* nor *people* nor *group* will capture the same sense. The difference shows us that the idea of a public, unlike a concrete audience or the public of any polity, is text-based—even though publics are increasingly organized around visual or audio texts. Without the idea of texts that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine a public as an entity that embraces all the users of that text, whoever they might be. Often, the texts themselves are not even recognized as texts—as for example with visual advertising or the chattering of a DJ—but the publics they bring into being are still discursive in the same way.

The strangeness of this kind of public is often hidden from view because the assumptions that enable the bourgeois public sphere allow us to think of a discourse public as a people and, therefore, as an actually existing set of potentially enumerable humans. A public, in practice, appears as *the* public. It is easy to be misled by this appearance. Even in the blurred usage of the public sphere, a public is never just a congeries of people, never just the sum of persons who happen to exist. It must first of all have some way of organizing itself as a body and of being addressed in discourse. And not just any way of defining the totality will do. It must be organized by something other than the state.

Here we see how the autotelic circularity of the discourse public is not merely a puzzle for analysis, but also the crucial factor in the social importance of the form. A public organizes itself independently of state institutions, law, formal frameworks of citizenship, or pre-existing institutions such as the church. If it were not possible to think of the public as organized independently of the state or other frameworks, the public could not be sovereign with respect to the state. So the modern sense of the public as the social totality in fact derives much of its character from the way we understand the partial publics of discourse, like the public of this essay, as self-organized. The way *the* public functions in the public sphere—as *the people*—is only possible because it is really *a* public of discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized, and herein lies its power as well as its elusive strangeness.

1) According to the author, a central concern in understanding the production of a public is:

- 1) circulation of texts
- 2) congeries of people
- 3) none of the above
- 4) all of the above

2) According to the author, publics are organised by:

- a) people
- b) the state
- c) pre-existing institutions like the church
- d) discourse

3) According to the author, publics are:

- a) partial
- b) notional
- c) empirical
- d) all of the above
- e) none of the above

4) According to the author, do you have to be physically present to be a part of a public?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Depends
- 4) None of the above

(Source: From: Warner, M. 2002. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 49-90).

Passage 4

I met the Imam of the village and Khamees the Rat at about the same time. I don't exactly remember now – it happened more than six years ago – but I think I met the Imam first. But this is not quite accurate. I didn't really 'meet' the Imam: I inflicted myself upon him. Perhaps that explains what happened. Still, there was nothing else I could have done. As the man who led the daily prayers in the mosque, he was a leading figure in the village, and since I, a foreigner, had come to live there, he may well for all I knew have been offended had I neglected to pay him a call. Besides, I wanted to meet him; I was intrigued by what I'd heard about him. People didn't often talk about the Imam in the village, but when they did, they usually spoke of him somewhat dismissively, but also a little wistfully, as they might of some old, half-forgotten thing, like the annual flooding of the Nile. Listening to my friends speak of him, I had an inkling, long before I actually met him, that he already belonged, in a way, to the village's past. I thought I knew this for certain when I heard that apart from being an imam he was also, by profession, a barber and a healer. People said he knew a great deal about herbs and poultices and the old kind of medicine. This interested me. This was Tradition: I knew that in rural Egypt imams and other religious figures are often by custom associated with those two professions. The trouble was that these accomplishments bought the Imam very little credit in the village. The villagers didn't any longer want an Imam who was also a barber and a healer. The older people wanted someone who had studied at al-Azhar and could quote from Jamal ad-Din Afghani and Mohammad Abduh as fluently as he could from the Hadith, and the younger men wanted a fierce, black-bearded orator, someone whose voice would thunder from the mimbar and reveal to them their destiny. No one had time for old-fashioned imams who made themselves ridiculous by boiling herbs and cutting hair.

Yet Ustad Ahmed, who taught in the village's secondary school and was as well-read a man as I have ever met, often said – and this was not something he said of many people – that the old Imam read a lot. A lot of what? Politics, theology, even popular science . . . that kind of thing.

This made me all the more determined to meet him, and one evening, a few months after I first came to the village, I found my way to his house. He lived in the centre of the village, on the edge of the dusty open square which had the mosque in its middle. This was the oldest part of the village: a maze of low mud huts huddled together like confectionery on a tray, each hut crowned with a billowing, tousled head of straw.

When I knocked on the door the Imam opened it himself. He was a big man, with very bright brown eyes, set deep in a wrinkled, weather-beaten face. Like the room behind him, he was distinctly untidy: his blue jallabeyya was mud-stained and unwashed and his turban had been knotted anyhow around his head. But his beard, short and white and neatly trimmed, was everything a barber's beard should be. Age had been harsh on his face, but there was a certain energy in the way he arched his shoulders, in the clarity of his eyes and in the way he fidgeted constantly, was never still: it was plain that he was a vigorous, restive kind of person.

'Welcome,' he said, courteous but unsmiling, and stood aside and waved me in. It was a long dark room, with sloping walls and a very low ceiling. There was a bed in it and a couple of mats but little else, apart from a few, scattered books: everything bore that dull patina of grime which speaks of years of neglect. Later, I learned that the Imam had divorced his first wife and his second had left him, so that now he lived quite alone and had his meals with his son's family who lived across the square.

'Welcome,' he said again, formally.

'Welcome to you,' I said, giving him the formal response, and then we began on the long, reassuring litany of Arabic phrases of greeting.

'How are you?'

'How are you?'

'You have brought blessings?'

'May God bless you.'

'Welcome.'

'Welcome to you.'

'You have brought light.'

'The light is yours.'

'How are you?'

'How are you?'

He was very polite, very proper. In a moment he produced a kerosene stove and began to brew tea. But even in the performance of that little ritual there was something about him that was guarded, watchful.

'You're the *doktor al-Hindi*,' he said to me at last, 'aren't you? The Indian doctor?'

I nodded, for that was the name the village had given me. Then I told him that I wanted to talk to him about the methods of his system of medicine.

He looked very surprised and for a while he was silent. Then he put his right hand to his heart and began again on the ritual of greetings and responses, but in a markedly different way this time; one that I had learned to recognise as a means of changing the subject.

'Welcome.'

'Welcome to you.'

'You have brought light.'

'The light is yours.'

And so on.

At the end of it I repeated what I had said.

'Why do you want to hear about my herbs?' he retorted. 'Why don't you go back to your country and find out about your own?'

'I will,' I said. 'Soon. But right now . . .'

'No, no,' he said restlessly. 'Forget about all that; I'm trying to forget about it myself.'

And then I knew that he would never talk to me about his craft, not just because he had taken a dislike to me for some reason of his own, but because his medicines were as discredited in his own eyes as they were in his clients'; because he knew as well as anybody else that the people who came to him now did so only because of old habits; because he bitterly regretted his inherited association with these relics of the past.

'Instead,' he said, 'let me tell you about what I have been learning over the last few years. Then you can go back to your country and tell them all about it.'

He jumped up, his eyes shining, reached under his bed and brought out a glistening new biscuit tin.

'Here!' he said, opening it. 'Look!'

Inside the box was a hypodermic syringe and a couple of glass phials. This is what he had been learning, he told me: the art of mixing and giving injections. And there was a huge market for

it too, in the village: everybody wanted injections, for coughs, colds, fevers, whatever. There was a good living in it. He wanted to demonstrate his skill to me right there, on my arm, and when I protested that I wasn't ill, that I didn't need an injection just then, he was offended. 'All right,' he said curtly, standing up. 'I have to go to the mosque right now. Perhaps we can talk about this some other day.'

That was the end of my interview. I walked with him to the mosque and there, with an air of calculated finality, he took my hand in his, gave it a perfunctory shake and vanished up the stairs.

1. This section is from the time the writer Amitav Ghosh, an Indian Anthropology student did fieldwork in rural Egypt.
What was the imam known for ?
 - a) Leading prayers
 - b) Cutting Hair
 - c) Traditional medicine
 - d) All of the above

2. Ghosh mentions how that villagers 'wanted someone who had studied at al-Azhar and could quote from Jamal ad-Din Afghani and Mohammad Abduh and the Hadith'.
Who or what is referring to?
 - a) Politicians
 - b) Public Preachers
 - c) Sacred texts
 - d) B and C

3. What research method was Ghosh trying to implement?
 - a) Archive
 - b) Survey
 - c) Interview
 - d) Discourse analysis

4. What captures the condition of the Imam?
 - a) Alienation
 - b) The clash between tradition and modernity
 - c) The rural-urban divide
 - d) Social change

(Source: Ghosh, Amitav. "The Imam and the Indian" <https://granta.com/the-imam-and-the-indian/>)

Passage 5

Fundamentalism, type of conservative religious movement characterized by the advocacy of strict conformity to sacred texts. Once used exclusively to refer to American Protestants who insisted on the inerrancy of the *Bible*, the term *fundamentalism* was applied more broadly beginning in the late 20th century to a wide variety of religious movements. Indeed,

in the broad sense of the term, many of the major religions of the world may be said to have fundamentalist movements.

In the late 20th century the most influential—and the most controversial—study of fundamentalism was *The Fundamentalism Project* (1991–95), a series of five volumes edited by the American scholars Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Marty and Appleby viewed fundamentalism primarily as the militant rejection of secular modernity. They argued that fundamentalism is not just traditional religiosity but an inherently political phenomenon, though this dimension may sometimes be dormant. Marty and Appleby also contended that fundamentalism is inherently totalitarian, insofar as it seeks to remake all aspects of society and government on religious principles.

Despite its unprecedented breadth, *The Fundamentalism Project* has been criticized on a number of grounds. One objection is that many of the movements that Marty and Appleby categorize as fundamentalist seem to be motivated less by the rejection of modernity than by social, ethnic, and nationalistic grievances. Indeed, in many cases the people who join such movements have not suffered more than others from the stress and dislocation typically associated with modernization, nor are such stresses and dislocations prominently reflected in the rhetoric or the actions of these movements. The term *modernity* itself, moreover, is inherently vague; Marty and Appleby, like many other scholars, use it freely but do little to explain what it means.

Another criticism of Marty and Appleby's approach is that it is inappropriate to use the term *fundamentalism*, which originally referred to a movement in American Protestantism, to describe movements in other religions, particularly non-Western ones. This practice has been denounced as a kind of Eurocentric "conceptual imperialism"—an especially sensitive charge in the Islamic world, where those designated fundamentalists are outraged by Western political, economic, and cultural domination.

A third objection is that the significant negative connotations of the term fundamentalism—usually including bigotry, zealotry, militancy, extremism, and fanaticism—make it unsuitable as a category of scholarly analysis. On the other hand, some scholars have argued that the negative connotations of the term aptly characterize the nature of fundamentalist movements, many of which seek the violent overthrow of national governments and the imposition of particular forms of worship and religious codes of conduct in violation of widely recognized human rights to political self-determination and freedom of worship.

(Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fundamentalism/Sikh-fundamentalism>)

- 1) As per the explanation in this writeup, 'fundamentalism' can be understood as
 - a) an inadequate scholarly category.
 - b) a conservative and violent form of Islam.
 - c) a conservative form of Christianity.
 - d) a religious movement that emphasizes strict adherence to positions outlined in religious texts.

- 2) According to the *Fundamentalism Project*,
 - a) fundamentalism was a totalitarian movement.

- b) fundamentalism essentially rejects secular modernism.
 - c) fundamentalism has to be understood not merely as a religious project in the traditional sense, but is by definition a political project.
 - d) All of the above.
- 3) 'Fundamentalism' as a concept and practice was originally located in
- a) versions of militant Islam.
 - b) militant forms of American Catholicism.
 - c) fundamental forms of zealous religiosity.
 - d) None of the above.
- 4) One of the objections against the *Fundamentalism Project* emanated from the use of the word 'fundamentalism' itself because
- a) of the negative popular meanings of the word as it becomes problematic in scholarly analysis.
 - b) of its inherent link to the rejection of modernity.
 - c) of its relation to practices of early Christianity.
 - d) of its lack of analytical utility with reference to American forms of Christianity which did not have fundamentalist manifestations.