Philosophy of Social Science: Course Outline/Lectures

There will be six lectures, given at 10 on Tuesdays in Weeks 1-3 and 5-7; there will be no lecture in Week 4.

These six lectures have a simple structure: the first two lectures introduce the subject by sketching some 19th Century arguments and their modern re-writings. The history begins with Mill and reactions from philosophers (Dilthey) and sociologists (Durkheim and to a degree Weber); it goes on to logical empiricists (Hempel and Nagel) and the unplaceable Popper. Naturalism of the sort defended by Mill, Hempel, and (up to a point) Popper was canonical in the anglophone world for forty years. It comes with an ideal history of scientific progress – whether inductive or by ‘conjecture and refutation.’ The underlying question is whether the social sciences are the natural sciences of the social world, so that the history of the successful physical sciences can be taken as the model for progress in social science. This recipe for progress is undermined by historians of science (Kuhn) who argue that the actual history of the most respected sciences is at odds with the recipe; it is further undermined by epistemological anarchists (Feyerabend) who maintain that all recipes are flawed. Lectures 3 to 6 turn to issues dividing social scientists as well as philosophers: hermeneutic analysis, holistic explanation, functionalism, and rational choice theory. The reading for the lectures is Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (eds), Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science (MIT, 1994, 5th printing, 2001); several of the lectures will rest heavily on arguments usefully reprinted there. Everything in it will be referred to as M&M, by part and/or chapter.

1. Naturalism Mark I and Its Critics (Causal Explanation; the Fact-Value Distinction; the Search for Laws; Geisteswissenschaften vs Naturewissenschaften)

Reading: Mill, A System of Logic, Books III (selectively) and VI (ditto)
Weber, Methodology of the Social Sciences, ed Shils and Finch (Free Press, 1949)

2. The Hypothetico-Deductive Conception of Explanation vs Epistemological Anarchism

Karl Popper, Conjecture and Refutation, ch 1
T.S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (2nd ed.)
Imre Lakatos & Paul Feyerabend, Against Method

3. Winchcraft and Witchcraft: Anti-Naturalism and Interpretive Social Science; the Hermeneutic Turn

Reading: Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science
4. Holistic Explanation and Methodological Individualism

Reading: Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* [the *ur*-text]

5. Functionalism: Left, Right, or Vacuous?

Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, ch 8

6. Rationalisation, Rationalism, and Rational Choice Theory

Donald Green & Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice*, (Yale UP, 1995)

Further Reading:
Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1994)

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