

How arguments are constructed and used in the Social Sciences



About this free course

This free course provides a sample of Level 1 study in Sociology

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Introduction

This course will help you understand how arguments are constructed and used in the Social Sciences. The material is primarily an audio file, originally 30 minutes in length and recorded in 1998.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of Level 1 study in [Sociology](#).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand how arguments may be presented in the Social Sciences.

1 How arguments are used in the Social Sciences

The audio programme used in this course addresses the issue of how arguments are constructed and used in the social sciences. It uses extracts from a radio programme (originally broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in January 1997) in which the social consequences of welfare provision are discussed from different viewpoints. The programme is organised to allow you to trace how arguments are being put together, assess what sort of assumptions are being made, and examine how forms of evidence are being used.

The programme itself identifies a number of issues for you to consider as you listen to it. The aim is to help you identify and evaluate the arguments about whether the welfare state has been marked by a 'failure to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor that has caused the cost of welfare to inflate uncontrollably. It has distorted the British economy, undermined the work ethic, and produced a less fair rather than a fairer society.' This is the argument put by Dr Digby Anderson in the programme and which is supported by a number of 'witnesses' whom he questions. A counter-argument is put forward by Bea Campbell.

The audio file was recorded in 1998. The course team analyse the nature of argument using a Radio 4 programme, which puts the welfare system on trial. Sequences from the radio programme are interspersed by analysis of the way the arguments are presented. Participants in the audio programme were:

- **John Clarke** Professor of Social Policy at The Open University;
- **Dr Digby Johnson** a member of The Social Affairs Unit (a registered charity);
- **Bea Campbell** a writer and journalist.

Activity 1

Listen to the linked audio files, Evidence and Argument. You may want to use the titles and spaces on the attached document to make notes on the arguments while you are listening.

Please click [here](#) to view document.

Comment/Reflecting on your learning

In addition to considering the arguments and evidence used in the programme it is also useful to reflect on the links between the debate and ideas and themes you have already met.

- What points of *continuity and change* can you see between Anderson's emphasis on the need to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor?
- What does this tell us about the process of social construction and the importance of history for understanding the present?
- Consider how the programme highlights the need and access to welfare are socially constructed and contested.

- Consider how the contrast between Anderson's and Campbell's arguments reflect the distinction between *social order* and *social justice* approaches to social problems. One sees the poor as the problem while the other sees the poor as having problems. This is also linked to the *social construction of difference*. Anderson's and Campbell's disagreement about the role of the state is also linked to the discussion about the socially constructed distinction *between the public and the private*.

Evidence and Argument part 1 (11 minutes 5MB)

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Evidence and Argument part 1](#)

Evidence and Argument part 2 (8 minutes 4 MB)

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Evidence and Argument part 2](#)

Evidence and Argument part 3 (10 minutes 5 MB)

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Evidence and Argument part 3](#)

Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying Sociology. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

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