

Philosophy of the Social Sciences

Lectures

Michaelmas Term 2009, Fridays Weeks 2-7 9.15-10.45

Lecture Theatre, Social Studies Building, Manor Road

The objectives of these lectures are:

- To introduce students to the philosophical analysis of explanation.
 - To introduce philosophical analysis of relevant key concepts including theory, facts, values, cause, rationality, agency, interpretation, action.
 - To introduce the history of philosophical debates that underpin current controversies regarding social scientific explanation.
 - To introduce the philosophical analysis of methodologies including empiricism, positivism, realism, instrumentalism, functionalism, structuralism, interpretivism, phenomenology.

The sessions will consist of a one hour lecture. For those who have to submit coursework for this subject, and for any others who wish to stay, this will be followed by an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the issues.

(For students who have to submit coursework in this subject, there will be two classes for further study of the philosophy of explanation, and essay planning, in Hilary 2009).

Introductory and General Reading

Introductory

Alan Chalmers *What is this thing called science?* Milton Keynes, Open Univ Press, 1982
Hollis, Martin, *The Philosophy of Social Science: an introduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1994

General

Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behaviour: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Cambridge 2007.

Martin, Michael and McIntyre, Lee C, eds., *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, Cambridge, Mass MIT Press 1994

Alexander Rosenberg *Philosophy of Social Science* 3rd edn, Oxford, 2004

Ruben, David-Hillel, ed. 1993. *Explanation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ryan, Alan, ed. 1973. *The Philosophy of Social Explanation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

More Advanced

James Bohman *New Philosophy of Social Science: problems of indeterminacy* Polity 1991 intro + chs 1 and 2

Jon Elster *The Cement of Society* CUP 1989

Sandra Harding *The Science Question in Feminism* Milton Keynes, Open Univ Press, 1986, chs 2,3,8

Charles Taylor *Philosophy and the Sciences of Man* Cambridge 1985

Lecture 1. Week 2.

Explanation I - the deductive nomological model of scientific explanation

Problem: "All scientific explanations must be deductive; that means that the objects of scientific knowledge must be law governed; that means that the idea of a 'social science' is dubious"

J S Mill *The Logic of the Moral Sciences* esp ch 3

Max Weber *On the Methodology of the Social Sciences* (eds Shils and Finch) Glencoe Ill, 1949.

Karl Popper *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* esp chs 1,4,5; or *Objective Knowledge* esp chs 1,2; or *Conjectures and Refutations* esp chs 1,3,10,11

Carl Hempel *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* esp chs 9, 12; or ch I of David Hillel-Ruben (ed) *Explanation* Oxford Univ Press 1993

Lecture 2. Week 3

Explanation II - the realist critique of empiricist accounts of causal explanation

Problem: "Great philosophers have had the utmost difficulty in arriving at an operationalisable philosophical analysis of the difference between a genuine 'cause' and 'accidentally true generalisations' or simple empirical associations. Yet in social science we need to know whether one factor really is the cause of another."

David Hume *An Enquiry into Human Understanding* ...

Mackie, J.L. 1980. *The Cement of the Universe: a study of causation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Salmon, Wesley C. 1998. *Causality and Explanation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press or see chIII of Ruben (ed)

Nancy Cartwright *How the Laws of Physics Lie*

Jon Elster 'Mechanisms' in *Explaining Social Behaviour*

Lecture 3. Week 4

Explanation III - the interpretive critique of causal explanation in the social sciences

Problem: "An adequate explanation of an agent's behaviour or action must include reasons and understandings from the agent's point of view; reasons cannot be causes in the scientific sense; so there can be no conventionally scientific explanations of human actions."

Peter Winch *The Idea of a Social Science* 2nd edn including Preface

"Understanding a Primitive Society" in *Ethics and Action* Routledge 1972

Donald Davidson *Truth and Interpretation* esp section 'Language and Reality'

Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* I, ss 198 ff (on 'following a rule')

Alasdair MacIntyre "The Idea of a Social Science" in Alan Ryan (ed) *The Philosophy of Social Explanation*

Max Weber *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*

Jon Elster *Explaining Social Behaviour* esp chs 1 and 5.

Lecture 4, Week 5.

Scientific Theory I - how do we judge whether a theory is scientific?

J S Mill *The Logic of the Moral Sciences*

Karl Popper *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* esp chs 1,4,5; or *Objective Knowledge* esp chs 1,2; or *Conjectures and Refutations* esp chs 1,3,10,11

Thomas Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 3rd edn Chicago 1996 (1st edn 1962)

Peter Winch *The Idea of a Social Science* 2nd edn including Preface

Lecture 5, Week 6.

Scientific Theory II - what is a scientific theory? what is the relationship between scientific theory, scientific knowledge, scientific data, and reality?

Problem: *"No clear distinction can be drawn between 'theories' and 'observations' so the empirical testing of theories is impossible."*

Karl Popper *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* ch 3

Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* Chicago 1977

Berger, Peter, and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Searle, John R. 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Lecture 6. Week 7

Structure and Agency - decisions, actions, causes and explanations.

Problem: *"So-called scientific explanations of decision and action are based on models that bear as much resemblance to real world processes as a model railway does to a real railway."*

Milton Friedman 'The Methodology of Positive Economics' in Martin and McIntyre (eds).

Max Weber *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*

Donald Davidson 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'; 'Hempel on Explaining Actions' in *Essays on Actions and Events*

Charles Taylor "What is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Language*

Jon Elster *Explaining Social Behaviour*