

Mid-Semester Examination: IIIT-Hyderabad

Thinking about Social Phenomena: Constructing Puzzles

Date of exam: 24 February 2020

Total marks: 75

Explain ANY FIVE (of six) of the following puzzles (in around 200-250 words). Each puzzle is worth 15 marks.

How to answer: The explanation of each puzzle should comprise the larger theoretical principle and the mechanism. You will be assessed on both parameters.

Remember: Do not use pop psychology sources from the internet. Your argument should be based on recommended readings. If you use material from the outside, make sure these are from a credible source. Always cite the source of your statement in brackets. E.g. As Elster (2015) says; documented in Holocaust studies (Varese and Yaish, 1998) and so on.

You will be assessed on: Functionalism; non-events; motivations; confirmation bias; cognitive dissonance; emotions; norms.

Example puzzle: A fair-skinned boy is good friends with a dark-skinned boy in his class. But in front of other classmates, the fair boy avoids interacting with his dark friend. Explain.

The explanation can be along these lines:

Social norms induce people to adopt socially acceptable behaviours. Those who fail to abide by these norms are likely to face contempt from the observer and isolated. Faced with contempt, the norm violator suffers shame. If this shameful action becomes public knowledge, it may lead the norm violator to extreme action, including suicide, because social norms are mediated by exposure to others.

In a society with strong social norms of hierarchy, skin colour may be perceived to signal one's race or caste: darker complexions associated with inferiority. In the given puzzle, the fair boy might be willing to interact with the dark boy in private, away from the eyes of his school mates. To avoid being shunned, he may ignore his dark-skinned friend when observed by their mates.

It is possible that the discrimination towards his friend induces the fair boy to violate the social norm and willingly flaunt it in front of his mates. As Elster (2015) notes, when one publicly shows off their violation of social norms, it triggers anger in the observer rather than contempt because it tells other people that one does not care about their reactions. If the fair boy flaunts the norm violation in front of his mates, at the most he may be ridiculed by the mates and not shunned.
