

Fundamental Issues in Social Science

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Abstract

Philosophy of science pays meagre attention to the social sciences and humanities. It deals with basic questions in the natural sciences like Hempel, or general epistemology like e.g. Putnam and Kripke. Popper is the main exception.

Keywords

Culture Sciences, Inner and Outer Behaviour, Rationality, Snow, Dahl, Weber

1. Introduction

C.P. Snow (2013) introduced us to the divide between 2 sets of cultures in academia. His message from 1959 has increased relevance today. The natural sciences have newly invented strange concepts like inflation, anti-matter and selfish genes, whereas the social sciences and the humanities stay with humans and their sense data concepts, although sadly the new discipline of *philosophy of science* offers little insight into the special problematics of the *KULTURWISS-ENSCHFTEN*, as philosopher Rickert (1920) called one of Snow's cultures around 1900. One may point out that already Boltzmann's concept of entropy sits uncomfortably with cultural sciences and economic development or growth. One is stunned by physics debating whether time is illusion. However, Popper was not only a heavyweight in philosophy, but also knowable in social science.

I will here attempt to point out some of the main philosophical problems of Rickert's cultural sciences, i.e. social science.

2. A Few Chief Issues

I emphasize the following problems in a philosophy of culture sciences. First we have:

2.1. Ontology

The social sciences and the humanities inquire into humans and their cultures in

a wide sense. Speaking generally, it is matter of understanding *inner* and *outer* behaviour. What *matter* is to the natural sciences, the *event* is to the culture sciences. The event in time and space could be physical behaviour or movement. Or it could also be mind events. Or both, as in intentional behaviour.

The distinction between inner and outer behaviour is very relevant to the humanities. One finds here that concepts like end, means, ambition and plan are employed to create consistency among outer behaviours. One may refer to *goals* as a type of mind phenomena to separate zeal from actual behaviour and outcome.

Example 1: after the capture of Western Europe, Hitler wanted peace with England and planned the attack on Soviet Union. Rejected, his goal was to force England. This could only bring capitalism together with communism—two fronts war.

Moreover, Hitler dragged Germany into two hopeless Mussolini wars, binding armies in the South. The outcome was that Germany was not ready for a *Blitzkrieg* against Soviet. Hitler never grasped the strategy of *Blitzkrieg*, favouring *gattrition* war in the East. Given these inconsistency in behaviour, jumping the gun whenever and whenever, one must enquire into his psyche. Remember that Hitler came out of the Vienna gutter, being educated on very low quality stuff.

Example 2: the outer behaviour of king Gustavus Adolphus entering the 30 years war is well-known, but the driving goal? Protestantism? Economic incentives? Big power gaming? Territorial gains? Military dexterity and prowess?

In economics, revealed preferences are underlined, some regarding outer behaviour as merely manifestations of inner incentives. Sociology and political science deal with intentional behaviour—action, but what is an intention? In any case, intention seems fundamental in mind—how to study it is the topic of philosophy of mind like mental accounting.

Interestingly, Clausewitz' definition of “war” stressed the clash of wills with violent means. And Talcott Parsons emphasized the actors' orientations in his general sociology.

2.2. John Searle's Insight

No philosopher of mind or language has paralleled Searle in understanding the role of the mind in human civilisations. His book *The Construction of Social Reality* (Searle, 1997) argues convincingly that mind phenomena—beliefs and incentives—make up society together with outer behaviour. In collective behaviour, the mental components may be very complex, as above in the year long planning of *Barbarossa-Sinnzusammenhang* (Weber). Motive or reason is inner behaviour and it has been debated whether a reason could be a cause of outer behaviour (Davidson, 2001). In any case, means and ends are mental concepts to be distinguished from cause and effect or outcomes.

2.3. Epistemology

The ontology of inner outer behaviour has implications for knowledge, where

inner behaviour is often mentioned “subjectivity” and outer behaviour “objectivity”. This is rather confusing, as other minds are also subjects besides displaying outer behaviour.

Within the culture sciences, the knowledge search has a *Popperian* flavour. This means an emphasis on falsifiability and confirmation.

In the classic scheme one separates between logic and mathematics on the one hand, as well as synthetic science; and moreover in addition, the a-priori on the one hand and a-posteriori on the other hand. In social science and the humanities the *analytic* proposition—synthetic a-priori in Kantian *verbiage*—plays a negative role. In philosophy, one finds a huge debate on the combinations: synthetic a-priori or analytical proposition and necessary truths a-posteriori.

The culture sciences emphasize synthetic a-posteriori sentences, because they satisfy *Popper’s (1934)* falsifiability.

In fact, the culture sciences place a great emphasis upon evidence. This applies to causal analysis, using much statistics to model relationships among variables.

At the same time, *behaviourism* in various versions is rejected, because the study of inner behaviour matters. It has even been argued that economics is a “subjective” discipline dealing with wants and needs as well as value and expectations.

2.4. Value

As *Gunnar Myrdal (1958, 1970)* emphasized in his methodology for inquiry into political economy, key words in social theory are many times loaded with value. Take for instance “economic efficiency” or “democracy” and “justice”. By defining value loaded terms by means of a set of properties, one transfers the value to these properties.

Myrdal went so far as to state that value threatened objectivity in social enquiry.

2.5. Analyticity 1

The most cited article in philosophy today is *Quine’s (1953)* analysis of the sentence:

(S) All bachelors are unmarried men.

Using the correspondence notion of truth, a social scientist would hardly look for empirical evidence for (S). Instead one could claim that (S) is true analytically through:

- 1) Definition
- 2) Meaning
- 3) Set theory
- 4) Predicate logic

Quine (1953) denied that (S) was analytically true by rejecting all four interpretations. We will concentrate upon a), or i.e. that (S) is true by definition.

Language comprises definitions of terms, but there is hardly a one to one relation between word and meaning. If a dictionary D states that two expressions—

“bachelor” and “unmarried man” are synonyms, can one then make the substitution:

(S1) All unmarried men are unmarried?

(S1) is a tautology, but is (S) then analytically true? Dictionaries report facts about language usage, which is often ambiguous and changing.

Quine’s questioning of analytic sentences led to a wide debate about key concepts such as *synonymy* and *meaning*.

2.6. Necessity

Analytical sentences like “ice is frozen water” should be separated from sentences like “tigers are animals”, which is not a-priori, yet true in every possible world. This has no counterpart in the culture sciences. This is possible world semantics. Could it be applied to history: Hitler won the Second World War? No one has yet developed it.

The cultural sciences underline *contingency* in all the events. Consider for a moment the basic law of Darwinian biology: “All species survive due to their of capacity for adaptation in the struggle for life”. Is it synthetic a priori or analytic a posteriori? Does it matter?

2.7. Definitions of Words

The epistemological situation in the social sciences is different, as one relies often upon stipulative definition. Since the culture theories come in ordinary vocabulary—ambiguity and opaqueness, key terms need to be given an unambiguous meaning. Hence the use of stipulative definitions is important, but it also raises the problem of analyticity. Actually, analytic sentences take an important place in the social sciences.

3. Analyticity 2

The relevance of inquiries into the misuse of analytical sentences in the social sciences is clear, when focusing upon e.g. “democracy” and “polyarchy”.

Philosopher *A. Naess (1956)* together with Stein Rokkan inquired into the many uses of “democracy” in a famous study from 1956. They found many meanings, often contrary ones. What to do to reduce ambiguity and semantic confusion? The standard approach is to rely upon stipulation and then proceed with empirical enquiries. But it generates analytic propositions. Often theories in the social sciences have stipulations about key terms with following “analytical” propositions from stipulation, explicit or implicit. Revealing analytical sentences helps one determine the scope of a theory

Given the much use of stipulations in the social sciences, one must handle the value loaded words with care. Some terms like “democracy” is positively valued; and the positive value is transferred and results in a tautology.

3.1. Real Definition

“Polyarchy” as concept is found already with the *Ancients*. But *R. Dahl (1971)*

made it famous in his book from 1971. So what is a polyarchy today?

“Polyarchy” means to R. Dahl a political regime where we have:

- 1) Political accountability
- 2) Legislation by representative bodies
- 3) Free and fair elections
- 4) Bill of rights
- 5) Freedom of association
- 6) Freedom of the press

These institutions as conditions are necessary and sufficient for polyarchy, but not for democracy, states Dahl. Here, do we have a real definition or a theory capturing the essence of polyarchy? Or is it just another meaning of “democracy”?

3.2. Ideal Definition

To be more specific, Dahl stressed the positive value of the term “democracy”, which could be transferred to a democratic country. However, Dahl adhered to the view that democracy does not really exist anywhere.

Instead of pointing at a few democracies, Dahl looked upon democracy as an ideal nowhere realised. He thought about a definition like: Democracy = political equality, a regime “completely responsible to all its citizens”.

This is not merely ideal, but more seriously impractical. No system of institutions could deliver this, simply due to the zero sum nature of conflicts in politics.

Dahl argues that polyarchy as above is the closest one can get to the ideal of democracy. Thus, his main thesis that polyarchy is “democracy in development” is an analytical statement.

If the denotation of “democracy” targets the West European political systems, then the key connotation would compromise competition among party elites, participation of citizens and the rule of law.

4. Objectivity

Few scholars question the objective nature of the natural sciences. But what does this mean? The opposite is *subjectivity*, and it is often argued that the culture sciences are basically subjective.

The notion of subjectivity here is not ontological meaning inner behaviour. Nor is it a term for value loadedness, *i.e.* the often use of value loaded words.

Instead, the idea is that the knowing subject—the researcher—cannot fully account for his/her object. Thus subjectivity implies failing objectivity. Somehow the subject leaves his/her unmistakable mark on the object of study. Among historians it is often said that each generation looks upon events with different eyes. Social scientists underline the role of the different models when handling data.

One encounters this subjective theory of knowledge with [Leibniz \(2022\)](#) and [Mannheim](#) for instance besides of. “*Situationsgebundenheit*” was Mannheim’s term for subjectivism. [Weber \(1922\)](#) acknowledged that the researching subject

was active in relation to the object, but he still uphold objectivity as Popper's (2002) falsifiability.

4.1. Micro and Macro

The cultural sciences face a micro-macro problematic. The macro analysis targets a country or society as a whole. The social sciences employ statistics to uncover cross-sectional macro relationships. The humanities are much longitudinally focussed. What about the micro perspective?

Von Wright (1973), well-known professor of philosophy, analyses two basic modes of explanation: *nomothetic* and *teleological*. The former employs Hempel's well-known law-like *generalizing*, while the latter points at motive and intention or rationality. This distinction between a Galilean model and Aristotelian model is developed by means of von Wright's insights into deontic logic—the logic of norms or what one *OUGHT* to do.

Von Wright rejects the Hempel (1965) explanation model for. This amounts to a very strange claim about human actions.

Consider the following syllogism:

- 1) X intends to bring about P
- 2) X considers that he cannot bring about P unless he does A
- 3) Therefore X sets himself to do A.

This typical Wright explanation model is incorrect, as it does not explain the action A but the intention of P. The relationship between the intention to do A (inner behaviour) and actually doing A (outer behaviour) is probabilistic in Hempel's framework (inductive-probabilistic model).

4.2. Rationality and Morality

If a person P is in a situation S, is the reply to “what thing to do” unique? Von Wright must say Yes, but theories of decision making simply entail No. Game Theory may look for Nash equilibria, but complexity or ignorance soon set in. Mistakes abound. Probability may be hard to calculate. Strategy may call for less than rationality.

The culture sciences have to confront the problems of rationality or *reason* for acting.

Parfit (2022) inquires into “the thing to do” with reason as morality. The expression “thing to do” is both empirical (Wright) and normative (Toulmin, 1950; Barry, 1995).

Reasons and Persons offers a deep analysis, sometimes longish, of the moral aspects of rationality. Parfit (2022) aims to show that the simple version of rationality as enlightened egoism typical of economic man (woman) is wrong or misguided. He relies upon the standard 2 sided PD game, arguing that the Pareto inferior outcome violates rationality as avoiding self-defeating.

So be it! Like Hume and, Weber, I doubt that REASON is capable of delivery of morals by itself. Anyhow, Parfit adds a new solution concept besides individ-

ual rationality on the one hand and collective rationality on the other hand. This changes the entire game or interaction. The self-defeating strategy is cooperation actually.

Parfit argues that the PD game will have other solution than the self-defeating one. This requires rationality to comprise morality. Of course, this constitutes a key problem in politics, economics and ethics. Thus, for instance Barry 1995 defines the concept of justice as the thing that no one could reasonable reject/rationality as reasonably acceptable—circular definition? “Justice as impartiality” would be rejected by libertarians Hayek (1978) and Nozick (1974)—reasonably?

5. Conclusion

We find a few basic research issues in KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN, i.e. the humanities and social science. These problems are not much discussed in the philosophy of science. They include inner and outer behaviour, rationality and value. However they were penetrated by great Germans: Windelband (1894), Rickert and especially Weber around 1900. In philosophy of science the parallel between Wissenschaftslehre and Logik der Forschung has never been discussed.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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