Exercise 01

Social loafing is thought to occur because of a diffusion of responsibility in groups.

When group members work together on a single task and it is difficult to determine who is working hard and who is not, responsibility for the outcome is diffused ― or shared ― over the entire group.

Whether the outcome is considered a success or a failure, group members share the credit relatively equally.

This decreases the incentive for any individual to work hard because there is only a loose connection between their individual effort and the outcome for the group.

Extra effort may have little or no effect on the outcome for the group and will have absolutely no effect on the credit for the outcome that an individual receives (as long as the individual appears to be trying hard).

The result is a kind of free-rider problem whereby each individual slacks off a little bit, and in the end the performance of the entire group suffers.

Exercise 02

Animals in the wild see humans as a threat and are usually fearful of human contact.

This is an important survival instinct in animals for whom staying away from humans is vital to their survival.

In a captive setting where animals are dependent on humans for all their welfare and are exposed all day to hundreds of visitors, fear of humans over a prolonged period may be harmful to the animal’s health and mental wellbeing.

Long-term experience of fear may result in poor mental health, manifest in self-harm, conditioned helplessness or displaced aggression on cage mates.

A highly fearful animal will hide, become helpless and depressed and may even sustain wounds through trying to escape from the contact with humans.

Simple daily occurrences such as feeding and cleaning can be stressful for both the animal and the keeper.

Exercise 03

Needless to say, an artist might clarify her feelings by just focusing on them mentally.

That is, it is at least conceivable that one could get clear on one’s emotional state simply by thinking about it.

The emotion, then, would be clarified but not externalized.

Yet could an artwork exist entirely, so to speak, inside someone’s head?

This would appear to violate our ordinary understanding of art which regards an artwork as a public affair.

It would also seem inconsistent with the notion of expression which fundamentally rests on the idea of something “inside” being brought “outside.”

Thus, in order to block cases of completely mental artworks, the expression theorist should add that the process of the clarification and transmission of emotions should be secured by means of lines, shapes, colors, sounds, actions and/or words.

This guarantees that an artwork is, at least in principle, publicly accessible ― that it is embodied in some publicly accessible medium.

Exercise 04

The economy of life produces astonishing outcomes.

Among these is sting autotomy, the horrible process in which a stinging insect self-eviscerates, leaving its stinger embedded in the target’s flesh.

This suicidal behavior troubled Charles Darwin as he formulated his theory of natural selection.

He pondered how killing oneself could promote passing fitness via descendants to future generations.

An insect’s self-evisceration could provide strong evidence against his theory.

Amazingly, even though Gregor Mendel’s genetics, much less the modern concept of DNA, were unknown to Darwin, he came up with essentially the correct answer.

By facilitating the reproduction of your close relatives, mainly nestmates, your lineate would be passed down via relatives, because of your selfless sacrifice.

Sting autotomy maximizes the pain and damage of a sting, thereby aiding in the defense of the colony against large predators.

Exercise 05

What is the profile of our emotional life as we age?

Despite the image of older people as cranky or resentful of the young, Laura Carstensen, a researcher of aging at Stanford University, shows that our daily emotional experience is actually enhanced with age.

Typically, older people experience more positive emotions than negative ones in daily life.

The experience isn’t purely “happy.”

Rather, our emotions grow richer and more complex over time.

We experience more co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions, such as those poignant occasions when you get a tear in the eye at the same time you feel joy, or feeling pride at the same time you feel anger ― a capacity we call “emotional complexity.”

These mixed emotional states help us avoid the dramatic ups and downs that younger people have, and they also help us exercise more control over what we feel.

Mixed emotions are easier to manage than purely positive or purely negative emotions.

Thus, emotionally speaking, life just feels better.

Better control over emotions and increased complexity.

People with more emotional complexity also have a longer healthspan.

Exercise 06

Towns and cities in developing countries are unable to provide housing, infrastructure and services in pace with their population growth, which is typically much faster than it ever was in Europe.

The result is unplanned slums without basic services, where conditions are miserable.

This encourages politicians and donor agencies to regard urbanization as negative.

But the growth of slums is neither an inevitable consequence of urbanization, nor can it be blamed only on the lack of financial resources.

Slums are also the products of failed policies, had governance, inappropriate legal and regulatory frameworks, unresponsive financial systems, corruption, and not least, a lack of political will.

Some governments even compound the problems by limiting access to land and services for low-income migrants.

But policies focused on stopping migration or compelling people to leave urban areas ― even through massive evictions ― are futile.

This hounding of the poor has instead made their life even harder.

Exercise 07

Is value neutrality possible?

Many sociologists believe it is impossible to set aside personal values and retain complete objectivity.

They caution readers, rather, to understand that sociological studies may, by necessity, contain a certain amount of value bias.

It does not discredit the results but allows readers to view them as one form of truth rather than a singular fact.

Some sociologists attempt to remain uncritical and as objective as possible when studying cultural institutions.

Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions.

It means striving to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when analyzing data.

It means avoiding skewing data in order to match a predetermined outcome that aligns with a particular agenda, such as a political or moral point of view.

Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs.

Exercise 08

Technology does not exist in isolation.

It emerges out of specific economic, social and political contexts.

But technological change can make certain things possible, or more or less likely.

Technology was no threat to newspapers in the 1980s when computer typesetting and direct input revolutionized the industry, transforming the economics in the direction of huge potential increases in profitability.

That ‘new technology’ era allowed for enormous growth in the size of newspapers (pagination) with the resultant potential for growing advertising revenues.

The current digital revolution allowing for the delivery of words, pictures and sound through screens and a vast (limitless) increase in the amount of information available through this medium is of course a challenge to newspapers, but not necessarily a terminal threat.

It is that challenge newspapers are addressing now, in various ways, with varying investment and varying creativity and imagination.

There is undoubtedly a lot of gloom to be found in newspaper offices these days, but that is not the whole story.

It is also an exciting time for newspapers.

Newspapers are not on death row.