

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
PH.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN THEORY
August 23 to 27, 2021**

You are required to answer THREE (3) QUESTIONS (ONE QUESTION FROM EACH OF PARTS A, B & C). Each answer should be 10-12 pages (12-point font and double-spaced) in length. The complete exam should not total more than 36 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font), not including references. THE COMMITTEE WILL NOT READ PAST THE 36TH PAGE.

Part A

1. In your view, what is the most important theoretical debate faced by sociologists today? What are the various positions in this conversation and where do *you* stand?
2. In preparing for this comprehensive exam, you undoubtedly found some readings to be more compelling than others. What were most interesting and generative readings for you as you consider moving forward with your own research? What theoretical debates do these readings connect with and how might your work and ideas enable you to join the conversation(s)?

Part B

3. Most social science and humanities disciplines are in crisis. Countless think pieces lament the decreasing enrolments, lack of funding opportunities, poor job placement, and other external factors that have contributed to rethinking the role of the disciplines in higher education. However, another way to examine this crisis of the humanities and social sciences, is through an epistemic perspective that reveals that the academic disciplines as they are configured today are a product of one historical moment of the 19th century, and as such are not the only possible mode of organizing academic knowledge but simply a contingent historical configuration that has outlived its utility to best produce knowledge. In the first steps toward a shift away from the disciplines that were constructed in the 19th century, we've seen the proliferation of gender, ethnic, and area studies departments along with various attempts by social theory to remedy the parochialism of the disciplines through the particularism of area/ethnic/gender studies. Based on the different theories you have read in preparation for the comprehensive exam, do you see social theory as a 'false universalism' in need of revision? If so, is the way forward through illuminating previously ignored 'cases' through theorizing from the perspective of the non-European, non-cis Male, and non-white? How might taking such a viewpoint alter the social theory episteme? And if not, what is the way forward to a more inclusive social theory?
4. What is theory? How and why (if at all) does it matter for contemporary sociology?

Part C

5. The last twenty years have seen a renaissance in pragmatist theory in sociology and it has become an important part of the current theoretical landscape. What is it about pragmatism that makes it so useful for sociologists? Do you see yourself using it in your future work? Why or why not?

6. One of the most central theoretical problems of sociology is our ongoing effort to theorize the nature of modernity. How has social theory attempted to better describe and analyze what it means to be 'modern' and what do you believe is the future of theories of modernity and the transitions to and from modernity?