

Scholarship as a Vocation: Reflections on the Past and Future of Social Science

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This essay seeks to expose readers from the social sciences to current debates in their fields, beyond the discussions of induction and deduction one learns about in a typical research methods course. It provides glimpses of social science from its dawn in 17th century empiricism, through the rise of post-positivism and antipositivism, to the infamous “science wars” in the 1990s, and expresses a hope for a broader and more inclusive future. Specifically, the paper compares the traditional positivist method of scientific inquiry to a phenomenological approach, and attempts to demonstrate the relevance of philosophical investigation in social science research.

Keywords: *antipositivism; philosophy of science; positivism; post-positivism; science wars*

*Intellectuals have the responsibility to adopt the cosmopolitan dream
of the ancient Stoics: in the megapolis of today,
we are the inheritors of all traditions.*

Julia Kristeva

Almost a century has passed since Max Weber delivered his famous speech “Science as a Vocation” at the Munich University in 1918. In it, he argues that both reliable work and imagination are required in order to advance scholarship, and that these two requirements are needed just as much in science, as they are in the practical life of business entrepreneurs (Weber, 1958). Weber notes that many of the best insights and hypotheses were the ideas of “dilettantes” who had the inspiration but lacked “a firm and reliable work procedure” to pursue these ideas further. He then proceeds to reject the notion that science is “free from presuppositions,” that is, that we have finally attained the ability to construct scientific knowledge that does not rest on assumptions lacking formal proof. Walking his listeners through a variety of scientific fields such as medicine, jurisprudence, sociology, history, political science, and cultural philosophy, Weber shows that although each discipline has devised clever ways to operationalize its concepts and justify its position, no research field can provide an answer to the question of *why* scientific work is worth being known (Weber, 1958).

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This is an example of a supposition that cannot be proved scientifically, and thus negates the “free of presuppositions” claim. Weber does offer a way out of this conundrum, however, by contending that such normative questions are best answered by philosophy. Building on Weber’s argument, this paper maintains that in addition to being helpful in probing normative and ethical supra-scientific questions in social science, philosophy is also indispensable for critically examining the presuppositions amenable to scientific justification (itself a product of philosophy), and also for nurturing the imagination of social scientists by stimulating them to think outside the bounds of possibility offered by the scientific method.

Social science disciplines rest on a set of foundational principles. Sometimes the foundation formed by these principles can be rather heterogenous, with different theories pulling in different directions. Over time, researchers and practitioners in a discipline may become so accustomed to the ways in which research is being done within the dominant framework that they cease to see the assumptions underpinning the foundation they are standing on. Conditional truth and reality bleed into each other to a point of little to no differentiation. Perhaps this process of normalization is necessary for the advancement of a theoretical field; little progress can be accomplished if we were to start examining every research question back at ground zero. Or maybe the way we train future researchers is simply not bringing awareness of the assumptions adopted by each field of scientific inquiry. Close examinations of the foundational principles responsible for the cultivation of specific ways of thinking about the world and approaching research, are often relegated to cursory discussions of the development of the scientific method in introductory research methods classes. Although they tend to become second nature for researchers, these principles are rarely put into question, and are instead taken as a given.

The Importance of Finding Your Theoretical Roots

One might say that far from being glossed over in intro-to-methods courses, philosophy of social science has naturally fallen within the purview of those best equipped to study it—the philosophers of science, and yet, considering that the totality of our research work determines the development of social science, what do we lose by not inquiring, at least out of curiosity, about the assumptions that allow our field to work? This paper is adamant about its claim that a social scientist not willing to delve deeper into the history of social science resembles a politician not interested in the history of politics; and such politicians are likely to repeat the mistakes of previous generations. A possible counterargument could be that keeping abreast of the latest research techniques and “hot topics” in one’s field can automatically serve as a guarding rail preventing one from falling into the traps and impasses of what history has

proved wrong, but this is equating social sciences with the hard sciences far too much. Van Heerikhuizen (2015) argues, for instance, that whereas the natural sciences develop through a process of discontinuity in which old truths are disproven, virtually, once and for all, and the history of the humanities is marked by a more continuous course whereby we keep grappling with similar questions, such as what is the good life, for millennia, the social sciences experience progress in a way that is a combination of continuity and discontinuity, and this ambivalence is precisely what makes them so conducive to creative theories and methodologies. It also means, however, that what is proved wrong today is less certain to be always, absolutely, wrong—relapses cannot be eliminated, and, more importantly—understanding current trends entails being well-versed in the long-term tradition of a field: It is hard to understand Pierre Bourdieu if you are unaware of the insights of Marx, Weber, Husserl, and Cassirer (Paulle, van Heerikhuizen, & Emirbayer, 2012). Progress is clearly being made in social science, but it has mostly been progress within one dominant paradigm, that of positivism. Beyond questions of what is right and wrong, there always remains the issue, rendered invisible when one becomes engulfed by a research framework, of what new ways of doing things in our fields there are and what questions we are not asking by subjugating our entire research programs to a single paradigm.

It is not coincidental that the field examining the succession of ideas in the social sciences is referred to as a “philosophy,” rather than a “history” of social science, for it does not deal merely with historical events, in terms of major discoveries and scientists, but rather with entire research paradigms and constitutions of the social world. A philosophical analysis of a social scientific theory also helps explain which questions are worth asking, according to this theory, and why. It is thus important to keep in mind that when one wants to embark on a journey to the origins of their discipline, they are effectively immersing themselves in a plethora of ways of thinking about the world. Given the crucial relevance of philosophy in making sense of the changes of paradigms about the social world, the divide between the social sciences and humanities of today becomes all the more peculiar.

Between the time of Aristotle and the birth of modern empiricism in the 17th century, philosophy was inseparable from any rigorous inquiry about nature or the social world. For centuries philosophy and science would go hand in hand, and in the 18th century, Kant, in his treatise “The Conflict of the Faculties,” would voice his concern over the impending schism in Academia between “lower” and “higher” disciplines; philosophy being considered a lower faculty, unlike law and medicine that were favored by the state. Kant rejected such categorizations because they wrongly ascribed an inferior status to the one discipline that was critical of the oppressive government and was not afraid to speak truth to power. A very similar schism is all too apparent today, when Business schools and Liberal Arts programs rarely interact, and when the mark of philosophy is often only felt when courses such as “business ethics” touch on the philosophical concerns only in passing. Indeed, issues of theory-building

are intricately connected to philosophy, but graduate students in social science seem to come to this conclusion only after frowning a great deal at the need to read about 17th century empiricists, or, God forbid, ancient sceptics. And yet, the indelible connection between modern science and philosophy, all the way back to its beginnings in antiquity, is an unshakable fact. The field of logic, one of the major philosophical branches, along with metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, is where thinking about inductive and deductive approaches to science began, and, in fact, where the scientific method was born, and out of it—the positivist movement. While philosophy has moved beyond positivism as a methodology, the sciences and social sciences, with post-positivism, are still paying homage to a 17th century philosophy when it comes to their ontological and epistemological foundational beliefs (Scotland, 2012), proving themselves to be a lot more continuous in their thinking than we might expect; and surprisingly more continuous than the humanities.

Problems with the Positivist Paradigm

Rudner (1966) contends that the problems of chief concern to the philosophy of social science are methodological ones, dealing not with the substance but with the logic of any social theory, which is precisely the philosophical position of positivism. This would mean then, that even within the philosophy of social science, there is privileging of a particular kind of philosophy, namely, on the knowledge and verification-related branches, such as epistemology and logic, rather than on the ones examining what theories are actually made of. As long as this holds true, researchers will mainly concern themselves with issues of testability and validation, and shy away from the normative problems their fields may exhibit. Being too focused on methodology, the *how*, takes us away from asking about the *who* and the *what* in social science. Who is the one doing the research, what implicit assumptions are they bringing to the research table, and what is it that they are trying to examine? Posing these questions may help us recognize our own situatedness and the dynamism of the phenomena we are investigating. Contrary to popular belief, although the big questions about existence, knowledge, truth, and virtue persist, philosophy has changed dramatically over its two-millennia long history, and is today brimming with numerous schools of thought, each with its own valuable insights and critical questions, such as existentialism, phenomenology, critical theory, structuralism and poststructuralism, among many others. Emerging research perspectives such as queer theory and intersectionality are on the rise in the humanities not due to a fashionable trend but because of the realization that no theory, no theoretician, no researcher, and no research subject is ever capable of completely identifying, let alone removing, all research biases, and that no system affects two individuals of different race, sex, gender, class, age, religion, culture, politics, ability, etc. in the exact same way.

Perhaps a major reason why the social sciences seem to be more interested in finding commonalities with the natural sciences as opposed to the humanities, aside from the obvious one that has to do with a desire to establish stronger scientific rigor in the social fields, is that all empirical sciences share a common logic of justification (Rudner, 1966). They share, so to speak, a similar grammar of logical rules about how to construct the sentences of scientific research. While this allows for greater understanding and improved communicability across the sciences, it also encourages critics from these disciplines to see the absence of the familiar grammar rules in other research streams as an automatic flaw. Priority has been given to pointing out differences (or rather, weaknesses) of other disciplines with regards to their methodologies and logics of justification (for example, Popper's dismissal of Freud's psychoanalysis as a science), rather than to the diversity surrounding different contexts of discovery. Instead of trying to prove where others went wrong in their conclusions, it would be far more fruitful to educate ourselves about the kinds of questions other disciplines ask, and how their considerations are missing in our own research visions. Nonetheless, rather than being completely unrelated, different areas of scholarship provide different angles of looking at the same phenomena.

Something needs to change in the social sciences, but maybe not as radically as someone such as Epstein (2015) would propose: by dethroning the human from the, in his view, overly anthropocentric system of inquiry in the social sciences, he suggests that social scientists will effectively wash their hands of the need to ever revise their narrow view of what humans are. Starting from the assumption of perfect rationality in economics, specifically rational choice theory, and relaxing it to its boundedly-rational status in behavioral science, or even adopting a "flexibly-bounded" rationality view (Marwala, 2013), we still have a long way to go to be able to incorporate the centuries worth of social observation conducted in fields such as sociology, anthropology, clinical psychology, and psychoanalysis. Along this way, social scientists will perhaps come to the realization philosophy has reached (at least as far back as Rousseau) that maybe there can be no totalizing, uniform way to describe humans that can parade as "human nature." The rational choice perspective, along with perspectives like transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1981), relies on the strong assumption that we know what the nature of human beings is—they are, straight out of Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), rationally calculating, antisocial, self-interested individuals seeking to satiate their appetites while being careful not to hurt those of others, lest they retaliate. There is no place for motivation higher than primitive self-interest in this paradigm, and while some may think it is appropriate for the study of business and management where profit is deemed to be the leading factor in decision-making, this is still too narrow a theoretical view to be able to explain such burgeoning phenomena like social enterprise, fair trade, and social movements in general. Granovetter (1985) confronts these limitations that social science has internalized to the point of not questioning any longer, and offers a way out of them with his concept of *embeddedness*

(Granovetter, 1985), and yet, somehow, the Hobbesian “war of all against all” view has survived and continues informing the majority of academic work in management and economics.

Hence, one can argue that, contra Epstein (2015), it is not anthropocentrism that is the problem of social science which contains the human element in its very name, but rather a bad *kind* of anthropocentrism, one that places a single individual in the center, namely, the social researcher, as an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent being, at the expense of communal ties and social embeddedness. The symptom exhibited by social science does call for philosophy as Epstein (2015) notes, but not for the kind of philosophy social science is already familiar with—the positivist strains of epistemology and logic. The branch social science has least been touched by, ethics, can help, since this is where most debates about the relationship between people take place. A way to overcome the grim state of mistaken anthropocentrism is to turn from the present egocentric paradigm of investigation to a sociocentric mode in which the observed subjects are given at least as much consideration as we give the research agendas we come up with on their behalf. This way, subjects will not be locked in the narrow frameworks of our preconceived notions and will actually enable us to see the full scope of their agency which has the potential to enrich our research tremendously. There has been a push in leadership studies, for instance, for a relational perspective in the interaction between leader and follower (Uhl-Bien, 2006), but this relationality can and should also be applied to the relationship between researcher and research subjects. The way to do this will greatly differ, depending on the particular social science discipline, of course, and will probably not be easy for social psychologists, focused on maintaining maximum control over lab experiments. In clinical work, however, this is doable, and, in fact, already being implemented, for example in relational psychotherapy (DeYoung, 2003). Management studies are just starting to discover that *intersubjectivity*, or the relations one has with other people, matters—something philosophers have been pointing out at least since Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*.

Alternatives to Positivism

It is not ignorance in and of itself that hampers the dialogue between social science and philosophy, but rather prejudice. For if we simply didn’t know about a philosophical insight that is applicable to, for example, sociology, it would not be a problem to elaborate on the issue further. If, however, the research paradigm we were trained in actively rejected certain historical figures or ideas, seeing their value would be much harder, let alone incorporating them in our own research. Such is the case with Freud in psychology and Marx in sociology. Whereas the labor theory of value may be seen by some modern-day economic theorists as obsolete, Marx has certainly

left a much bigger mark on the history of social science than this single facet of his voluminous work. By combining economics, philosophy, and history, he has become one of the principle moulders of social thought (Crotty, 1998) and the founder of modern social research (Szelényi, 2009), with his rigorous social analysis and the power of the conclusions he drew from it. Among the most powerful social diagnoses he gave were the following two: 1) that material life determines consciousness, and not the other way around, as previously thought; and 2) that the dominant ideas of every epoch stem from the ruling class. Whether one believes these claims to still hold true today or not, does not take away from the importance of the paradigm-shifting value of his research. After all, many theories sprung as a reaction to it, which is, albeit a dangerous, but nonetheless effective way to advance a field of research. Szelényi (2009), for example, sees in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* an attack on traditional positivism. He points to Thesis 2 which argues that truth is not speculative but practical, and suggests that whereas the verificationist branch of positivism (which was the only one present at Marx's time; Popper's falsificationist take on positivism was not developed until 1963) is mainly concerned with the process of verification, which entails having the truth in order to verify it, the philosophy of praxis (Gramsci's name for Marx's methodology) holds that truth is not simply reflection but rather interaction between the researcher and the examined phenomena (Szelényi, 2009). In other words, in order to capture the truth, a positivist is assuming that it is fixed, which in turn excludes the possibility for change and is thus overly deterministic. Perhaps an even more encompassing part of Marx's legacy in social science is the critical stance he assumes not just vis-à-vis positivism but about society in general. This departure from the positivist paradigm has prompted the birth of antipositivism which is today especially prevalent in qualitative research methodologies, particularly in sociology, such as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory.

Choosing one of the numerous research paradigms that exist today is not the only option social scientists have in front of them. At least as far back as the late 70's, researchers were already proposing ways to combine two seemingly incompatible perspectives in order to amplify the strengths and alleviate the weaknesses of each. Rosen (1978) offers one such solution when it comes to positivism and phenomenology. Given that the goal of social science is social explanation which seeks to elucidate social change, only a combination of the two approaches can reliably bring knowledge, since the causal explanation sought by positive science needs to be complemented by the empathetic one phenomenology can offer (Rosen, 1978). Here, much like in Szelényi's (2009) reading of Marx, the distinction between positivism and phenomenology rests on the qualitative difference between the two paradigms, the former being seen as using objectification and reduction to arrive at a certain truth, whereas the latter relies on lived experience and hermeneutics while rejecting the positivist notion of an objective observer and thus embodying an antipositivist stance. The differences between the two social scientific approaches can be visualized through their application to the

observation of phenomena (Fig. 1).

Positivist Paradigm:

[experience = that which is *given* prior to analysis: *Data*]



Phenomenological Paradigm:

[experience = that which is *taken* in analysis: *Capta*]



Fig. 1: Positivist vs. phenomenological research paradigm; adapted from Lanigan (1994) and Martinez (2015)

A positivist research approach proceeds linearly, from the researcher (experiencer) who experiences the experiences of their research subjects but ultimately records those primordial experiences of the subjects rather than the researcher’s own experiences of them, thereby forming a collection of *data*. Phenomenology, on the other hand, starts with the *noema*, “what” was experienced; it then moves to the “how” of experiencing, the *noesis*, or modality of experience, and only then reaches the experiencer that does the experiencing—the “person” who is, however, always intersubjectively connected to its group or community (Martinez, 2011). Unlike the data (what is thought) in positivist thinking, phenomenology gathers *capta*, or what is lived (Lanigan, 1994). The phenomenological perspective prevents researchers from nurturing the illusion of having grasped a phenomenon, and helps us realize that what social scientific inquiry ultimately captures is not the phenomenon itself, but rather its manifestations, and that the research questions we ask invariably transform the ways in which we look for and see these manifestations.

Science Wars

More generally, the difference between the positivist and post-positivist paradigm on one hand, and antipositivism, encompassing perspectives such as phenomenology, existentialism, and critical theory, on the other, can be seen as the opposition between causal explanation and interpretive explanation. In the case of the former, researchers seek not just to explain or describe phenomena, but to establish concrete causal relationship, whereas the latter is highly skeptical of transposing the

scientific method from the natural sciences onto the social ones, and thus argues for a different research paradigm in social science, one that employs in its study of society an interpretive, rather than a scientific method, aiming at description instead of prediction. This theoretical mode of interpretation often assumes a *critical* bent, culminating in the critique of society that was initiated by Marx and Freud, continued by Frankfurt School theoreticians like Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin, who then brought its tradition to the New School for Social Research in New York, after fleeing Nazi persecution during World War II. A French counterpart of this fervent intellectual movement was simultaneously coming into being in the face of post-structuralism and the work of Foucault and Derrida. Together, these radical theoretical perspectives have come to be known in academic circles as “postmodernist” criticism. Although philosophy of social science syllabi rarely, if ever, touch on this aspect of social science history, many scientists and social scientists are nonetheless aware of it, so much so that the last decade of the 21st century was marked by what came to be known as the “science wars” waged by the camp of scientific realists, mostly in the natural sciences, against the postmodernist critics they considered to be unforgivable relativists (Gould, 2000). One of the most memorable events during this series of philippics was the so-called “Sokal affair,” the 1996 publication of “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” a hoax article by physicist Alan Sokal in one of the most prominent cultural studies journals, *Social Text* (Guillory, 2002). In a revelatory article in *Lingua Franca*, called “A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies,” Sokal explains that by purposely expressing doubt about the existence of an external world and the ability of science to obtain knowledge of it, and by presenting physical reality as a “social and linguistic construct” in the hoax paper, he tried to see whether a leading journal in postmodernism would publish something that “a) sounded good and b) flattered the editors’ ideological preconceptions” (Sokal, 1996). At first glance, Sokal seems to have succeeded in duping the editorial board and getting an article published whose ideas “few scientists or mathematicians could possibly take seriously” (Sokal, 1996). While we cannot speculate about the motives behind this publication on either side of the “conflict,” it is clear that Sokal believed he had finally accomplished what scientists like Norman Levitt had been trying to do for years—expose the blatant anti-science of the humanities and prove their utter uselessness. Regardless of this moment in recent history, the humanities have not disappeared, nor lost credibility in the circles sympathetic to their projects. In a way, wars among academic disciplines like this one by no means resemble altercations between countries or any other political or military conflict; for while in the case of the latter, a negotiation process is bound to take place sooner or later, when it comes to the divide between positivist sciences and antipositivist academic factions, all possibilities for diplomacy are blocked by the striking inability of the quarrelling parties to negotiate. Negotiation is not just about making concessions and compromising part of your own interests in order to gain something like a conflict-

free future (a very Hobbesian idea, by the way); negotiation is also about trying to understand what the other party wants and realizing that it may not necessarily want your demise; that perhaps it wants something not very different from what you yourself want and that together, you can attain it more easily. Progress can be achieved in this movement from conflict to cooperation. At least this is the rational way of thinking about it, but since we already noted how needlessly demanding the wish to constitute human beings with the idea that they possess at least a certain amount of rationality at all times is, let the example of the science wars serve as an epitome of the impossible rationality argument: if rationality were truly the one distinguishing mark of humanity, you would expect to see a lot of it in academia, and yet the systems different disciplines form and envelop themselves in, appear to function in a rather irrational way. For, if rationality were the order of the day, the hard sciences and humanities would at least try to understand what the other side is all about and learn from each other. What the Sokal hoax accomplished, if anything, was an exacerbation of the animosity between the two camps; it had no net gain to show for the whole ordeal, since it hardly brought about any meaningful change of mind in someone convinced by the interpretive method. Perhaps the least fortunate aspect of the Sokal story is the fact that Sokal wanted to dismantle “the master’s house with the master’s tools” while never bothering to actually understand these tools in the first place, and was thus only working with their faded shadows. He did precisely what this paper is arguing that we, as scholars, need to transcend—he gave in to the all too common temptation of criticizing the “how” of another discipline by questioning its methods, rather than by trying to grasp the “why” of its existence, as Weber might say. The ethos of the science wars goes beyond what can be scientifically proven or disproven; it is a normative question that cannot be answered via the scientific method, although scientists tirelessly want to demonstrate otherwise, and believe their attempts successful, when in fact they have not even asked the right question in order to obtain a remotely correct answer. The social sciences are caught up between these science wars, perhaps better called “academia’s impossible communication,” for there can hardly be any direct interaction when neither discipline is willing to learn the other’s language, unless it is just for show, Sokal-style. Far from being a disadvantage, the strategic location of the social sciences at the crossroads between (post)-positivism and antipositivism enables them to learn from an infinite number of theoretical traditions.

Although the scales are tipped in favor of the hard sciences as a role model for social science right now, some of the most intriguing work is being done in conversation with the oldest philosophical traditions, whether we realize it or not. This is the case, for instance, with the “inverted U,” or the curvilinear relationship between many social entities such as human traits and performance (Grant & Schwartz, 2011). In essence, it suggests that positive phenomena are good in moderation, and that after some critical threshold, they start having a negative effect. In their seminal paper, “Too Much of a Good Thing: The Challenge and Opportunity of the Inverted U,” Grant and Schwartz

(2011) trace this idea back to Aristotle's concept of the golden mean, according to which, one should always aim for the middle between two extremes in order to avoid both states of deficiency (when there is too little of a virtue present, e.g. courage would become cowardice) and states of excess (in high doses, courage can turn into recklessness). The reconsideration of Aristotle's theory of virtue "represents an opportunity for psychologists to answer fundamental questions about the limits of positive experiences" (Grant & Schwartz, 2011), but one can see how similar patterns can be found in other social sciences as well, such as sociology, education, and management studies (Lee, Yun, & Srivastava, 2013; Bowman, 2013).

While social science tirelessly tries to emulate the natural sciences, they are progressively turning their gaze toward to something social science disciplines have never ceased to analyze: the market. The shift of academic science from the logic of science (science has an intrinsic value, regardless of its applicability to society) to market logics (the value of science is measured by its market valuation) is now an indisputable fact (Berman, 2011). Berman (2011) paints a detailed picture of the "battle for insulin production" among biotech giants like Genentech and Biogen, the patent-or-perish mentality at research universities, and the creation of university-industry research centers, to alert us to the profound changes taking place in scientific domains such as the biosciences. While scholars in management and sociology are seeking to increase the scientific rigor of their research, biochemistry professors are becoming start-up entrepreneurs. This is to say that by the time social science reaches the coveted realm of pure scientific research, there might not be any hard sciences left there to greet it, because they will have "descended" down to where social science started from—the land of mortal humans, with all their unscientific imperfections.

Tips for Research (Re-)Orientations

It is true that a rigorous post-positivist can look at the antipositivist critiques of the positivist research paradigm, some of which were outlined here, and brush them aside by assuring herself that post-positivism has emerged precisely as an attempt to address such weaknesses. After all, concepts such as Platt's (1964) strong inference model for devising several alternative hypotheses as opposed to relying on the veracity of a single one, and the garbage can decision process pioneered by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972), challenge classical positivism's neat, linear, unidirectional mode of research, not to mention even more radical perspectives such as Locke's (1968) goal-setting theory. These alternatives are, however, still operating within a positivist-informed way of thinking that does not change the fundamental mechanism of doing research but only slightly tweaks it while remaining true to the general ethos of positivism. Such methods propose ways to tackle the problems of causality but they are not likely to ask what else might be there that could be just as important as proving

a causal relationship. Free of the obsessive compulsion to prove causality, antipositivism opens up a horizon for asking about the *meaning* of an organization; about the multilayeredness of relationships in it that involve living and breathing human beings, and not simply flat images of employees and employers. This is not to say that progress within post-positivism is futile, on the contrary; it just suggests that such progress does not constitute a radical break with naïve empiricism but a gradual improvement of it, whereas antipositivism is a de facto new *orientation* within social science that enables researchers to ask new questions and see new phenomena.

Returning to the issue of scholarship as a vocation, it should be noted that the research and theory-related classes one takes over the course of her graduate program should by no means represent the entirety of an aspiring researcher's engagement with theory and methods. They are meant, rather, as an introduction to these fields and young researchers should take it upon themselves to broaden their horizons. This happens naturally in the process of working as a research assistant and observing the research and theoretical predilections of the scholars we work with. It also takes place every time we read an inspiring article, but there are more proactive ways to stimulate this broadening of horizons, depending on one's personal preference. If we would like to approach the question of the foundations of our discipline historically, for example, we could find informative books, papers, or even online courses on the subject. Let us take for instance the philosophy of social science. Introductory courses giving an overview of the topic can be found online for free. An interesting idea is to simply look for publicly-available syllabi from such courses and compare the different approaches used in them. Are the topics arranged historically or thematically? Does the course provide a European, a North-American, or some other perspective? What is its center of gravity in terms of key thinkers or problems? What are the assigned readings and the discussion questions associated with them? After going through several syllabi, even without much background in the area, we can start forming an idea about the dominant bodies of thought informing this particular research domain, the key figures in it, as well as the fundamental issues at stake. It is important not to take any single syllabus, book, or course as the ultimate authority on the question, and looking at several sources can help reinforce the idea of plurality and demonstrate different avenues for critically questioning the underlying assumptions of each scholar. More diversity will also tremendously aid us in visualizing the developments in our academic area of interest and understand what some of the points of contention are. When it comes to the philosophy of social science, a list such as this one could be a good way to start examining the various ideas behind each position:

Full vs. partial formalization

Particularism vs. nominalism

Analytical vs. empirical vs. synthetic statements

Formal vs. factual science

Realism vs. conventionalism vs. anti-realism in science
Rational forecast/predictive statements vs. descriptive/interpretative statements
Verification vs. falsification in positivism
Positivism vs. postpositivism vs. antipositivism
Methodological individualism vs. collectivism/holism
Causal vs. empathetic explanation
Verification vs. critical observation

(An inexhaustive list of the debates in social science)

From this starting point, we can delve into each debate and try to trace its origins, as well as weigh the arguments on each side and form our own opinion about them. The more we read, the more the list will grow, and this is fine, even desirable—this way, we may actually be inspired to take one or more debates and try to address them through our own knowledge, while continuing to build up inspiration for the scholarly work ahead of us.

Conclusion

What social science is after, in the words of Kristeva (1996), is “the human enigma,” and since humanity is always in a “state of transit: between biology and meaning, the past and the future, pleasure and the absurd,” we, as social scientists, are contemplating its “instability, movement, and rebirth” (Kristeva, 1996, p. 265). An antipositivist view denies that conducting research is merely about recording data as impartial, invisible onlookers; instead, it holds that each study changes something, which necessitates a concern with ethical, and not just epistemological, issues. We enact change, whether we like it or not; if not by consciously modifying a process, then at least by offering a possibility for questioning it. What writer Andrew Solomon says about traveling, that it is both a window and a mirror, can also be said of research—it reveals something, but it also reflects a great deal.

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