**‘Sociology Can Never Be Value Free’, Using Your Knowledge Of Value Freedom Assess This Quotation (33 marks)**

In relation to the question, the phrase value free means to disassociate personal beliefs, prejudices and opinions from the study of sociology. There are three main stances when assessing this view, these being than value freedom is possible, not possible, or that values should be celebrated and fully incorporated into sociology. Weber saw these values as something other than facts, stating that they could not be disproved. From his perspective there is an essential role for values in sociology. Yet on the other hand positivists argue that, perhaps in an attempt to certify sociology as a real science, we should follow the methodology of the natural science such as biology, chemistry etc.

The natural sciences such as physics take a strictly unbiased approach towards to the subject, and this is the approach that positivists believe sociology should adopt. They argue that, like the natural sciences, the subject studies external factors and phenomena that are separate to the individual. Therefore they can be observed objectively by following a strict scientific procedure. They further this point with the statement that any personal or political beliefs and biases of the researcher can be overlooked or discarded as long as the research method is well designed and the findings unaltered. As a result they tend to favour methods that generate quantitative data, as it seen as more reliable and objective, giving the opportunity to look for scientific correlations etc. However, there is a key difference between sociology and other natural sciences. Natural sciences study phenomena that are insentient, and therefore a researcher is almost completely incapable of drawing an emotional connection to the study or having a pre-existing one. The very meaning of sociology is the study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society. In other words, it is the study of sentient human beings. Whether realising it or not, any sociological researcher has been socialised or chosen freely into believing a certain viewpoint on any given social matter. However logical a value free approach may seem, and no matter how beneficial, it is almost impossible to dissociate human feeling in an experiment involving sentient beings.

The school of thought often dubbed ‘value laden sociology’ agrees with this conclusion, stating that even if sociology wants to be value free, it cannot. They go further to give examples to back this view, showing how human values are imbedded into the sociological research process. They bring up the important issue of funding for one. Like every other science, sociology relies on funding from investors and other various sources, and to obtain this funding they must present a case that is appealing and convince others that it needs further research. Values and personal biases will definitely come into play in this instance. Career progression is another important point which would probably also is an issue with studying a more natural science. As any other person might have, sociologists have career ambitions and goals. Knowingly or subconsciously their actions can be a result of these desires, which make it impossible to lead a value free approach. Lastly, perhaps the most important point that they make is sociologists are human beings. To escape from personal beliefs, no matter how hard they try, is undoable when conducting research. Even the very choice of what subject matter they delve into is the result of personality and beliefs.

Some sociologists believe that the subject can never and should never be value free. Instead they believe that as a subject it should have values guiding the research. Throughout the 1970s, a debate raged between Gouldner and Becker, the only common ground that sociology should openly ‘take sides’ in research. Gouldner stood fast to his beliefs that sociologists cannot ignore their values when doing their research, and that they need to hold onto their values. This is due to the risk of ‘selling out’ to the highest bidders when conducting research. He also argued that sociologists should focus on the powerful groups of society, as they created the ‘structures of oppression’. Gouldner criticised Becker’s opposite view that sociology should focus on the underdog (criminals, mentally ill patients etc) as little is known about them. Gouldner instead believed that this approach was an overly sentimental view of disadvantaged groups. Unlike Becker, he enforces a Marxist position in siding against the powerful, exploitive groups in society. Feminists also agree with this stance, seeing exploitive groups as the key issue of the patriarchal society. Qualitative methods are preferred in the instance of embracing values, as the depth, validity and verstehen it provides are seen as important.

Weber, like committed sociologists, sees values as having an essential role in sociology. For him values were a guide to research, helping us to choose which aspects of life to study. However, he logically concluded that when the time comes to collect data, values should have no participation in that area. They come back into the process when you interpret what the research is telling you. He also state that he believed, as sociologists, there is a responsibility to look at the effects of the research. No one should hide behind the objectivity, particularly if the findings cause any harm. Weber presents a logical approach, accepting that value free sociology cannot be achieved and instead stating that it should be exploited sometimes and at other times dropped. For instance, when collecting data any bias should not enter the equation, but in interpreting the data it is important to use values. However, it should be said that it is an easy balance to achieve in theory, but in practicality it can be difficult for a person to pick and choose when to apply their personal beliefs.

The positivist belief that sociology can somehow discard its values is widely thought to be inaccurate. Even if a conscious effort is made to rid research of emotional feelings, it will conflict with the process on a subconscious level. Despite their attempts to establish it as such, sociology isn’t a natural science. However, instead of trying to mimic the methods of physics and the like, sociology should embrace its own as a new, more emotionally intelligent science. Upon looking at the evidence we can see that human emotion and judgement is too intrinsically linked to the process and essence of the subject to discard it. The idea that it should be embraced should be taken in moderation, as when values start to corrupt data it becomes an issue. There should be a middle ground in the process, as Weber highlighted, that uses values to their advantage but knowing when to drop it. Yet in conclusion, the statement in the question is accurate. It is human nature to view issues or theories through a bias, and no one will ever fully disassociate themselves from their opinions, especially in the realm of sociology.