

What is Social Science Research? Introduction to Philosophy and Methodology

Dr. Robert Adcock (adcock@american.edu)

May 9-11, 2016

9:00am – 4:30pm

Outline

This workshop is a broad survey of epistemological, ontological, and methodological issues relevant to knowledge production in the social sciences. The workshop has three overlapping objectives:

- To provide you with a grounding in these issues as they are conceptualized and debated by philosophers, social theorists, and intellectuals more generally
- To introduce some of the ways in which these issues have been incorporated (all too often incompletely or inaccurately) into the social sciences
- To promote reflection on how these issues relate to practices of empirical research

This is neither a technical research design nor a proposal writing class, but is pitched at a more philosophical level. As we proceed through the workshop, however, you should come to appreciate the consequences of philosophical debates for the design and conduct of empirical research in the social sciences. You are encouraged to approach this workshop as an opportunity to think critically, creatively, and expansively about the status of social scientific knowledge, both that which you have produced and/or will produce, and that produced by others.

The social sciences have long been concerned with the epistemic status of their claims. Unlike in the natural sciences, where a clear record of practical success tends to make the exploration of such philosophical issues a tangential endeavour, in the social sciences there is an important and evident relation between differences in the philosophies (whether explicit or implicit) of science held by researchers and the kinds of social-scientific work they produce. This workshop provides a pluralistic framework for identifying and analyzing philosophical positions, their assumptions, and their methodological implications for the ways that social science research is conducted and judged. While far from an exhaustive survey, the workshop offers a chance to engage philosophical topics of recurring relevance to the conduct of social science, the methodological training of new social scientists, and efforts to justify and advance the aspirations of many social scientists to win a share of the public attention and support natural scientists routinely receive, and the aspirations of some to contribute through their social scientific work to the critical transformation of society.

The workshop takes as a baseline the survey of philosophical issues, typology of alternative stances, and call for methodological pluralism advanced in Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics*. Chapters of Jackson's book are paired with accompanying readings of two kinds: 1) selected texts from philosophers; 2) selected texts from other political and social scientists so we can better identify and evaluate what is most distinctive about Jackson's own arguments. The workshop sessions will be seminars that combine short framing presentations

by the instructor with extensive discussion. The goal is not only to help participants grasp Jackson's terminology and arguments, but also to spur them to reflect on and articulate their own philosophical premises and commitments, which may well diverge to a greater or lesser extent from Jackson's.

Schedule of Sessions

The readings for each session are listed in the order I recommend reading them. Students will get the most from the workshop if they do all or at the least bulk of reading in advance, take notes in doing so, and then use those notes to prepare in the evenings for the next day's class.

Day 1. Monday, May 9

Morning Session. The Science Question and Jackson's Fourfold Typology 9.00-12.00

Weber, Max. 2004/1917. "The Vocation of Science." In *The Essential Weber*, ed. Sam Whimster (New York: Routledge), 270-87.

Keohane, Robert. 2009. "Political Science as a Vocation." *PS* 42, no. 2: 359-63.

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, Chap. 1-2.

Afternoon Session. Neo-Positivism 1.30-4.30

Popper, Karl. 1968/62. "Science: Conjectures and Refutations." Chap. I (§I-IX) of *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row).

Hempel, Carl G. 1942. "The Function of General Laws in History." *Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2: 35-48.

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, Chap. 3.

Day 2. Tuesday, May 10

Morning Session. Critical Realism and Scientific Realism 9.00-12.00

Bhaskar, Roy. 1978. "On the Possibility of Social Scientific Knowledge and the Limits of Naturalism." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 8, no. 1: 1-28.

Wendt, Alexander and Ian Shapiro. 1997. "The Misunderstood Promise of Realist Social Theory." In *Contemporary Empirical Political Theory*, ed. Kristen Renwick Monroe (Berkeley: University of California Press), 166-87.

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, Chap. 4.

Afternoon Session. Analyticism and Max Weber 1.30-4.30

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, Chap. 5.

Ringer, *Max Weber's Methodology*, Introduction, Chaps. 3-4.

Day 3. Wednesday, May 11

Morning Session. The Critical Tradition and Reflexivity 9.00-12.00

Popper, "The Logic of the Social Sciences," *The Positivist Dispute*, 87-104.

Adorno, "On the Logic of the Social Sciences," *The Positivist Dispute*, 105-122.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. "For a Scholarship with Commitment." *Profession* (2000) 40-45.

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, Chap. 6.

Afternoon Session. Methodological Pluralism? 1.30-4.30

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, Chap. 7.

Bevir, Mark. 2008. "Meta-Methodology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, eds. Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, & David Collier (New York, Oxford UP), 48-70.

Feyerabend, Paul. 1988/75. "How to Defend Society Against Science." In *Introductory Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, eds. E. D. Klemke, Robert Hollinger, and A. David Kline (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 34-44.

Required Reading List (find these readings on course reserve*: <http://reserves.concordia.ca/>)

Students are expected to purchase (or borrow for the period of the workshop) a copy, either hard or electronic, of Jackson's book, which we will read in its entirety. I give publication information for the first edition, but a second edition is scheduled to appear this April. Given that availability may dictate which edition you can access, I will be prepared for students to use either edition.

Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. 2010. *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics*. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 0415776279

There are also two books from which we will read two or more chapters, and which students may hence wish to purchase or borrow copies of.

Adorno, Theodor, et al. 1976/69. *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*. New York: Harper & Row. ISBN: 0613118965

Ringer, Fritz. 1997. *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. ISBN: 0674001834.

The remaining readings are articles or single chapters, listed alphabetically by author below with full citation information so you can locate them. If, however, you find one or another reading to be unavailable to you, email and let me know.

Bevir, Mark. 2008. "Meta-Methodology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, eds. Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, & David Collier (New York, Oxford UP), 48-70.

Bhaskar, Roy. 1978. "On the Possibility of Social Scientific Knowledge and the Limits of Naturalism." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 8, no. 1: 1-28.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. "For a Scholarship with Commitment." *Profession* (2000) 40-45.

Feyerabend, Paul. 1988/75. "How to Defend Society Against Science." In *Introductory Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, eds. E. D. Klemke, Robert Hollinger, and A. David Kline (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 34-44.

Hempel, Carl G. 1942. "The Function of General Laws in History." *Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2: 35-48.

Keohane, Robert. 2009. "Political Science as a Vocation." *PS* 42, no. 2: 359-63.

Popper, Karl. 1968/62. "Science: Conjectures and Refutations." Chap. I (§I-IX) of *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row).

Weber, Max. 2004/1917. "The Vocation of Science." In *The Essential Weber*, ed. Sam Whimster (New York: Routledge), 270-87.

Wendt, Alexander and Ian Shapiro. 1997. "The Misunderstood Promise of Realist Social Theory." In *Contemporary Empirical Political Theory*, ed. Kristen Renwick Monroe (Berkeley: University of California Press), 166-87.

*If you are registered for non-credit and are unable to locate the readings, please contact us at wssr@concordia.ca or contact Dr. Adcock directly at adcock@american.edu