

Section A

Answer **one** question.

- 1 "The evolution of mathematics is more organic than planned." Discuss with reference to knowledge construction in mathematics. [30]
- 2 "Science is just a fancy word for trial and error; he who places his trust in it is a fool." Discuss. [30]
- 3 "The rise of quantitative methods has made the social sciences more rigorous." Discuss. [30]
- 4 "Common sense knowledge is more valuable than academic knowledge." Discuss. [30]

Section B

You **must** answer question five.

5 The recent uproar over the proposed changes by the government to immigration laws has once again raised crucial questions about immigration and its implications on society. The most common argument against immigration is that immigrants will take American jobs, lower their wages, and especially hurt the poor, but many Economists have effectively countered this argument many times over, citing data to prove that American jobs will remain largely secure and that the impact on wages will be minimal. They have also counter-argued that the findings gathered by so-called experts who question the government's facts are plain wrong.

Government officials agonise over the fact that the many counter-arguments provided did not seem to dispel the myths about immigration, but that is hardly surprising. Economists in and out of government have always and will continue to disagree on the facts. And it is this incessant disagreement between high-ranking Economists that raises another – and more fundamental – question: Who can we trust to tell us the truth about what is going on? Each expert claims to know what is going on, and while no one readily admits to know *everything*, they speak in ways that reveal their own assumptions about their knowledge claims. People ask them questions, and they respond with answers and fact-based solutions as if they knew it all – for example, the misconceptions about immigrants abusing the welfare state and consequently increasing government debt was met with the fact that most legal immigrants do not even have access to means-tested welfare, and even when they do use welfare (in exceptional cases), the dollar value of benefits consumed is smaller.

These experts give people the impression that there are observable facts that can be known, and consequently the belief that as long as we can gather enough data, we can truly know what is going on. If that were true, however, why is there so much disagreement among so-called experts?

The way they talk also misleads others into believing that the truth about their claims is empirically verifiable. Are there even such things as pure “facts” in society that we can know? There are only facts that are couched in one conceptual system or another, and observations that are couched in theory-laden vocabulary. Research projects are guided by antecedent assumptions about the structure of the phenomena which shape the eventual empirical findings in an arbitrary way. Scientific research communities are regulated by other criteria altogether (individual career advancement, the political demands of funding agencies, etc.) rather than epistemic criteria (evidence, logical coherence, etc.). Social phenomena are not objective in the first place, but rather defined by the fluid and changing intentions, meanings, and beliefs of the participants and observers. All observation in social science requires the interpretation of behavior, so there are no brute facts at all (Charles Taylor); the investigator constructs the world he observes (Peter Berger); or all social observation depends upon the perspective of the investigator, so that there are no perspective-independent facts.

If the ‘objective’ knowledge experts claim to know is actually socially constructed, then the arguments for and against immigration should not be couched in language that assumes there are right and wrong answers to the problem.

Analyse and critically evaluate the argument in the above passage. In addition, respond to it with your own argument, supporting or challenging the author's claims and conclusion(s). Where appropriate make reference to relevant issues concerning social scientific knowledge and inquiry.

[30]

END OF PAPER