

D102/18

TELEVISION SCRIPT

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COMPLETED PROGRAMME

D.102/18

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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Social Science Foundation Course

QUESTIONING THEORIES?

Executive Producer	DAVID SELIGMAN
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Vision Mixer	GILL HAGUE
Presented by	BERNARD WILLIAMS
Taking part	LAURENCE HARRIS
		JOHN CLARKE
1st Insert:	(Presenter) ..	SUSAN HIMMELWEIT
(D.102/5)	(Actors) ..	JOHN JOYCE
		STEPHEN WHITTAKER
		JEAN LEPPARD
		BARBARA BERMEL
2nd Insert:	(Actor) ..	JOHN JOYCE
(D.102/5)		
3rd Insert:	(Presenter) ..	RICHARD KERSHAW
(D.102/10)	(Actor) ..	JOBY BLANSHARD
Consultant	TONY WALTON

Duration: 23'19"

1st TX: 08.55 20th June, 1982.

OPENING TITLES (32")

MUSIC (32")

(inc: D.102 A Foundation Course
in the Social Sciences)

CAP: Programme 18
QUESTIONING THEORIES?

STUDIO

PROF. BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to cam.)

S/I: PROF. BERNARD WILLIAMS
T/O

2-S

LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE

BERNARD WILLIAMS (to cam.)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

Much earlier in the course, in TV4, I talked to a sociologist, Stan Cohen, about some very general questions which come up when we ask what the social sciences are, what sorts of evidence they can use and what sorts of explanations they're trying to give.

Now in this programme, I'm going to ask some more questions, particularly about concepts and theories in the social sciences and how they tie in with values. I've been joined for this programme by Laurence Harris who was responsible for the economics block, block two, and by John Clarke who led the social divisions block, block three. I'm going to focus the discussion in this programme on four topics that you've already met in the economics and social divisions blocks of your course.

PLUS ANIMATION:

1. The model
2. How specific?

I'd like to begin by looking at the nature of a model or caricature. You remember that a model was used in the economics block. Second, having discussed the model, I want to move on to examine how specific that model is. Is it a model that can only explain what happens in one society,

3. Theoretical choice

or can we generalise from it? The third thing we'll tackle is theoretical choice. Why do social scientists opt for one set of concepts rather than another? Why, for instance, in "Brian's Britain" was the theory of social class used to explain Brian's lifestyle rather than a psychological theory or even a biological theory? And in the fourth and final section of the programme I want to turn to values. What part do values play in forming theories?

4. Values

3-S LAURENCE HARRIS/
JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

Well let's begin with the first of these four points, the model or caricature. You'll remember how we first met it.

1st insert (2'05")
(D.102/5)
"Getting it Together"
(dramatization)

OOV:

Welcome to the capitalist economy.

STEVE:

Eh!

OOV:

The capitalist economy.

JOHN:

What's that?

OOV:

That's what you're going to find out.

SUSAN HIMMELWEIT:

Yes, welcome to the capitalist economy. In this programme you're going to see a model of a capitalist economy, being built by our actors, John, Jean and Steve. You've got

SUSAN HIMMELWEIT (to cam.)
S/I: SUSAN HIMMELWEIT
T/O

MCU
SUSAN HIMMELWEIT

MIX TO CARTOON OF
SUSAN HIMMELWEIT

another such model in Unit 5, that was a written one, now you're going to see a theatrical one. But the idea behind the two is the same, to pick out the key features of a capitalist economy. It won't look like any particular economy, more like a stylized picture of them all. A bit like a theatrical caricature. Caricatures manage to make their point, not by drawing people exactly how they look, but by picking out their important distinctive features. That's one of the reasons they can be amusing because they do present familiar things in a strangely stark light. We're going to do a similar thing here. So now watch carefully and we'll let the show begin.

(PAUSE)

(dramatization)

JOHN:

Morning, morning, morning. Sorry love there's no work for you.

BARBARA:

What do you mean?

JOHN:

Come and see for yourself.

(PAUSE)

JOHN:

This is progress.

(PAUSE)

This machine can do the work of two of the old machines but only needs one operator. Sorry love but you see

how it is.

STEVE:

You can't get rid of one of us just like that.

JOHN:

Look, with this machine we can make more money and as there's fewer of you, I can pay you more, so we all benefit. You can see the sense in that, can't you?

STEVE:

He's right you know love, you can't stand in the way of progress, I mean after all, you're just doing it for pin money.

JOHN:

You can't all be winners can you?

OOV:

Not in a capitalist economy.

MIX TO CARTOON
OF SUSAN HIMMELWEIT

(PAUSE)

3-S LAURENCE HARRIS/ JOHN
CLARKE/ BERNARD WILLIAMS

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

Well Laurence, that's agreed to be a caricature or a model. I think some people are going to say that it's very, very much a caricature, that it represents an extremely crude and particular view of our society. What would you say if that criticism was made?

LAURENCE HARRIS:

LAURENCE HARRIS
(to BERNARD WILLIAMS)

Well all caricatures are crude, all

S/I: PROF. LAURENCE HARRIS
T/O

models are crude, they are as Susan Himmelweit said in the programme, bringing out essential elements of the thing. But there is one difference between a model and a caricature which I think hasn't come out from the programme and that is this: in a caricature you pick out a particular feature and you highlight it - De Gaul's nose, or President Nixon's ears, or whatever in the cartoon characters, but those features that you pick out don't particularly explain any of the more complicated aspects that are left out. Whereas in a model you're picking out elements which you think, the social scientist thinks, has some role in explaining all the other bits of the model, even some of the bits that are left out.

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

And, of course, it's your particular view of it - it's a particular kind of economic interpretation, in particular it's a Marxian interpretation of society - and, of course, these wouldn't necessarily be the economic features that other economic theorists would pick on. I mean is that, would you agree with that?

LAURENCE HARRIS C/A

LAURENCE HARRIS:

(to Bernard Williams)

Yes, that's quite true, I mean there are several aspects of it which are very specific to this type of model. The most obvious I think is the fact that we've concentrated in all the programmes and in the units upon conflict between classes, between a

(BERNARD WILLIAMS C/A)

working class and a capitalist class and that's quite a specific way of modelling the economy, there's no doubt about that.

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

So that, here there is an implicit claim which you would be making and obviously a very contestable claim, but a lot of what happens in the economy, that is at a purely economic level, is determined by considerations of class and class conflict - even if the identification of those classes in a modern society are very much overlaid by other, other social factors.

LAURENCE HARRIS
(to Bernard Williams)

LAURENCE HARRIS:

Yes, that's absolutely right. Let me give some examples. I think that in block two we've given some fairly clear examples of how conflicts between, on the one hand workers and on the other hand capitalists, or to be more precise - between labour and capital without attaching the sort of personifications to them - have been related to technological developments, how they've accounted for some of the dynamic that we've had in capitalist economies, the most remarkable dynamic.

Now the alternative to taking the view that there is this sort of conflictual element which underlies this dynamic and gives rise to some of this dynamic is to say - let's just

assume that all individuals are equal, some happen to own capital, some happen to own labour, but they're all basically equal and they can all be brought into harmony with each other - that's what's done in a lot of economics. And if we assume that, that everybody's just an individual equal to the others, everyone can be brought into harmony, we're not going to find any real reason why society should change - why there should be this change, great change, dynamic change, in methods of production, for example.

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris)

(LAURENCE HARRIS C/A)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

Could I just pick you up on a point that we have with ... that's implicit in what you've been saying - many economists would hope to find economic concepts which could be applied in some form or other to any economy. In particular the notions of supply and demand might be thought to apply to any economy, but there's a sense in which the economic concepts, the concepts that you're using here in these programmes, are very specially applied to, and indeed Sue said this in the opening remarks, to a capitalist economy. Indeed, there's a rather odd remark just at the end of the extract we saw - you remember:

JOHN:

You can't all be winners, can you?

OOV:

Not in a capitalist economy.

INSERT 2 (5")
D.102/5
"Getting it Together"
(dramatization)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

3-S

LAURENCE HARRIS/
JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris)

That remark there, that we can't all be winners in a capitalist economy - which seems rather to imply there could be an economy in which everybody was a winner, but which is indeed a slightly odd implication I would have suggested. But apart from that, the point is do we need economic concepts which would range across any economy which could be universally applicable? I think the implication of your approach is that there is a very special social phenomenon which is the "capitalist economy" which has very special sorts of concepts that apply to it, is that right?

LAURENCE HARRIS:

LAURENCE HARRIS
(to BERNARD WILLIAMS)

Yes, I think that's absolutely right. The problem is to know exactly how to divide off one economy from another, I mean, as you say, when John at the end there says, you know - we can't all be winners in a capitalist economy, it is a sort of a strange ascertainment if it's meant to imply that in a socialist economy everybody could be a winner. But clearly it's not meant to imply that. He, he in the drama is the boss. And he's clearly not implying that the socialist economy is hunky dory for everyone. What's going on here is simply the idea that we want to hammer home - that each economy is specific and that the model that we've

developed here is a specific type of economy.

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris)

LAURENCE HARRIS C/A

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

But wouldn't some economic theorists say that a notion of profit is a measure of productivity for instance, is a notion which has got to be applied in any economy. If you're thinking about any economic process, you would have to consider some notion rather like profit - unless, of course, you are dealing with an extremely primitive economy indeed, or perhaps some exchange kind or something of that sort.

LAURENCE HARRIS
(to Bernard Williams)
(BERNARD WILLIAMS C/A)

LAURENCE HARRIS:

That's absolutely right, what one would do as an economist is think of a concept as surplus. In a capitalist economy that surplus has a slightly different character from its character in say, China today.

BERNARD WILLIAMS (to cam.)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

We've also had some programmes about class in the context of sociological theory - theory concerned with social stratification. Our old friend Brian Harris, whose life was shown to us, illustrated the idea that a lot of what happens to people depends on the class position into which they're born. Well this seems to say that structural features of society and in particular "class" are more important in determining what happens to people than say individual psychological factors.

3-S
LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

3RD INSERT (1'22")
D.102/10
"Brian's Britain"

TEACHER
(to Interviewer)

TEACHER:

Brian Harris, wasn't he quite good at sports? Football, yes we had quite a good football team in the school at that time and Brian came out quite well in that. I don't suppose he ever made the first eleven ... but still. As for his classroom work, quite a bright lad but not an outstanding pupil, better on the practical side than he was on the academic.

RICHARD KERSHAW (to cam.)

RICHARD KERSHAW:

Brian's academic performance was not exceptional and he left Wood Lane at 14 without any qualifications, but mind you, so did most of his contemporaries.

TEACHER
(to Interviewer)

TEACHER:

It's a situation the social scientist might describe as class based, unequal distribution of qualifications. Which is to say that children from a working class background are much less likely to achieve any kind of educational qualification than are children from higher up the social scale. Just take a look at this. In the first group, class one, 93 out of every hundred children achieve some sort of educational qualification. The proportion diminishes as we move down

ANIMATION:
Educational Qualifications

the scale and from backgrounds like Brian's, only 35 out of every hundred achieve any kind of qualification at all.

BERNARD WILLIAMS (to cam.)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

Well this is a very clear example of the third point that I mentioned at the beginning - about theoretical choice, the choice of the concepts and theories which governs one's social explanations. Well I'd like now to ask John Clarke whether he agrees with the idea that social structure governs individual behaviour to this important extent, and also whether a sociologist is committed to believing that by the very nature of his subject.

JOHN CLARKE
(to Bernard Williams)
S/I: JOHN CLARKE

JOHN CLARKE:

Well I think there are two points to make about it. One is there is a choice clearly in that programme, and in sociology generally, to focus on social factors and forces, rather than biological or factors of individual psychology to explain large patterns of social behaviour. That's, I mean that's a commitment of the discipline in that sense you're right. But it's not just a sort of random commitment - it's a commitment that societies are diverse, there are different sorts of patterns of behaviour and that those are likely to be explained by social variation rather than by universal, biological or psychological factors. That's the first level of choice that's involved in it.

T/O

3-S
LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to John Clarke)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

Let me just see if I've got that clear, can I? You're saying that there is a level of choice in choosing any sociological concept rather than a psychological or biological one and that is somehow implicit in pursuing this subject as an explanatory discipline.

JOHN CLARKE
(to Bernard Williams)

JOHN CLARKE:

That's right and the commitment is to looking for social factors or social processes first. Then there's a question about what sort of concepts are used to analyse those processes and forces and that's where I think the question of class comes in, and that's where class is used in the programme about Brian Harris.

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to John Clarke)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

I see, so what we're saying is that there is first a commitment to using some form of sociological concept, perhaps rather than psychological ones. And secondly there's the question about why this one, namely class, is taken as fundamental. Yes, right, I mean ^{aren't} people going to say when they see this representation of Harris's life that the, the man is absolutely represented as fundamentally powerless on anything that really matters.

3-S
LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

JOHN CLARKE
(to Bernard Williams)

JOHN CLARKE:

I wouldn't want to suggest that it's quite as far as powerless. The focus

is really on trying to see how the, the social conditions act as a constraint on what is possible for people. The question of power then seems to me to be a question about what people can do within those basic constraints of the society. And I think one of the qualifications I'd want to add for that as a sociologist is that people are likely to be more individually powerless rather than collectively powerless, that people acting together, for a sociologist, are more likely to possess power than, than as individuals. And that relates back to the fact that the conditions, I mean, are conditions of action as well as constraint.

(BERNARD WILLIAMS C/A)

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to John Clarke)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

There are as we've said the two points; whether you choose some social concept to give these explanations in social theory and as you've said that it's being sociology almost that commits one to that. And there is this particular case of this concept, namely the concept of class. Perhaps we ought

to turn now to the issue of why you want to give social explanations using this concept. Why this concept rather than other forms of social concept that might be used in such a theory?

JOHN CLARKE
(to Bernard Williams)

JOHN CLARKE:

Well could I answer that at two levels because in the, in the programme that we've been talking about the ideas of class is used in a, I think, a very descriptive way. It simply says there are different groups. And it's not used as a very powerful explanation, or a very powerful theory, and it's only I think in the units that, that people have been reading, where the question of class is a really theoretical concept, as a, a mode of explanation is important. The first level of the answer is class appears in the Brian Harris programme because it's sort of empirically true that

3-S
LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

those patterns of educational mobility, of job choice, of income, empirically correspond to class groupings. There's a sort of factual level of importance about the idea of class.

JOHN CLARKE
(to Bernard Williams)

The second I think is a more theoretical argument about the importance of class because it seems to me that it's possible then to construct an argument which begins, as Laurence said earlier, to connect up the different levels of society, to connect economic questions to social divisions, to political questions.

BERNARD WILLIAMS (to cam.)

ANIMATION:
"Values/Facts/Theories/
Explanation"

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

This gets us to the fourth point that I mentioned at the beginning of our discussion which is the role of values in the selection of theories and concepts and the social sciences. Because it does look really from what we've already said as though values probably play a larger role in the selection of ideas in these sciences than for instance they do in the natural sciences. And I'd like to start by asking Laurence whether you think that is so, that values play an important role in theory, choice in the social sciences?

3-S
LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

LAURENCE HARRIS:

LAURENCE HARRIS
(to Bernard Williams)

Well I think they play a role, but I don't think they play an important role. I think that social science isn't a completely bloodless, lifeless

enterprise. I think social scientists argue and become angry, and you may recall, when we first saw programme five together, you became quite angry when you saw the class concepts in there and I became quite angry in sort of defending them and, and clearly our values were sort of coming to play there. But I don't think that sort of argument is terribly important in the question of how social science theories get chosen - how some win out and others lose out. Now to me, it seems to me that values aren't the most crucial thing. The most crucial thing I think is whether or not a theory is comprehensive and coherent in its explanation of social phenomena.

(BERNARD WILLIAMS C/A)

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris)

(2-S C/A
LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE)

(JOHN CLARKE C/A)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

And you would claim that the notion of comprehensiveness that you're using here is, is an absolutely neutral scientific notion. It's like a similar notion that might be used in the natural sciences. John, what do you think about this, because it seems to me that, that I think I myself am inclined to think that this notion of comprehensive explanation that we're offered in this context is actually weaker than it looks. That what we're being given is a set of concepts in which, of course, one can interpret the phenomena one's confronted, one can always find a way of translated, translating what's put in front of you by using these notions, but it is

more just like a kind of general way of looking at the world and indeed one that is rather closely connected to practical values about what one should do about the situation, rather than something which is any strong sense analagous to the comprehensiveness of the best natural scientific explanations. But what do you feel about this?

JOHN CLARKE
(to Bernard Williams)

JOHN CLARKE:

Well I, I don't think I would agree with that. It seems to me that, I mean, the question about comprehensiveness, I mean raises two problems. One is, it's often true that there are specific theories within particular disciplines, for example, which can actually give a very detailed, very precise explanation of a particular phenomena. That maybe one criteria of comprehensiveness. But it seems to me there's a more important one - which is that one of the questions for the social sciences is not to divide up the real complexity of the social world into those nice, neat academic sub-disciplines, but actually to deal with how different sorts of social phenomena are connected together. And it seems to me that one of the great strengths of a Marxist theory is precisely that it resists that sort of segregation as it, of the world, as if it's, the world corresponds to discipline. And clearly in terms of the phenomena that Laurence was talking about, about

the introduction of new technology or strikes - those are also the questions that sociologists ought to be interested in and there are social as well as economic phenomena, and the disciplinary separation seems to me very difficult then.

BERNARD WILLIAMS
(to Laurence Harris and
John Clarke)

(to Cam.)

BERNARD WILLIAMS:

Well there are obviously some very large questions in which I think all three of us could probably continue to disagree, and in fact would disagree, about the strength of these notions and explanations which are being evoked here, and how strong a notion of explanation we're given here to use. But I think in ending we have to say that in this discussion we are all going to agree that values play some role in shaping theories in the social sciences but there really is, I think, room for considerable disagreement here and I think we disagree amongst ourselves, about how strong that formative role is. Everybody agrees that the facts by themselves can't totally determine what theories you should hold. There must be an element of choice, or possible disagreement, about what concepts you bring to the facts, and about what theoretical structures should be used in interpreting those facts. Now that's true in the natural sciences also. But in the social sciences the subject matter is, of course, much more closely related to questions of value, and of what society should be like, and of how we want to regard other people.

The fact that values are involved in these ways, and of course as I've said there are disagreements about how - the extent to which they're involved, how radical that involvement is, but the fact that they're involved at all - may make people wonder whether it's all going to turn out to be relative, so that the whole of social science will end up just depending on what values you happen to hold. But this isn't so. And even somebody more sceptical than Laurence and John about this wouldn't think that was so, because first of all, we mustn't forget this, there is that level of fact which we talked about already. There is a level for instance of statistical fact. A set of truths which no responsible investigator in the social sciences can deny, however, those truths are going eventually to be interpreted. But there is actually a more basic point as well as that. The connection between social scientific theory and values which exists is a two-way street*. If values help to form theories, and the pictures which those theories offer of society, they help us to criticise values - and that gives room for rational argument and discussion. The fact that values and theory are connected doesn't simply make theories arbitrary. It also helps to stop our values being arbitrary because it makes them responsive to the facts, and also to carefully considered interpretations of the facts and the

*as I believe they do,
it's also true that
social scientific
theories,

kind of interpretation that social science can indeed offer us.

3-s
LAURENCE HARRIS/JOHN CLARKE/
BERNARD WILLIAMS

MUSIC (29")

(LIGHTS DIM)

S/I: taking part
PROF. BERNARD WILLIAMS
PROF. LAURENCE HARRIS
JOHN CLARKE

(33" to end
of programme)

T/O

S/I: Consultant
DR. TONY WALTON

T/O

S/I: Design
GEORGE WISNER
RICHARD BOOTH

T/O

S/I: Production Assistant
Christine Jackson

T/O

S/I: Executive Producer
DAVID SELIGMAN
Series Producer
CAROL HASLAM

T/O

S/I: Producer
HUGH PHILLIPS

F/O STUDIO

F/O MUSIC & VOCALS

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F/O