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How did you get interested in the philosophical aspects of the social sciences?

I was corrupted from the start. I studied PPE (philosophy, politics and economics) as an undergraduate at Oxford. At Balliol College, where I studied, philosophy was what gave the whole course intellectual coherence—perhaps because you could still study all three to quite a high level without much technical expertise, and thus spend time reflecting on conceptual issues and basic presuppositions. One of my economics tutors, Paul Streeten, was intensely interested in questions about values and objectivity in economic theorizing (and the writings on these themes by the Swedish sociologist-economist Gunnar Myrdal, which he edited [Myrdal 1958]). The other economics tutor, Thomas Balogh, was consumed by hatred of neo-classical economics and so challenged us to explain what was wrong with the orthodox textbooks (notably Paul Samuelson's *Economics*) and other mainstream writings that he made us read. In politics we read American political scientists and democratic theorists writing, in celebratory vein, about 'pluralist' democracy in the United States. Their supposedly objective findings and conclusions seemed to betray a distinct ideological complacency which, I already suspected, stemmed from conceptual and methodological choices—a suspicion I later elaborated in my *Power: a Radical View* (Lukes 1974).My first philosophy tutor (at the age of seventeen) was Charles Taylor, who was soon to write his first book *The Explanation of Behaviour* (Taylor 1964), criticizing behaviorist psychology. Another major presence was Sir Isaiah Berlin, Professor of Social and Political Theory. One of his compelling themes was the celebration of imaginative empathy in the interpretation of cultures in thinkers such as Vico

and Herder and an implicit critique of scientism and 'positivist' social science. (He always thus regarded sociology). Another, of course, was his critique of theories of inevitability in philosophies of history.

As I moved into graduate work in the early 1960s, sociology was livening up and in the air, even the Oxford air, though I went to the LSE to Tom Bottomore's seminars to learn about it. I soon decided to write a doctoral thesis on Emile Durkheim, which I did under the supervision of the great social anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard. What decided me to do so was my excitement at reading Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* in part because of its and his sociological slant on a whole range of recognizably philosophical questions, and not least its bold, if misconceived, attempt to offer a sociological alternative to Kant by advancing a sociological account of the fundamental categories of thought. Durkheim was, of course, himself a philosopher-turned-sociologist but the philosophy from which he turned lacked rigor and indispensable tools that twentieth-century philosophers and logicians were to bring. (John Searle has recently made this observation (Searle 2006), and on this point I agree with him. More about this below). Working through the corpus of Durkheim's writings I deployed analytical philosophical distinctions and arguments to clarify my understanding of his ideas and to display their conceptual architecture.

I also read the early writings of Ernest Gellner—*Words and Things* and *Thought and Change* (about which I published a shamefully unappreciative review) and I was intrigued by his sociologically challenging essay 'Concepts and Society' (Gellner 1962) about the role of contradictory ideas in social life. I liked his sardonic critique of the rather self-satisfied and complacent 'linguistic philosophy' of the time but knew that he seriously underrated its strengths and was always absurdly unappreciative of Wittgentstein. (Despite my review, we subsequently became warm friends and co-editors of the *European Journal of Sociology,* along with Bottomore, Raymond Aron and Ralf Dahrendorf). And I was drawn into the wide-ranging and still continuing so-called 'rationality debate' (Wilson 1970), about whether there could be alternative, culturally-based standards of rationality, a debate initiated by Peter Winch's book *The Idea of Social Science* (Winch 1958) and his remarkable article 'Understanding a Primitive Society' (Winch 1964). This interest developed partly through my increasing interaction with the Oxford social anthropologists but above

all because of my friendship and intellectual collaboration with the wonderful Martin Hollis, whose pure and extreme rationalism provoked me, though we always shared an antipathy to relativism and a futile determination to put it to rest. Our engagement in the rationality debate led to co-teaching seminars (with Taylor and my philosophy of science colleague Bill Newton Smith) and eventually co-editing *Rationality and Relativism* (Hollis and Lukes 1982).And in those early years the inspirational Alasdair MacIntyre had arrived in Oxford and generously invited me, while I was still a mere graduate student, to co-teach a class on philosophy of the social sciences, at which I presented a paper, soon published in the *British Journal of Sociology*, on methodological individualism (Lukes 1966). By then it was already clear to me that there was a range of philosophical questions to which the work of social scientists, classical and contemporary, was of central significance, often putting them into a new light and raising new, often philosophical questions unasked by social scientifically innocent or ignorant philosophers. Yet, as I have indicated, I was no less impressed by the contribution analytic philosophy could make by rendering far more precise social scientific claims and ideas—as exemplified in my good friend G. A. Cohen's masterly *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Cohen 1978), which surpassed all previous writings on historical materialism, offering extremely fine-grained accounts of functional explanation, of how one can distinguish between social and material facts, and of much else besides that is of both philosophical and sociological interest.

Which social sciences do you consider particularly interesting or challenging from a philosophical point of view?

My difficulty in answering this question arises from being unable to identify 'a philosophical point of view.' If there is such a point of view, I doubt that I possess it. What I do think is that one can view all the social sciences philosophically, that is, in a philosophical way. What does that mean? Perhaps that one can probe their presuppositions, elicit their methodological commitments, identify their 'priors' and so forth. One can analyze the complex causal structures that their explanations posit, identifying which are the relevant counterfactuals that they require, distinguishing spurious from explanatory correlations, and the like. But these, surely, are all tasks that are themselves internal to the social scientific enterprise itself: what theoretically minded and skilled social scientists

should be doing themselves anyway. So what kinds of questions, if any, are distinctly philosophical questions?

Negatively, perhaps we can say that they are questions the pursuit of which goes beyond or bypasses the explication or defense of some particular explanatory approach (which may well involve the criticism of alternative approaches). Positively, perhaps we can say that they are questions that raise some perennial puzzle that needs to be solved by practicing social scientists and that any given such approach will take to be solved in one or another way. Here are some examples of such puzzles. How are we to understand collective agency? What distinguishes social facts? What constitutes the meaningfulness of human action? Are their non-physical laws? Are the best or proper explanations reductionist? How are we to make sense of contingency in social life? Are there limits to our knowledge of social and economic processes? Is all knowledge local knowledge? In what does human well-being consist? What is it to be rational? Are there alternative criteria of rationality? And so on.

I suggest that those who assume one or another answer to questions such as these, in elaborating or defending some explanatory approach stand on this side of the social science/philosophy boundary (if there has to be one), while those who pursue such questions because they find them intrinsically interesting and important stand on the other side. Some specific examples will perhaps make my point. On this side of the line I would place, for instance, Jon Elster's defense of methodological individualism, his critique of functionalist explanation and his advocacy of explanation in terms of social mechanisms, James Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory* (Coleman 1989), which sets out, with numerous examples, ways in which rational choice models can explain social phenomena and Clifford Geertz's elaboration of what is involved in 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) and his defense of 'anti-anti relativism' (Geertz 1984). On the other side I would place John Searle's account of social institutional facts, as epistemically objective while containing ontologically subjective elements essential to their existence, Peter Winch's *The Idea of Social Science* (Winch 1958), which offers an account of meaningful behavior that sharply distinguishes social from natural science, and Amartya Sen's explorations of alternative conceptions of rationality and freedom and his account of what constitutes well-being in terms of functionings and capabilities. Thinkers of the former kind are concerned to advance and defend a particular research program

to which they are committed. They are, typically, impatient of and bored, even irritated by questions such as those above. To thinkers of the latter kind such questions are meat and drink. (Some, a very few, such as Sen, are equally at home on both sides of the dividing line).Thus Searle is concerned with social ontology because he aims to identify, as a philosophical enterprise, the distinguishing features of human social reality in order to show how this fits into the one world that consists entirely of physical particles in fields of force and this leads him to reject theories which postulate further realities. Winch sought to develop what he took to be a Wittgensteinian approach to the understanding of social life by focusing on what is involved in 'following a rule.' And Sen has explored the questions indicated by advancing ideas that offer a more realistic way of thinking about and dealing with poverty and inequality. And so he challenges prevailing ethical theories, such as utilitarianism, notably the assumption that individuals make rational utilitarian choices about their own welfare, and the Rawlsian theory of justice, notably its misdirected focus on 'primary goods.'

So I answer that all the social sciences raise interesting, challenging and problematic philosophical issues and that I find those just cited particularly so, and particular the last.

How do you conceive of the relation between the social sciences and the natural sciences?

I don't think I have anything new to add to the old debate about the relation between the social and the natural sciences that has rumbled on ever since August Comte invented Positivism, and so I shall largely cite with approval the arguments of others with whom I agree. I do think that all the interesting positions lie in the central region of the continuum that stretches between the extremes of undifferentiated unity, on the one hand, and radical dualism, on the other—that is within the range of views that combine, in different ways, what is common as *science* with what is divergent because *social.* In my view, the former must include the commitment to seeking rigorous epistemic objectivity and the latter must include recognition of ontological subjectivity accessible in its distinctly human form through mutually accessible languages (alongside the impossibility of exact replicability and of isolating closed systems through experiment).

In social science the pursuit of epistemic objectivity faces distinctive challenges of which I will here single out one that interests

me. I refer to what is often, with a nod to Weber, called the issue of 'value-relevance' in social scientific explanation, namely the role of what Weber called *Kulturwertideen* in the framing of the questions social scientists ask. Myrdal put it this way: 'There is no way of studying social reality other than from the viewpoint of human ideas... The value connotation of our main concepts represent our interest in a matter, gives direction to our thought and significance to our inferences' (Myrdal 1958: 1). I would rather avoid the term 'values' (which never helps to clarify one's meaning) and say that practical, social, political and moral concerns typically and unavoidably enter into what we want social scientific inquiries to explain. But how far or deeply do they enter? Do they merely guide or govern the selection of the *explanandum* or do they also influence the *explanans*?

Consider the concept of power. This is obviously a causal concept but in social contexts to have power is have the ability to bring about *significant* outcomes, and to exercise power is to bring them about. Of course one can have the power to bring about trivial effects, but when we talk about power and power relations and when, as social scientists, we study it, seek to locate it, assess it impact, even try to measure it, and when we compare the power of some with that of others we make implicit or explicit judgments about what is significant. My power will be greater than yours if the interests of those I can affect are more significant. (A judge able to impose the death sentence has greater power than one who does not). Moreover, we are interested in power for extra-scientific reasons—to assign various kinds of responsibility, for example, or to evaluate the functioning of social arrangements. And this means that we will select out from the complex causal processes at work the chains and links which are relevant in the light of those extra-scientific interests. Of course, we can always try to expunge the vocabulary of power and its cognates (coercion, authority, manipulation, domination, hegemony and so on) from our *explanatia* and replace it with technical terms or mathematical modeling,but will the answers then respond to the interests that motivate them?

As for the recognition of ontological subjectivity, this does indeed imply, as Charles Taylor has commented, that there is an unavoidably 'hermeneutical' component in the sciences of man, for man is 'a self-defining animal' (Taylor 1971: 55). He makes this comment at the beginning of what is, in my view, still the best single-essay treatment of this topic: 'Interpretation and the

Sciences of Man.' (Taylor 1971) The most striking corollary Taylor derives from this observation is that there is a radical difference between the natural and the social sciences—between metereology, say, and sociology–with respect to their powers of prediction. With changes in self-definition 'go changes in what man is, such that he has to be understood in different terms. But the conceptual mutations in human history can and frequently do produce conceptual webs which are incommensurable, that is, where the terms cannot be defined in terms of a common stratum of expressions' (Taylor 1971: 55). I like and agree with the quasi-Popperian conclusion that Taylor draws: that 'conceptual innovation ... in turn alters human reality', and so the 'very terms in which the future will have to be characterized if we are to understand it properly are not all available to us at present.' (Taylor 1971: 56). It is, perhaps, worth noting that Taylor's arguments were principally directed against one particularly powerful trend of the time, influenced by the lure of a prevailing natural science model of explanation, namely behaviorism.

Another philosopher who has reflected upon ontological subjectivity is John Searle, for whom what is distinctive of human social reality is that it consists in 'institutions' (such as money and property), which, according to Searle, are created and sustained entirely in individual minds by collective intentionality. They are created, through the constitutive power of language, by the assigning of deontic powers—rights, duties, obligations, responsibilities and so on—which in turn create desire-independent reasons for action. Thus Searle concludes that institutional social facts are epistemically objective but 'only exist in virtue of collective acceptance or recognition or acknowledgement.' (Searle 2006: 13). I shall say more about this account under the next question, but here it is worth noting that part of Searle's motivation (which I applaud) is to meet the challenge of sociobiology and its 'implicit message... that human beings are not different from other social animals and that the terms in which we need to understand human social behavior are essentially biological and above all evolutionary.' (Searle 2006a: 40-41). On the contrary, human social behavior is done for reasons, under the constraints of rationality and within human institutions it is done with the presupposition of free-will and empowered by humanly created deontologies. This is a further deep and far-reaching way of distinguishing the social from the natural sciences.

What is the most important contribution that philosophy has made to the social sciences?

Philosophical contributions to social science can be direct when reflection on philosophical issues, in the sense defined above, affects the practice of some discipline. Consider the immense impact of utilitarianism on the agenda and conceptual apparatus of neoclassical economics. It has had a comparable influence upon the considerable swathe of political science that has been colonized by rational choice theory. More specifically, individual contributions can deploy their philosophical reflections to explanatory and, indeed practical effect. Consider, as already mentioned, Sen's parallel but interrelated critique of welfarist utilitarianism and his major contributions to welfare and development economics and Hayek's deployment of his arguments concerning our necessarily limited access to the relevant knowledge to the winning of the socialist calculation debate and his assault on the very idea of central planning. Such contributions can, of course, be 'important' but deleterious and social science can be influenced by poorly understood or bad philosophy. Talcott Parsons's critique of what he took utilitarianism to be in developing his 'theory of action' exemplifies the former; and the adoption of extreme relativist and post-modernist ideas in some areas of recent 'interpretivist' cultural anthropology exemplifies the latter. I suppose that bad or poorly understood philosophy could generate good social science. (Perhaps the so-called 'strong program in the sociology of science is an instance of this). Do good social scientists (or good scientists in general) need to be good or even decent philosophers, or indeed even philosophers at all? It is certainly not obvious that the normal science of progressive research programs benefits by focusing attention on their presuppositions.

This leads me to consider a second, indirect way in which philosophy can contribute to social science: that is, precisely by focusing on its ontological and methodological presuppositions. Here, as just suggested, the effects on social science practice are not necessarily beneficial. The classical sociologists—notably Marx, Weber and Durkheim—wrote well-known methodological texts that have become canonical within the discipline. They are cited in textbooks and assigned to beginning students, yet they cry out for close analysis and rigorous critique conducted with the benefit of advances in logic and philosophy that have occurred since they were written. I have already cited Cohen's discussion of Marx's historical materialism, which itself generated much debate and

further treatments of a similar sort. Weber's account of *Verstehen* and causality have benefited insufficiently from philosophically informed discussions of these issues. Much could doubtless be gained by drawing in the former case on the 'rule-following debate' deriving from Saul Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein, and in the latter on contemporary discussions of causation.

As for Durkheim, his *Rules of Sociological Method* and his other methodological writings constitute a perfect case for such philosophical treatment. As it happens, John Searle has mounted a spirited critique of Durkheim's views, but I maintain that in criticizing Durkheim Searle in effect reveals with great precision what is implicit and unworked out in his thinking. Searle comments that Durkheim 'was not in a position to state the precise details of collective representations because he lacked the logical apparatus. (This is not his fault. He happened to live in the prehistory of the study of intentionality).' (Searle 2006b: 62). Searle complains that Durkheim has a mistaken conception of society and social facts, failing to see that we can have an epistemically objective science of a domain that is ontologically subjective—that, as stated above, these objective facts only exist 'in virtue of collective acceptance or recognition or acknowledgement.' Searle holds that Durkheim did not grasp the distinctions needed to see this and the paradox it involves: that institutional social facts are real but only exist because people think they exist. I maintain (and have argued elsewhere [Lukes 2007]) that Durkheim's writings abundantly express, but do not analyze, this idea and paradox. Moreover, I further maintain that Durkheim, as a sociologist, addresses a problem which Searle, as a philosopher, leaves entirely unaddressed, namely, how is 'collective acceptance or recognition or acknowledgement' achieved? Durkheim, in short, begins where Searle leaves off by inquiring into the transmission and inculcation of ideas, from the most concrete and specific to the basic categories of thought, into the mechanisms of socialization, into the conditions under which the recognition of shared norms and integration into shared values break down and the consequences of such breakdown, and into the role of ritual and symbolism in generating and regenerating enthusiastic support for the collective representations that unite communities.

Which topics in the philosophy of social science will, and which should, receive more attention than in the past?

My answer to this is to point to a domain that used to be jointly

occupied by social scientists and philosophers but has been vacant for some five decades. We can label this domain 'the sociology and psychology of morals.' It was a central topic at the turn of the twentieth century chiefly among philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists (the distinction between the latter was not yet institutionalized). In France Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim, in Britain L. T. Hobhouse and Edward Westermarck, in the USA Franz Boas and William Graham Sumner and later Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict all operated within this territory. Moral philosophers ventured into it in the 1950s, notably John Ladd (Ladd 1957) and Richard Brandt (Brandt 1954). I believe that much could be gained at the present time from a convergence between sociologists and anthropologists, on the one hand, and moral philosophers, on the other (see, for example Moody-Adams 1997, Cook 1999, Moser and Carson 2001 and Levy 2002). Moreover, there is now an accumulating body of work by psychologists, cognitive scientists and experimental or behavioral economists, working in collaboration with philosophers, exploring how individuals acquire, implement and are affected by norms, the possible relations between innate mechanisms and cultural learning in the acquisition of moral norms and, in general, the psychology of moral norms (Carruthers et al. 2006 and Hauser 2006).

There are some fascinating questions to be explored here, questions that have been insufficiently explored at the appropriate level of philosophical sophistication. What sense can be made of the claim that there is 'a diversity of morals'? How are we to distinguish between moral principles, rules, norms, codes and practices? How do sociological and anthropological accounts of what morality is differ from philosophical accounts? What can the latter learn from the former and the former from the latter? What evidence can be adduced for the diversity of morals within and across cultures? If it exists, how wide and how deep does such diversity go and how can the answer to these questions be established empirically? Is 'morality' an analytically useful concept that can be applied cross-culturally? Can we reconcile its external use, by observers engaged in description and explanation, and its internal or first-person use, by moral agents or participants. Are their distinguishable domains of morality that can be identified across cultures? Is there a convincing (non-relative) way to distinguish between what is customary (*mores*) and what is moral? What is the force of the so-called enculturation thesis in accounting for how people acquire moral principles, beliefs and attitudes? What

is the value of the evidence gathered by psychologists of subjects' responses to moral dilemmas, generated by philosophers, such as the so-called 'trolley problem' purporting to show the ways in which they display the capacity for moral reasoning and judgment? Is that capacity universal or species-wide among humans? What is the bearing of studies of animals on answering this question? How strong is 'the linguistic analogy' drawn from Chomskian linguistics with morality—an idea mooted at one point by John Rawls? Can we plausibly postulate a universal moral grammar, with unconscious principles and parameters? (Hauser 2006 and Susan Dwyer in Carruthers et al. 2006). If so, what would be the scope for reasoning, deliberation and reflection (in which we typically seek the 'right answer' to moral questions and dilemmas) and what would this imply for the thesis of moral relativism? (After all, the principles and parameters of Chomskian universal grammar result in our speaking one language or another, or several: there is no Esperanto-like location from which we could arrive at the 'right' way to speak). How does moral relativism differ from other forms of relativism, and how strong are the arguments for and against it? Which human rights should be universal? Some of these questions are sociological, some psychological, some are philosophical and most are inextricably all at once.

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