

Human Science Knowledge Questions

Scope

- How do we decide whether a particular discipline should be regarded as a human science?
- Do the human sciences and literature provide different types of knowledge about human existence and behaviour?
- Are predictions in the human sciences inevitably unreliable?
- What are the main difficulties that human scientists encounter when trying to provide explanations of human behaviour?
- Is human behaviour too unpredictable to study scientifically?
- Do the boundaries between different disciplines and different areas of knowledge help or hinder understanding?
- Is it possible to discover laws of human behaviour in the same way that the natural sciences discover laws of nature?

Perspectives

- To what extent is it legitimate for a researcher to draw on their own experiences as evidence in their investigations in the human sciences?
- Is it possible to eliminate the effect of the observer in the pursuit of knowledge in the human sciences?
- How might the beliefs and interests of human scientists influence their conclusions?
- How can we know when we have made progress in the search for knowledge in the human sciences?
- If two competing paradigms give different explanations of a phenomenon, how can we decide which explanation to accept?
- What forms of protection against research error and bias are available to human scientists?

Methods and tools

- What role do models play in the acquisition of knowledge in the human sciences?
- Are observation and experimentation the only two ways in which human scientists produce knowledge?
- What assumptions underlie the methods used in the human sciences?
- To what extent are the methods used to gain knowledge in the human sciences

“Scientific”?

- How does the use of numbers, statistics, graphs and other quantitative instruments affect the way knowledge in the human sciences is valued?
- To what extent can the human sciences use mathematical techniques to make accurate predictions?

Ethics

- To what extent are the methods used in the human sciences limited by the ethical considerations involved in studying human beings?
- Do researchers have different ethical responsibilities when they are working with human subjects compared to when they are working with animals?
- What are the moral implications of possessing knowledge about human Behaviour?
- Should key events in the historical development of the human sciences always be judged by the standards of their time?
- What values determine what counts as legitimate inquiry in the human sciences? Can knowledge be divorced from the values embedded in the process of creating it?
- Is the role of the human scientist only to describe what the case is or also to make judgements about what should be the case?

Making connections to the core theme

- How does advertising utilize knowledge of human psychology to influence and persuade us? (scope)
- What is it about a theory that gives it the power to destabilize our view of ourselves and of the world?(perspectives)
- How might the language used in polls and questionnaires influence the conclusions that are reached? (methods and tools)
- What moral obligations to act or not act do we have if our knowledge is tentative, incomplete or uncertain (ethics)