

The philosophy of social science is the study of the logic, methods, and foundations of social sciences such as psychology, economics, and political science.

Thus, positivists devoted much effort to analyzing the nature of theory testing in the natural sciences. But another part of their motivation was to offer to the social sciences recipes drawn from the analysis of how testing proceeds in natural sciences. Several positivist philosophers attempted to develop formal logical theories of theory testing. However, over the course of several decades it became clear to positivists and their students that the testing of scientific theories was too complicated an undertaking to be reduced to a logical recipe. Positivists also devoted much time to developing accounts of the nature of scientific theories and the structure of scientific explanation. The theory of explanation they advanced is called the "deductive-nomological" or "covering-law" theory: Similarly, the positivists pointed out, given the law about the expansion of water at its freezing temperature, we can predict that the full radiator will break if we know that the temperature is falling below freezing. Laws are explained by derivation from other, more general laws. Thus, we can derive a chemical law that hydrogen and oxygen will combine under certain conditions to produce water, by deducing it from more general physical laws governing the chemical bonds produced through the interaction of electrons. According to the positivists, a theory has the structure of an axiomatic system—rather like Euclidean geometry with its postulates, or axioms, and its theorems derived from them by logical derivation. But unlike geometry, the axioms of a scientific theory are not taken to be known for certain. Rather, positivists held that such axioms are hypotheses, which are tested by the deduction from them of predictions about observations. If observations corroborate the predictions, the theory is confirmed to some degree. But no theory is ever conclusively verified once and for all. Theories, like laws, are supposed to be true everywhere and always. Yet our evidence for these claims about every where and always is limited to here and now and in the past. Therefore, scientific knowledge is fallible. To emphasize the hypothetical nature of the basic laws of a theory and the logical relations between these laws and the observations that test them, positivists named their account of theories "hypothetico-deductivism: Similarly, the balanced equations of chemistry follow from the physical theory of the atom, and Mendelian genetics, discovered in the nineteenth century, turns out to be derivable from molecular genetics. Or so positivists claimed. Most students of science accepted this picture of the progress of science as accumulating more and more knowledge by incorporating and preserving the insights of older theories in newer ones. But the positivists attempted to make the picture more precise by giving a formal account of the reduction of theories as the logical derivation of one axiomatic system from another. One serious problem for positivists was reconciling their empiricism—the requirement that meaningful statements be testable in observation—with the unobservable entities, processes, and properties of scientific theories. It is clear that theoretically indispensable concepts like electron, charge, acid, and gene name unobserved things. Are we to stigmatize the statement "electrons have negative charge" as meaningless because it cannot be tested? The trouble with this approach is that no particular observations follow from any single theoretical statement; experimental observations follow only from large sets of theoretical statements working together. The realization of this fact about the relation between observations and theory began the unraveling of positivism as a philosophy of science. Moreover, when observations disconfirm a set of theoretical statements working together, they force us to give up one or more members of this set. What might the nonempirical factors be? Searching for the nonempirical factors means in effect giving up positivism and its empiricist epistemology as an account of scientific method. Soon after that, sociologists began to seek nonevidential factors that determine scientific consensus among social forces. Students of gender and gender politics sought to show that scientific practices, and in some cases scientific theories, were the result of male domination and discrimination based on race, class, and gender. These enterprises had little influence on the course of the philosophy of science itself, though they had a good deal of impact on the ways in which each of these social sciences viewed itself as a science. And all of them reduced the influence of logical positivism within the social and behavioral

disciplines. Meanwhile, for quite different reasons, logical positivism as a viable movement among philosophers had disappeared by the s. Many philosophers continued to lack confidence that these disciplines were yet scientific enough to shed objective light on the nature of science. Moreover, no one could solve the problems required to vindicate its philosophical program. The social sciences have failed, despite long attempts, be- Lawlessness in Social Science 15 cause they have not uncovered laws or even empirical generalizations that could be improved in the direction of real laws about human behavior and its consequences. One compelling explanation is that social science is just much harder than natural science: The research object is we human beings, and we are fiercely complicated systems. Teasing out the separate effects of all the forces determining our behavior is more formidable a task than that which faces any other discipline. Perhaps the complexity of human behavior and its causes and effects are beyond our cognitive powers to understand. On this view, the social sciences are just "young sciences: Sure, but science has always successfully coped with complexity in other cases. Are the social sciences really young by comparison with the natural sciences? From the post-World War II effusion of research money, statistical methods, cheap computation, and improved scientific education of social scientists? Behaviorists in all the social sciences provide good illustrations of these attitudes. These social scientists offer a different explanation for the failure to discover laws. They note that as natural science developed, its subject matter became more complex and more difficult to work with. But the increasing complexity of research in the natural sciences has not resulted in any slowdown in scientific advance. Quite to the contrary, the rate of "progress" has, if anything, increased over time. Thus, by itself, complexity can hardly be an excuse for the social sciences. Moreover, the argument continues, the social sciences have had a great advantage over the natural sciences. Thus, the Newtonian revolution was the result of realizing that commonsense notions about change, forces, motion, and the nature of space needed to be replaced if we were to uncover the real laws of motion. Instead we must view motion at constant velocity as the absence of net forces, consider "down" as just the direction toward the strongest local source of gravity, and accept that Earth is moving at about seven hundred feet per second. Similarly, the pre-Darwinian conception of unchangeable, immutable species must be surrendered if we are ever to coherently entertain an evolutionary theory, still less to accept one that explains diversity by appeal to blind variation and natural selection that changes species into new ones. But in the social sciences, the change of fundamental categories has not been thought necessary. The social scientist is not just a spectator of the social domain, but a participant, an agent, a player in the human domain. Theories in natural science cannot change the nature of the reality that the physicist or chemist or biologist studies, but theories in social science can and often do. This goes for social scientists as well as those whose actions and behavior they study. The fact that many social scientists do so is not an argument that they inevitably must. Thus, we might have expected progress to have been possible or perhaps even more rapid in the social than in the natural sciences. The absence of progress makes the excuse that these are young disciplines that face subjects of great complexity unconvincing to many social scientists and some philosophers. And many social scientists seek to supplant those categories with new ones, for example, operant conditioning, sociological functionalism, and sociobiology. It is easy to see how a category scheme can prevent us from uncovering laws or regularities even when they would otherwise be easy to find. We do so by catching fish and examining their anatomy. Our observation leads to the hypothesis that fish breathe through gills. Casting our nets more widely, we begin to trap whales and dolphins, and then we modify our generalization to "all fish breathe through gills, save whales and dolphins. The trouble is obvious: Indeed, the difference between a "kind-term" like gold, which reflects real divisions in nature, and one like fake gold, which does not, is the fact that there are laws about the former and not the latter. Philosophers call the kind-terms that figure in laws "natural kinds. That is why the explanations that employ them have little predictive power. If these social scientists are correct, their disciplines will indeed turn out to be young sciences. For in the absence of their preferred system of kinds and categories, the social sciences are rather like chemistry before Rejecting Prediction for Intelligibility 19 Lavoisier: It is important to keep in mind that social scientists and philosophers have challenged every step in this chain of reasoning: Let us examine this challenge. To begin with, they hold that the natural sciences have not in fact made the kind of progress ordinarily attributed to them. Many of its readers, especially social

scientists, interpreted Kuhn as claiming that instead of progress, scientific history from Aristotle to Einstein has been characterized by change without overall improvement. Accurate translation between them is impossible, for there is no neutral basis for translation and thus for fair comparison. It certainly undermines the claim that it is controversial whether science shows persistent improvements in predictive success about what can be observed. Positivists failed to see this situation because they accepted the early twentieth-century rewrite of the history of physics as the objective truth about what actually happened in the history of science. Succeeding theories are incompatible with each other, so neither can be derived from the other. In fact, Kuhn seemed to claim that the whole idea that predictive success should constitute a transdisciplinary criterion for scientific knowledge is part of a conceptual scheme: But this paradigm has now been replaced in physics by the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics. The conceptual schemes of those theories deprive Newtonian demands on scientific method of their authority. Newtonian science made prediction a requirement of scientific achievement because it was a deterministic theory of causal mechanisms. The fundamental laws of quantum physics are statements of probabilities. For the same reasons that scientific standards change within each of the natural sciences, they differ extensively between them. And the differences between standards in the natural and social sciences will have to be wider still. Of course, within some disciplines prediction and practical application are important ways of "articulating the paradigm: For the sort of progress that characterizes the human sciences and progress in physics or biology are too different even to compare. Unlike the natural sciences, which aim at causal theories that enable us to predict and control, the social sciences seek to explain behavior by rendering it meaningful or intelligible. They uncover its meaning, or significance, by interpreting what people do. The interpretation of human behavior, in this view, is not fundamentally causal. Speech, not snoring; jumping, not falling; suicide, not mere death are the subject matter of some of the social sciences. The correct interpretation of human actions enables us to navigate successfully in a society of other human beings. Folk psychology includes such obvious truths as that being burned hurts, medium-sized objects in broad daylight are detected by normal observers, thirst causes drinking. After all, a theory is something we could give up; it is composed of models, empirical generalizations, or even laws that are subject to testing by experience. We can dream up lots of exceptions to that generalization.

Chapter 2 : Understanding Society: Why "philosophy of social science"?

The Philosophy of Social Science. The philosophy of social science can be described broadly as having two aims. First, it seeks to produce a rational reconstruction of social science.

Auguste Comte and Positivism Comte first described the epistemological perspective of positivism in *The Course in Positive Philosophy*, a series of texts published between 1830 and 1842. These texts were followed by the work, *A General View of Positivism* published in English in 1853. The first three volumes of the *Course* dealt chiefly with the physical sciences already in existence: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, whereas the latter two emphasised the inevitable coming of social science. Observing the circular dependence of theory and observation in science, and classifying the sciences in this way, Comte may be regarded as the first philosopher of science in the modern sense of the term. His *View of Positivism* would therefore set-out to define, in more detail, the empirical goals of sociological method. Both Comte and Marx intended to develop, scientifically, a new secular ideology in the wake of European secularisation. The early sociology of Herbert Spencer came about broadly as a reaction to Comte. Writing after various developments in evolutionary biology, Spencer attempted in vain to reformulate the discipline in what we might now describe as socially Darwinistic terms although Spencer was a proponent of Lamarckism rather than Darwinism. In the same year he argued, in *The Rules of Sociological Method* "What has been called our positivism is but a consequence of this rationalism. Among most social scientists and historians, orthodox positivism has long since fallen out of favor. Today, practitioners of both social and physical sciences recognize the distorting effect of observer bias and structural limitations. This scepticism has been facilitated by a general weakening of deductivist accounts of science by philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn, and new philosophical movements such as critical realism and neopragmatism. In psychology, a positivistic approach has historically been favoured in behaviourism. Epistemology[edit] In any discipline, there will always be a number of underlying philosophical predispositions in the projects of scientists. Some of these predispositions involve the nature of social knowledge itself, the nature of social reality, and the locus of human control in action. The founding positivists of the social sciences argued that social phenomena can and should be studied through conventional scientific methods. This position is closely allied with scientism, naturalism and physicalism; the doctrine that all phenomena are ultimately reducible to physical entities and physical laws. Opponents of naturalism, including advocates of the *verstehen* method, contended that there is a need for an interpretive approach to the study of human action, a technique radically different from natural science. These debates also rage within contemporary social sciences with regard to subjectivity, objectivity, intersubjectivity and practicality in the conduct of theory and research. Philosophers of social science examine further epistemologies and methodologies, including realism, critical realism, instrumentalism, functionalism, structuralism, interpretivism, phenomenology, and post-structuralism. Though essentially all major social scientists since the late 19th century have accepted that the discipline faces challenges that are different from those of the natural sciences, the ability to determine causal relationships invokes the same discussions held in science meta-theory. Positivism has sometimes met with caricature as a breed of naive empiricism, yet the word has a rich history of applications stretching from Comte to the work of the Vienna Circle and beyond. The mid-20th-century linguistic turn led to a rise in highly philosophical sociology, as well as so-called "postmodern" perspectives on the social acquisition of knowledge. Michel Foucault provides a potent critique in his *Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, though Habermas and Richard Rorty have both argued that Foucault merely replaces one such system of thought with another. This problem is especially important for those within the social sciences who study qualitative mental phenomena, such as consciousness, associative meanings, and mental representations, because a rejection of the study of meanings would lead to the reclassification of such research as non-scientific. Influential traditions like psychodynamic theory and symbolic interactionism may be the first victims of such a paradigm shift. The philosophical issues lying in wait behind these different positions have led to commitments to certain kinds of methodology which have sometimes bordered on the partisan. Still, many researchers have indicated a lack of patience for overly

dogmatic proponents of one method or another. Michael Burawoy has marked the difference between public sociology, which is focused firmly on practical applications though see e. Thibodeaux, [16], and academic or professional sociology, which involves dialogue amongst other social scientists and philosophers. Ontology[edit] Structure and agency forms an enduring debate in social theory: Discussions over the primacy of structure or agency relate to the very core of social ontology "What is the social world made of? One attempt to reconcile postmodern critiques with the overarching project of social science has been the development, particularly in Britain, of critical realism.

Chapter 3 : Philosophy of social science - Alexander Rosenberg - Google Books

Philosophy of social science, branch of philosophy that examines the concepts, methods, and logic of the social sciences. www.nxgvision.com philosophy of social science is consequently a metatheoretical endeavour – a theory about theories of social life.

Rosenberg, a philosopher of science, seems to agree, since he holds that the theories put forth for the social sciences have little predictive power. He details the reasons for this and, along the way, introduced me to many useful concepts: He also presents a succinct critique of economics with its failure to develop theories with predictive power and its concomitant reluctance to move on from theories that have clearly failed. I was especially impressed with the concept of folk psychology basically the built in psychology that we use to assess others and make our way in the world and its associated narratives. Folk psychology is faulty, but everything seems to begin there. It would seem a huge organizing principle in the study of just about anything - hard sciences, social sciences, history, literature, etc. For whatever reason and although Rosenberg references it many, many times in the text, he does not use it as an organizing principle. Although Rosenberg seems to be well aware of probability theory and its applications in the hard sciences, he does not see how its application to social science and economics would resolve several of the significant problems he raises. However, this is the third edition, published in 1992, and there is a fifth edition published in 2002. Rosenberg holds the singular distinction of being the only philosopher I have read who is actually useful. Most fundamental concepts are comprehensively explained and rich discussions on each of them are presented. This book, or similar ones are a must read for those who work in social science areas in order to become clear in their minds! However, the book is not fluent! In fact, the author preferred to run the discussions on contradictory ideas side by side. In a paragraph one reads an idea and all supporting reasons for it. Well, it is really a good introductory book to philosophy of social science! In a paragraph one reads an idea and all supporting reasons for that idea while in the next one, the opposite idea comes with supporting reasons! This finally gives a sense of exhaustion! It would be better to explain all similar ideas in one set of chapters and others in another set of chapters. Another point is that the author spent much space on classic approaches for instance empiricism, behaviorism and holism. I think for a contemporary readers, it is necessary to be informed much more on approaches such as interpretivism, deconstructionism and ideas of T. Unfortunately the book is not reach in regarding these concepts. Rosenberg usually takes quite a correct or at least, productive take on these, pointing out to the open spaces that lie behind their constitutive arguments. But still, this whole thing feels like s.. For those who love discussing dead things, such as logical positivism, behavioralism, structural holism, some simplified biological arguments, moral arguments on the level of utilitarianism vs. But still, this whole thing feels like s This is, in my view, simply a very pathetic essentialization of ontology that always makes for a clumsy point to start from.

Chapter 4 : MSc Philosophy of the Social Sciences

Philosophy of Social Science provides a tightly argued yet accessible introduction to the philosophical foundations of the human sciences, including economics, anthropology, sociology, political science, psychology, history, and the disciplines emerging at the intersections of these subjects with biology.

See Article History Philosophy of social science, branch of philosophy that examines the concepts, methods, and logic of the social sciences. The philosophy of social science is consequently a metatheoretical endeavour—a theory about theories of social life. To achieve their end, philosophers of social science investigate both the practice of the social sciences and the nature of the entities that the social sciences study—namely, human beings themselves. The philosophy of social science can be broadly descriptive unearthing the fundamental conceptual tools in social science and relating them to the tools employed in other human endeavours , prescriptive recommending that a certain approach be adopted by the social sciences so that they can accomplish what the recommender thinks social science ought to accomplish , or some combination of the two. The approach that answers this question affirmatively is called naturalism , whereas that which answers it negatively is known as humanism , though a number of theories attempt to combine these two approaches. Given this framework, the term philosophy of social science is arguably misleading, because it suggests that the discipline is concerned with the social sciences insofar as they are sciences or scientific; thus the term seems to imply naturalism. To avoid this suggestion, practitioners sometimes denominate their field of inquiry: In addition to the core disciplines of economics , political science , anthropology , and sociology , the social studies also include such disparate disciplines as archaeology , demography , human geography , linguistics , social psychology , and aspects of cognitive science , among others. This should indicate the range of the field that the philosophy of social sciences encompasses and how diverse the questions, methods, concepts, and explanatory strategies are within the field. Meanings and causes of human behaviour Human actions can be described as self-evidently meaningful; they are typically performed for a purpose and express an intention, and they also often follow rules that make them the kinds of action they are. Thus, people do not simply move their limbs or emit sounds, they vote or marry or sell or communicate, and, when they do, their actions and relations appear to be different in kind from the behaviour of other animals, especially nonconscious animals such as sponges. Philosophers mark this difference by saying that humans act, whereas entities that lack consciousness or that lack the capacity to form intentions merely move. How should the interpretation of the meanings of actions fit into the study of human behaviour? Does it introduce elements that make such a study different in kind from studying entities whose movements are not meaningful? Those who give an affirmative answer to the latter of these questions insist that social science must either be an interpretive endeavour or must at least provide a role for the interpretation of meanings within it; for them, meaning is the central concept of the social sciences. Philosophers such as Heinrich Rickert and Wilhem Dilthey argued that human phenomena are the product of conscious and intentional beings who became so by means of enculturation the assimilation of a culture , including its values and practices , and this means that the human sciences must concentrate on meaning and its interpretation as they attempt to understand human life. This line of thought continued into the 20th century and beyond. Most notable was the application of hermeneutics to the study of human social life. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation, originally of written texts and later of all forms of human expression. It originated in the modern period in reflections on the interpretation of the Bible. A number of hermeneutical theories of the social sciences have been developed, the most significant being that of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer , presented in his masterpiece *Wahrheit und Methode ; Truth and Method* , and that of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur , discussed in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* Hermeneuticists argue that human actions are the expressions of ideas and feelings and as such are essentially meaningful phenomena. To understand them is more akin to interpreting a text or a painting than it is to dissecting the contents of a cell and the causes that produced them. Meaning, not cause, and understanding meaning , not causal explanation , is the rallying point for philosophers of social science of

this persuasion, though they offer varied accounts of what is entailed in interpreting meaning. A cognate line of thinking developed largely in England and in the United States out of the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, as represented especially in his *Philosophical Investigations*, a work that argued for the essentially social nature of linguistic meaning, which it parsed in terms of rule following. Analytic philosophers, most notably Peter Winch in *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, applied this idea to the social sciences, hoping to show that the study of human beings involves a scheme of concepts and methods of analysis that are wholly unlike those in the natural sciences. Phenomenology is another branch of philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness of beings who are conscious and who know that they are. The German philosopher Edmund Husserl founded the phenomenological movement in the early 20th century. Phenomenologists focus on the fact that human doings are consciously undertaken and are thus essentially intentional in character. For this reason, humans cannot be studied in the way in which plants and molecules are; instead, the structures of human consciousness must be unearthed and shown how they are expressed in human relations and actions. Human acts are typically gestural in that they express some psychological state and cultural orientation, and much of what humans do is shaped by their culture and psychological states—motives, desires, goals, feelings, and moods as well as the life-world the world as immediately or directly experienced, in which psychological beings necessarily exist. The study of human life consequently involves such things as empathy, attempting to relive what others have experienced and to grasp their subjective states, and the like. This way of thinking has underwritten a variety of approaches in the social sciences, the most well-known being ethnomethodology, a school of sociology formulated by the American sociologist Harold Garfinkel in his classic work *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. The social sciences that figure most saliently in humanist approaches, which centrally feature the interpretation of meaning and consciousness, are anthropology, history, and those parts of sociology that focus on the margins of mainstream society. The reason for this emphasis in sociology is that, when confronting the behaviour of those whose linguistic, cultural, and conceptual worlds are significantly different from their own, social analysts cannot ignore questions of meaning. Moreover, these disciplines strikingly confront a host of questions that trouble philosophers of social science, questions that are grouped around the topic of relativism the doctrine that either experience, assessments of value, or even reality itself is a function of a particular conceptual scheme; these views are called, respectively, epistemological, moral, and ontological relativism. But not all philosophers of social science believe that meaning is something on which the social sciences should focus. Despite the fact that human actions and relations are clearly meaningful on the surface, some philosophies of social science have denied that meaning ultimately has or should have a fundamental role to play in the social sciences. One of the most noteworthy of these approaches is behaviourism, which dispenses with inner mental states and cultural meanings altogether. Instead, human behaviour is conceived as a series of responses to external stimuli, responses that are regulated by the patterns of conditioning that have been inculcated into the organism. Other approaches that deny that the interpretation of meaning is of fundamental import in the social sciences include systems theory and structuralism. Systems theory conceives of society as an entity each of whose various parts plays a certain role or performs a certain function in order to maintain society or to keep it in equilibrium; such roles are played by those who inhabit them, whether they know that they are doing so or not. As a result, the purpose of social science is to unearth the elements of this structure and to reveal its inner logic. In both systems theory and structuralism, the meaning that behaviour has for those engaging in it is ultimately irrelevant to its explanation. Behaviourists, systems theorists, and structuralists base their approaches on the assumption that human behaviour is the result of prior causes in the same way that the behaviour of plants and animals is. The nature of theory in social science Beyond the intentions and meanings associated with behaviour, social scientists are also interested in mapping out the basic structures of society and the resources, social and otherwise, that underwrite these structures. They are also concerned with the unintended consequences of actions and relations. In all of these investigations, social scientists go beyond deciphering the meaning and import of acts and relations to uncover their broader causes and effects. Indeed, depending on how broad and successful social science is in this task, causal explanations become integrated into theories of social life— theories that typically go far beyond the self-understandings of the agents

involved. Examples include Keynesian or monetarist theories in economics, kinship theories in anthropology, and modernization theory in political science and sociology. Questions about the nature of social-scientific theorizing abound: Can the social sciences make warranted predictions about future actions or relationships? Should the social sciences ultimately aim at explanation in terms of individual actions or in terms of groups or group structures? To these sorts of questions, humanists have sometimes insisted that causality in the social sciences is different in kind than causality in the natural sciences. Others have tried to work out a middle road that combines the best of both the naturalist approach, with its focus on causality, and the humanist approach, which focuses on meaning. The methodological writings of the German sociologist Max Weber are a particularly vivid instance of this. An important class of theories in the social sciences—so-called competence theories—constitute a distinctive type. Theories of this type explain human behaviour as arising from principles of rationality or from internalized systems of rules. These examples are indicative of the ways in which theorizing in the social sciences may be fundamentally different from that in the natural sciences. Meaningful actions involve rationality because they consist of following rules, procedures, principles, and the like. Or, again, principles of economic reasoning specify how much product to bring to market in order to maximize profit. They proceed by discovering how an idealized actor who is perfectly rational or who has perfectly mastered the relevant rules would behave in various situations. Another way in which theories in the social sciences are different from those in the natural sciences is that the entities being explained in the social sciences are. But this raises the question of what is the relationship, in social-scientific theories, between, on the one hand, the ideology and self-understanding of the agents and, on the other, the theoretical constructs that social-scientific observers of their behaviour might propose. Does the former take precedence over the latter? Does the former constrain the latter? These are questions that philosophers of the natural sciences need not address, because the phenomena studied in the natural sciences are not the product of the ideology of that which is being studied. Indeed, the notion of ideology points to an activity crucial in the social sciences but one potentially in tension with its scientific aspirations, namely, critique. The role of critique in social science Critique becomes a possible dimension of social science because the self-understandings that serve as a basis for the actions and relations of agents may themselves be systematically mistaken. They may be under the control of an ideology that masks their social and personal reality, or they may be the victims of an irrationality that hinders them and makes them act in unintelligent or deluded ways. Such irrationality may lie beneath their frustrations or the social conflicts in which they perforce find themselves. All of this suggests that, in order to understand and explain what such people are doing and how they are relating to others, social scientists must engage in what is called ideology critique: Examples of important social theories for which ideology critique is central are those of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Habermas, and some feminist theories. Deconstruction is yet another form of critique in the social sciences, one inspired by the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and by postmodernism more generally. Deconstruction is the procedure in which that which is hidden in an entity such as a category or a social formation is brought to light and shown to be part of the entity, even though it was ostensibly something antithetical to it. But deconstruction might show that heterosexual identity is in fact parasitically dependent on homosexuality, even as the former tries to exclude or subordinate the latter—indeed, it might show that the difference between these two terms is constitutive of their meaning and, thus, that homosexuality is a hidden aspect of the identity of heterosexuals. What is true for the opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality may also be true for other antinomies: The assessment of rationality or the coherence of schemes of meaning including ideology critique and deconstruction raise questions about the objectivity of social science. Of course, questions about objectivity arise even if assessments of rationality and coherence play no essential role in the social sciences, for the simple reason that social science investigates phenomena that include the social scientists themselves and that often have close bearing on their own values and on what they hope or fear for themselves and their fellow humans. Questions about the conditions and nature of objectivity are thus a central concern of the philosophy of social sciences.

Chapter 5 : Philosophy of social science - Wikipedia

Philosophy of the Social Sciences (POS), peer-reviewed and published quarterly, has served as the international, interdisciplinary forum for current research, theory, and debate on the philosophical foundations of the social sciences for 40 years.

Pre-modern[edit] The origins of philosophy of science trace back to Plato and Aristotle [28] who distinguished the forms of approximate and exact reasoning, set out the threefold scheme of abductive , deductive , and inductive inference, and also analyzed reasoning by analogy. The eleventh century Arab polymath Ibn al-Haytham known in Latin as Alhazen conducted his research in optics by way of controlled experimental testing and applied geometry , especially in his investigations into the images resulting from the reflection and refraction of light. Roger Bacon â€” , an English thinker and experimenter heavily influenced by al-Haytham, is recognized by many to be the father of modern scientific method. In this philosophy[,] propositions are deduced from the phenomena and rendered general by induction. The 19th century writings of John Stuart Mill are also considered important in the formation of current conceptions of the scientific method, as well as anticipating later accounts of scientific explanation. Logical positivism Instrumentalism became popular among physicists around the turn of the 20th century, after which logical positivism defined the field for several decades. Logical positivism accepts only testable statements as meaningful, rejects metaphysical interpretations, and embraces verificationism a set of theories of knowledge that combines logicism , empiricism , and linguistics to ground philosophy on a basis consistent with examples from the empirical sciences. Seeking to overhaul all of philosophy and convert it to a new scientific philosophy, [34] the Berlin Circle and the Vienna Circle propounded logical positivism in the late s. Thereby, only the verifiable was scientific and cognitively meaningful, whereas the unverifiable was unscientific, cognitively meaningless "pseudostatements"â€”metaphysical, emotive, or suchâ€”not worthy of further review by philosophers, who were newly tasked to organize knowledge rather than develop new knowledge. Logical positivism is commonly portrayed as taking the extreme position that scientific language should never refer to anything unobservableâ€”even the seemingly core notions of causality, mechanism, and principlesâ€”but that is an exaggeration. Talk of such unobservables could be allowed as metaphoricalâ€”direct observations viewed in the abstractâ€”or at worst metaphysical or emotional. Theoretical laws would be reduced to empirical laws, while theoretical terms would garner meaning from observational terms via correspondence rules. Mathematics in physics would reduce to symbolic logic via logicism, while rational reconstruction would convert ordinary language into standardized equivalents, all networked and united by a logical syntax. A scientific theory would be stated with its method of verification, whereby a logical calculus or empirical operation could verify its falsity or truth. In the late s, logical positivists fled Germany and Austria for Britain and America. The logical positivist movement became a major underpinning of analytic philosophy , [35] and dominated Anglosphere philosophy, including philosophy of science, while influencing sciences, into the s. Yet the movement failed to resolve its central problems, [36] [37] [38] and its doctrines were increasingly assaulted. Nevertheless, it brought about the establishment of philosophy of science as a distinct subdiscipline of philosophy, with Carl Hempel playing a key role. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions In the book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* , Thomas Kuhn argued that the process of observation and evaluation takes place within a paradigm, a logically consistent "portrait" of the world that is consistent with observations made from its framing. A paradigm also encompasses the set of questions and practices that define a scientific discipline. He characterized normal science as the process of observation and "puzzle solving" which takes place within a paradigm, whereas revolutionary science occurs when one paradigm overtakes another in a paradigm shift. More than one logically consistent construct can paint a usable likeness of the world, but there is no common ground from which to pit two against each other, theory against theory. Each paradigm has its own distinct questions, aims, and interpretations. Neither provides a standard by which the other can be judged, so there is no clear way to measure scientific progress across paradigms. For Kuhn, the choice of paradigm was sustained by rational processes, but not ultimately determined by them. The choice between

paradigms involves setting two or more "portraits" against the world and deciding which likeness is most promising. For Kuhn, acceptance or rejection of a paradigm is a social process as much as a logical process. That is, the choice of a new paradigm is based on observations, even though those observations are made against the background of the old paradigm. These assumptionsâ€”a paradigmâ€”comprise a collection of beliefs, values and techniques that are held by a given scientific community, which legitimize their systems and set the limitations to their investigation. The scientific method is to be used to investigate all reality. Nevertheless its very existence is assumed. As infants we made this assumption unconsciously. People are happy to make this assumption that adds meaning to our sensations and feelings, than live with solipsism. For the most part, science is the discovering and explaining of the external world. The benefit of SRS is that the investigator is guaranteed to choose a sample that represents the population that ensures statistically valid conclusions. Coherentism Jeremiah Horrocks makes the first observation of the transit of Venus in 1639, as imagined by the artist W. Lavender in *In contrast to the view that science rests on foundational assumptions, coherentism asserts that statements are justified by being a part of a coherent system. Or, rather, individual statements cannot be validated on their own: As explained above, observation is a cognitive act. That is, it relies on a pre-existing understanding, a systematic set of beliefs. An observation of a transit of Venus requires a huge range of auxiliary beliefs, such as those that describe the optics of telescopes, the mechanics of the telescope mount, and an understanding of celestial mechanics. If the prediction fails and a transit is not observed, that is likely to occasion an adjustment in the system, a change in some auxiliary assumption, rather than a rejection of the theoretical system. Quine , it is impossible to test a theory in isolation. The investigations that followed led to the discovery of an eighth planet, Neptune. If a test fails, something is wrong. But there is a problem in figuring out what that something is: Instead, he favored a "survival of the fittest" view in which the most falsifiable scientific theories are to be preferred. He argued that "the only principle that does not inhibit progress is: Because of this, he said it was impossible to come up with an unambiguous way to distinguish science from religion , magic , or mythology. He saw the exclusive dominance of science as a means of directing society as authoritarian and ungrounded. Sociology of scientific knowledge According to Kuhn, science is an inherently communal activity which can only be done as part of a community. Others, especially Feyerabend and some post-modernist thinkers, have argued that there is insufficient difference between social practices in science and other disciplines to maintain this distinction. For them, social factors play an important and direct role in scientific method, but they do not serve to differentiate science from other disciplines. On this account, science is socially constructed, though this does not necessarily imply the more radical notion that reality itself is a social construct. However, some such as Quine do maintain that scientific reality is a social construct:*

Chapter 6 : Social sciences, philosophy of - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy

The Philosophy of Social Science: A Contemporary Introduction examines the perennial questions of philosophy by engaging with the empirical study of society. The book offers a comprehensive overview of debates in the field, with special attention to questions arising from new research programs in the social sciences.

Innovative thinking about a global world Monday, December 8, Source: The Frankfurt School The subject of the philosophy of social science is important but poorly understood. The field considers the most foundational questions about the possibility of scientific knowledge about the social world. What are the scope and limits of scientific knowledge of society? What is involved in arriving at a scientific understanding of society? What are the most appropriate standards for judging proffered social explanations? A philosophy can guide us as we construct a field of knowledge, and it can serve as a set of regulative standards as we conduct and extend that field of knowledge. Philosophy has served both intellectual functions in the past century or two. The importance of the philosophy of social science derives from two things: It is as if we were passengers on a technologically complex spacecraft whose propulsion and life support systems we do not fully understand; and further, we have only a limited understanding of the systems of science and engineering on the basis of which these technologies were designed and maintained. We would have a very lively interest in learning the science that explains the workings of the technologies, and in learning the limitations and areas of uncertainty that the relevant sciences include. Likewise, it is important for us to come to a better and more well-grounded understanding of the social, political, and behavioral phenomena that constitute the modern social world. And there are large and unresolved philosophical questions about the logic of social science knowledge and theory on the basis of which to arrive at that understanding. However, philosophies of social science were also relevant in the emergence of the social sciences in the nineteenth century, as idealized schemata for setting the scientific goals that the founders set for themselves. Philosophical ideas about the nature of knowledge and the nature of the social world guided or influenced the founding efforts by such early social researchers as Weber, Durkheim, or Spencer in the formulation of their highest-level assumptions about social processes and their most general assumptions about what a scientific treatment of society ought to look like. So there has been an important back-and-forth between philosophy and the social sciences from the start. It is useful to attempt to reconstruct the guiding assumptions about the "scientific study of society" that were in the minds of the founders of the social science disciplines and the several generations of philosophers who shaped so much of our current understanding of social science; to expose some of the chief contemporary problems in social science inquiry and explanation today; and to show how this line of intellectual development also suggests some new ways of thinking about social science research and theorizing. The goal is to treat the philosophy of social science, not simply as a sub-discipline of philosophy, but as an active and guiding area of intellectual work intimately bound up in the development of the social sciences. Philosophy, then, played an active role in the intellectual work done by the creators of sociology as they attempted to frame a "science of society" in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Durkheim, Weber, Marx, the Chicago school of sociology, and the first generation of ethnographers. And I believe we can learn a great deal about how better to understand the contemporary world by attempting to identify the leading assumptions about social scientific knowledge held by the founders of the social sciences. What assumptions about social science knowledge were held by the philosophers who initiated the field, including Comte, Mill, Spencer, and others? How did the development of theories of the "human sciences" within the continental tradition of hermeneutics relate to positivist theories of the social sciences from the Vienna Circle through Popper, Hempel, and Nagel? How did the praxis philosophy of the Frankfurt School change some of the ways we think about the social sciences? The leading philosophical ideas that have been applied to the social sciences emerged out of these early efforts to make sense of the social world: Reflection on the leading ideas about the "what and how" of social scientific knowledge will also give us an idea of some of the rethinking that needs to occur in the way that we think about the social sciences in the modern world. A better understanding of the nature and logic of the social sciences has great practical importance. Just think of the complexity and magnitude of the processes that have

been underway in the past fifty years: And these processes are not well understood. Rather, social change is a contingent, multi-threaded social congeries of behavior, institutions, and contingent events, and no single set of comprehensive theories can be expected to explain all these phenomena. These changes are as deep, rapid, and perplexing as those associated with the process of industrialization in nineteenth-century England”and consider how profoundly the experience of Manchester and Birmingham stimulated new sociological thinking in the hands of Engels, Tocqueville, Marx, and the other founders of modern western sociology. So the complexity and opacity of the contemporary social world demands a better understanding of the logic and methods of the social sciences.

Chapter 7 : Philosophy of science - Wikipedia

Summary: The category "Philosophy of Social Science" can be used in two different ways: it can mean a subfield in the philosophy of science with its own tradition and focus on those issues arising from the studies of society and human nature, such as methodological individualism/holism, social ontology, objectivity and values, rationality, etc.

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The philosophy of social science aims to provide an interpretation of the social sciences that permits answers to these questions. The philosophy of social science, like the PHILOSOPHY OF NATURAL

References and Further Reading 1. Naturalism and the Unity of Scientific Method The achievements of the natural sciences in the wake of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century have been most impressive. Their investigation of nature has produced elegant and powerful theories that have not only greatly enhanced understanding of the natural world, but also increased human power and control over it. Natural science is manifestly progressive, insofar as over time its theories tend to increase in depth, range and predictive power. It is also consensual. That is, there is general agreement among natural scientists regarding what the aims of science are and how to conduct it, including how to evaluate theories. At least in the long run, natural science tends to produce consent regarding which theories are valid. Given this evident success, many philosophers and social theorists have been eager to import the methods of natural science to the study of the social world. If social science were to achieve the explanatory and predictive power of natural science, it could help solve vexing social problems, such as violence and poverty, improve the performance of institutions and generally foster human well-being. Those who believe that adapting the aims and methods of natural science to social inquiry is both possible and desirable support the unity of scientific method. Such advocacy in this context is also referred to as naturalism. Of course, the effort to unify social and natural science requires reaching some agreement on what the aims and methods of science are or should be. A school of thought, broadly known as positivism, has been particularly important here. However, brief mention of some of its key ideas is warranted, given their substantial influence on contemporary advocates of naturalism. The genesis of positivism can be traced to the ideas of the British empiricists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, including most notably John Locke , George Berkeley , and David Hume. As an epistemological doctrine, empiricism in essence holds that genuine knowledge of the external world must be grounded in experience and observation. The aim of scientific explanation is prediction, he argued, rather than trying to understand a noumenal realm that lies beyond our senses and is thus unknowable. Comte also advocated the unity of scientific method, arguing that the natural and social sciences should both adopt a positivist approach. For a variety of reasons, positivism began to fall out of favor among philosophers of science beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century. Not only did this implausibly relegate a slew of traditional philosophical questions to the category of meaningless, it also called into question the validity of employing unobservable theoretical entities, processes and forces in natural science theories. Logical positivists held that in principle the properties of unobservables, such as electrons, quarks or genes, could be translated into observable effects. In practice, however, such derivations generally proved impossible, and ridding unobservable entities of their explanatory role would require dispensing with the most successful science of the twentieth century. Despite the collapse of positivism as a philosophical movement, it continues to exercise influence on contemporary advocates of the unity of scientific method. Though there are important disagreements among naturalists about the proper methodology of science, three core tenets that trace their origin to positivism can be identified. First, advocates of naturalism remain wedded to the view that science is a fundamentally empirical enterprise. Second, most naturalists hold that the primary aim of science is to produce causal explanations grounded in lawlike regularities. And, finally, naturalists typically support value neutrality – the view that the role of science is to describe and explain the world, not to make value judgments. At a minimum, an empirical approach for the social sciences requires producing theories about the social world that can be tested via observation and experimentation. Indeed, many naturalists support the view, first proposed by Karl Popper, that the line demarcating science from non-science is empirical falsifiability. According to this view, if there is no imaginable empirical test that could show a theory to be false, then it cannot be called a scientific theory. Producing empirically falsifiable theories in turn necessitates creating techniques for systematically and precisely measuring the social world. Much of twentieth century social science involved the formation of such tools, including figuring out ways to operationalize social phenomena – that is, conceptualize them in such a

way that they can be measured. The data produced by operations in turn provide the raw, empirical material to construct and test theories. The purpose of a theory, according to naturalists, is to produce causal explanations of events or regularities found in the natural and social worlds. Indeed, this is the primary aim of science. Scientific explanations of such regularities or events in turn require identification of lawlike regularities that govern such phenomena. An event or regularity is formally explained when its occurrence is shown to be logically necessary, given certain causal laws and boundary conditions. This so-called covering law model thus views explanation as adhering to the structure of a deductive argument, with the laws and boundary conditions serving as premises in a syllogism. These laws may be invoked to produce causal explanations of a variety of other events and regularities, such as the orbit of the planets in our solar system, the trajectory of projectiles, the collapse of stars, and so forth. Thus the discovery of lawlike regularities offers the power to produce parsimonious explanations of a wide variety of phenomena. Proponents of the unity of scientific method therefore hold that uncovering laws of social phenomena should be a primary goal of social inquiry, and indeed represents the sine qua non for achieving genuinely scientific social investigation. That is, factual statements about the world can never logically compel a particular moral evaluation. For instance, based on scientific evidence, biologists might conclude that violence and competition are natural human traits. But such a factual claim itself does not tell us whether violence and competition are good or bad. According to advocates of naturalism, the same holds true for claims about the social world. For example, political scientists might be able to tell us which social, political and material conditions are conducive to the development of democracy. But, according to this view, a scientific explanation of the causes of democracy cannot tell us whether we ought to strive to bring about democracy or whether democracy itself is a good thing. Science can help us better understand how to manipulate the social world to help us achieve our goals, but it cannot tell us what those goals ought to be. To believe otherwise is to fall prey to the so-called naturalistic fallacy. Critiques of Naturalism

Naturalism has been highly influential in the social sciences, especially since the middle in the twentieth century and particularly in the United States. Movements to make social inquiry genuinely scientific have dominated many fields, most notably political science and economics. However, whether these efforts have been successful is contestable, and naturalism has been subjected to wide-ranging criticism. Some critics point to what they view as formidable obstacles to subjecting the social world to scientific investigation. These include the possible absence of law-like regularities at the social level, the complexity of the social environment, and the difficulty of conducting controlled experiments. These represent practical difficulties, however, and do not necessarily force the conclusion that modeling social inquiry on the natural sciences is doomed to failure. More radical critics of naturalism argue that the approach is thoroughly misconceived. Proponents of interpretive social inquiry are perhaps the most significant among such critics. Advocates of this approach claim that the aim of social investigation should be to enhance our understanding of a meaningful social world rather than to produce causal explanations of social phenomena grounded in universal laws. Their skepticism is shared by adherents of two other influential schools of social inquiry, known as critical theory and postmodernism. But proponents of these approaches also emphasize the various ways in which social science can mask domination in society and generally serve to reinforce the status quo. These various criticisms of naturalism are considered below. The Absence of Social Laws Among critics who point to practical obstacles impeding efforts to model social inquiry on the natural sciences, perhaps their most important objection questions the very existence of law-like regularities in the social world. They argue that the stringent criteria that philosophers of science have established for deeming an observed regularity to be an authentic law-like regularity cannot be met by proposed social laws. For a regularity to be deemed a genuine law of nature, the standard view holds that it must be universal; that is, it must apply in all times and places. The second law of thermodynamics, for example, is held to apply everywhere in the universe and at all points in the past and future. In addition, the types of laws of most importance to science are causal laws. A law may be described as causal, as opposed to a mere accidental regularity, if it represents some kind of natural necessity – a force or power in nature – that governs the behavior of phenomena. Not all law-like regularities meet the causal requirement. For instance, it is a regularity of nature that the earth orbits the sun in a certain elliptical path once every days. But the orbital regularities of earth and the other planets in the solar

system have no causal powers themselves. Whether there are genuine law-like causal regularities that govern social phenomena is not at all clear. In any event, no laws governing the social world have been discovered that meet the demanding criteria of natural science. To be sure, social scientists have identified many social regularities, some of which they have even dubbed social laws. Examples from the discipline of economics would include the laws of supply and demand. But upon closer inspection, these laws fail to meet the criteria for genuine law-like regularities. Sometimes, particularly in economics which boasts more purported laws than the other social sciences, the laws merely describe logical relationships between concepts. These laws may be true by definition, but because they do not describe the empirical world, they are not scientific laws. On the other hand, social laws that claim to describe empirical regularities invariably turn out to be imprecise, exception ridden and time-bound or place-bound rather than precise and universal. Consider the law of demand from economics, which holds that consumer demand for a good will decrease if prices go up and increase if prices go down. Though this pattern typically occurs, it is not without exception. Sometimes increasing the price of a good also increases demand for it. This may happen when consumers interpret a higher price as signaling higher quality or because purchasing an expensive good provides an opportunity for conspicuous consumption – wasteful expenditure as a display of status. Moreover, the law of demand is a weak law; it merely specifies an inverse relationship between price and demand. Unlike the more precise laws of natural science, it does not specify the magnitude of the expected change. In many cases proposed social laws are grounded in simplified and therefore false assumptions about human nature. For instance, the laws of economics are typically grounded in the assumptions of rational choice theory. This theory posits that individuals always act rationally and instrumentally, weighing potential costs and benefits as they aim to maximize their own utility. But though individuals may typically act rational in this sense, especially in the economic sphere, it is nonetheless the case that they do not always do so. Psychologists, for instance, have documented numerous ways in which individuals frequently fail to act rationally, owing to predictable kinds of flawed reasoning or perceptual errors. Moreover, it is evident that much behavior, even within the sphere of economics, is not instrumental but rather is guided by social norms, habit or tradition. Thus the laws of economics grounded in the assumption of instrumental rationality are in fact false. Outside of economics, the laws of social science are fewer and generally even more dubious. Many simple-majority, single-ballot systems do in fact exhibit more than two political parties. At best, such purported laws could be described as tendencies or typical patterns rather than genuine law-like regularities. The reason for the absence of genuine laws in the social sciences is a source of debate. Some argue that the failure to uncover social laws stems from the complexity of human behavior and the social world. Human behavior is the product of manifold factors, including biological, psychological and perhaps sociological forces, each of which are themselves quite complex. Moreover, the social systems in which human behavior are embedded are themselves highly intricate. Untangling the myriad interactions between multiple individuals in, for example, an economic system is a daunting task.

Chapter 9 : Philosophy of Social Science - Bibliography - PhilPapers

Although some of the topics and issues treated in the philosophy of social science are as old as philosophy itself (for example, the contrast between nature and convention and the idea of rationality are dealt with by Aristotle), the explicit emergence of a subdiscipline of philosophy with this name is a very recent phenomenon, which in turn may itself have stimulated greater philosophical.