**Task 1.2: Reflecting on your current second-order commitments**

This task asks you to reflect on your current second order commitments. The purpose is to encourage you to become familiar with the distinctions between different second order questions, and to promote reflexive consideration of your already existing views.

Write a short account (a couple of paragraphs) of your current ontological/  epistemological/ methodological position regarding the central second order questions we introduced in sub-section 1.2 of the module book.

Consider the following prompts:

1. What is your current ontological viewpoint? Do you think that the social world is a part of the natural world, or separate from the natural world?

My current ontological viewpoint is that the social world is both connected and removed from the natural world. The actions of individuals that are influenced by external forces (laws of nature, illness, laws & rules, social pressure etc.) I would consider to be connected to the natural world however, actions that are influenced by individual human cognition would be independent. The reason for this claim is that the freedom of the mind allows us to contemplate things far beyond the natural world that we know. Professor Stephen Hawking is an excellent example of influences of the natural world affecting what he is able to physically, however, his mental freedom still remains. Due to freedom of thought (and since humans are not always rational), the possibility of an action to change at any given moment for any number of reasons is infinite. So it is my belief that human beings are constantly being influenced by internal and external forces, that combine to produce a certain outcome. This ideology may align somewhat with the concepts found in complexity theory where order arises through the interplay of various forces.

1. What is your current epistemological viewpoint? Do you think that knowledge of the social world should aim at verifiable truth, or perhaps sympathetic understanding others?

In my current epistemological viewpoint, I do not believe that knowledge of the social world should aim at verifiable truth. The rationale for this response is linked to the ontological perspectives mentioned above. With so much possibility for variation and irrationality within human beings it is impossible to have 100% conclusive findings. It is only possible to report what has occurred in a specific social context at a specific time and infer that under the same circumstances people would be likely to act the same. Knowledge is gained through thick description of social events which empowers individuals to have a sympathetic understanding of others. Through the evaluation of society, individuals, and culture, positive change can occur.

1. What is your current methodological approach to social science research? Do you think that social science should proceed by observation and measurement, or perhaps by imaginative understanding of the experience of others?

In the past, my research has tended to focus on understanding the experiences of others, therefore any observations that I have done have been followed up with interviews. Although this outlook is something I gravitate towards, I am open minded to pursuing other methodological approaches in order to gain greater breadth in my skills and understanding as a researcher and academic.

I believe that methodological approaches should be flexible and that the most suitable methods should be chosen to best answer the research questions of a study. It is important to find the right tool for the job rather than to force the use of an inappropriate tool in the wrong context. I think one thing that is important (stemming from my ontological and epistemological perspectives) is that research into the social sciences should be bottom up. It is important for the data speak for itself and not necessarily the researcher to speak for the data. Data can be collected in a number of ways; surveys, interviews, observations, journal entries, written reflections etc. it depends on what a study is examining, what is possible, and what is ethical.