

Suggested answers to the exam in the philosophy of science, August 2013.

1. Would you say that this is a paper on economics?

Definitely. The paper deals with an unusual subject but the approach and the methodology is standard economics. Furthermore, the paper is published in an economics journal and the authors are economists.

2. Would you say that this paper is an example of normal science?

Yes. The question relates to Kuhn, and it would be appropriate to describe what Kuhn means by normal science as opposed to anomalies and changes in paradigm (scientific revolutions)

3. How would you characterize the relation of this paper to the methodology of Karl Popper?

This is in fact not very easy. The focus of Popper is on the grand ideas, such as the heliocentric view, and the need to attempt to falsify this view. But no grand theory is being presented in this paper and so it would not seem to fit in to the framework proposed by Popper.

4. How would you characterize the relation of this paper to the methodology of Imre Lakatos?

Presumably it could be said that the basic approach is to use the economic approach to questions usually dealt with in sociology (economic imperialism): And as such there is an implication with respect to parental matchmaking, and this implication would seem to be confirmed. Thus it could be argued that economic imperialism applied to this question has produced a novel fact, and thus is an instance of a progressive research programme.

5. How would you characterize the relation between theory and empirical work in this paper?

The theory is only described very briefly: "Our main prediction can be generated formally from a theoretical model where the son chooses whether to search for a wife himself or to delegate his parents to conduct the search." This is in fact not very surprising that one may construct such a model but this model need not be the only one. Many models may be constructed to explain a specific fact. Furthermore, in a brief paper the model could have been suppressed but no reference to e.g. a working paper is given. So, we are presented with an ad hoc hypothesis with only a loose connection to standard economic theory.

6. Do you think that it is possible to replicate this study?

The question relates to the discussion by Hamermesh on replication. Pure replication could be possible but statistical replication would be impossible as the data is from 1991. Scientific replication would be a possibility, however.

7. In the terminology of McCloskey, are you convinced by the conclusion in this paper?

This would lead to a discussion on what it actually takes to convince an economist.