

Section A

Answer **one** question.

- 1 "Social science does not deserve to be called a field of knowledge because its research is unable to reproduce results." Discuss.
[30]
- 2 "Mathematics is little more than symbols working together with no necessary relationship to the real world." Discuss.
[30]
- 3 "A scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents of its position. Rather, its opponents eventually die and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it." Discuss with reference to the nature and construction of knowledge in science.
[30]
- 4 "Evidence is the best justification for knowledge." Discuss.
[30]

Section B

You **must** answer question five.

- 5 Social scientists have been offering advice to the progressive political and social movements of the times since the latter half of the nineteenth century, though with mixed success. The accumulation of more data over the decades and significant contributions made by fields such as psychology and anthropology in explaining the impact of world events have thrust social science into the limelight once again. Social scientists today have the opportunity to display what they have to offer toward the solution of what is now a fairly well-standardised, if incomplete, list of problems: poverty, racial segregation and discrimination, urban decay and the strangulation of transportation, human and mechanical pollution of the environment, and a perceived increase in the incidence of crimes of violence. Will social scientists succeed in living up to the expectations that face them?

There are several purely scientific difficulties in applying social science successfully to the solution of social problems. Firstly, when individuals are subjects in an experimental study, their behaviour changes. The Stanford Prison Experiment is a notable example – students allocated the role of prison guards began abusing students who were acting as prisoners even though no one gave them any such instruction. It is obvious that researchers can never accurately measure individual behaviour in a simulated setting. Secondly, there are many inadequacies of existing data about social problems and individual behaviour and the defects of indirect data. Any analysis of textual material generated either indirectly from transcriptions of audio recordings of verbal behaviour in natural settings (for example, in conversation or group discussions) or directly from narratives (for example, letters of complaint, tweets, forum posts) is bound to be subjective. Finally, manipulating social factors that are supposedly variables in social scientific analyses of problems is almost impossible to do in a scientific way. Without solving these scientific problems, there can be no headway made in applying social science.

Furthermore, the way social scientists go about defining social problems to solve makes them chase their own tail instead of actually solving those problems. A social scientist who undertakes to work on a practical problem, not as a wise man or a clever consultant, but as a scientist, quickly finds that the popular statement of the problem is either incomplete or misleading – “the” problem is really many problems, only some of which fall within the disciplinary or scientific scope. To maintain the scientific approach, the social scientist has to redefine “the” problem to make it more amenable to inquiry, and has to focus on only *one* problem at a time. But doing so takes him down a path away from the original practical problem, dangerously making his research irrelevant, and so he goes back to the drawing board to try to ensure that the original problem is still being addressed and remains amenable to social scientific inquiry. The social scientist becomes perpetually stuck at just defining the problem and refining his approach.

Even if the social scientist can become ‘unstuck’, the abovementioned scientific difficulties throws into question the credibility of social scientific research, and consequently, any proposed solutions. If these questions have remain unanswered for decades, why do we still expect social scientists to give us the answers to social problems?

- Adapted from “Social Science and Contemporary Social Problems” by Henry W. Riecken

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.

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