

# PHILOSOPHY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Feringer notes

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- **1. The social sciences . . .**
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- **ERH goes on to the conclusion:**

1. The social sciences deal with phenomena fundamentally different from the subjects of the natural sciences, and therefore require a different method.

2. Today there is no recognized method for the social sciences. There is only a natural science of society, with the inference that those parts of society amenable to the methods of natural science might be properly treated - but other parts of social experience would not be amenable to this method.

Natural science obtains data from controlled laboratory conditions, or from field observations (as with astronomy and climatology), striving for generalizations to either prove or disprove the hypotheses being tested. If the methods for both natural and social events are to be the same, there should not be two names. Why then do we have two names?

3. A philosophy for both ethics and for natural science, are two elements of modern thought. The question of method is all-important. While man can observe objects of nature from the outside, he cannot apply this method to society with any validity, for obvious reasons. Nor is society transcendent, as are the 'idea' and 'God.' (p.2) The social scientist cannot claim a universal truth; this is because there are believers and nonbelievers. [RF - Here ERH infers, and I would agree, that all knowledge, including both natural and social science, is established by vote. There can be universal agreement about truth only in natural science.] Thus, when any individual attempts to impose a universal (social) truth, he/she must be labelled a dogmatist, or theologian of a particular denomination.

4. Other differentiations can be made between "natural" and "social" phenomena. For instance,

God does not speak in human language, and nature does not speak at all. However, "...social facts are accompanied (described and evaluated) by the words of those who are producing these facts." (p.2) "A family is not a fact like a mountain because the members of the family call themselves the Rosenstock-Huessys, or the Joneses. The father ..is called father, the child his son and so forth." Likewise, a sociologist describing a nation in decay includes the speeches of its members as evidence. Obviously speech lies at the center of all social events.

5. All individuals belong to some group that is either praised or damned by other individuals or groups.

6. All social facts have one quality in common, that they have been NAMED. This notion is inherent in the concept, "society." Society is a collaboration of individuals, who talk and are named, e.g. child, slave, private, woman, Jew, Christian. Any social event is described in a spirit of self-consciousness by all parties. "Words and ideologies, then, are one inescapable element of every subject matter of the social sciences." (p.2). Neither societies, nor individuals, by definition, could exist without self-consciousness. **SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IS A KEY DISTINCTION BETWEEN SOCIAL AND NATURAL SCIENCE.**

7. What can the philosopher offer to enlighten the sociologist in a situation where every word and name has at least a twofold meaning, one relating to his own scientific work, and another among the members of his/her society? ERH suggests that inherent in scientific language is logic, the art of reasoning, and the art of dialectics (argument). The philosopher of social science, on the other hand, introduces grammar (the structuring of speech), to which must be added, the question of who is speaking and who is listening. Thus, to the situation of natural science, where there is a subject and object, one needs to add (for a social science) a responder. His example is as follows:

the crowd says: we go, - the cop says, you go, - the reporter says they go. Any social act then can be described in at least 3 ways, i.e. in terms of the actor, the antagonist (receiver of the action) and the observer. Grammar is therefore necessary, "...because neither dialectics nor logic admit the law of the plurality of objective and subjective world-languages." (p.3)

To mention only one of these three ways, e.g. "he goes", would omit the other two parties, reducing a social act to an act of natural science, (to only the act of the observer). This would mean giving up his claim to being a scientist (his own humanness). "The grammatical interaction between the `I', the `you' and the `he' is by no means arbitrary."

8. A proper method of social science must be centered on grammar, because "he who acts represents the seat of self-consciousness." (p.4) Natural science represents only one third of the total social position that makes up social life. The scientist, the "he" speaker, is also an "I" and a "you" speaker, and as such can never escape living in all three places. This is why social science requires a different method than that of natural science. The grammatical element of society places people in their respective roles in any given event.

9. Social sciences must therefore admit (embrace, consider, utilize) apparent nonscientific language (that of the doer and the receiver of action), because these are crucial elements of a social event. (p.5) The dialectician asks, "How many opinions can be tolerated about the same values?" The logician asks, "How many facts can be explained by the same reason?" The grammarian asks, "How many faiths are necessary for preserving the many functions of a society?"

[RF - Is this the essence of a unique social science method, which is to say, the science of how to preserve and regenerate society? Obviously such a method requires some amalgamation of different points of view, one that engenders peace.]

10. Social method is a problem of living, that is, not according to a single attitude about reality such as that of the scientist, or of the theologian, or of the artist, but by combining all of them. A particular 'Value', in the singular, singles out only one dimension of mankind's experience.

A rotation of the different horizons of consciousness, from the prejudiced to the scientific and back again is the condition under which the social scientist is allowed to function. Without this rotation between knowing and forgetting again, he would destroy the society of which his sciences are telling from origin and destiny. (p.5)

11. Going from theory to practice is a very different process in natural science as compared to social science. In natural science the theory is kept in mind as a guide constantly. In social science one must forget the rule in order to practice. ONE CAN LOVE EITHER THE RULE OR THE INDIVIDUAL, BUT ONE CANNOT LOVE BOTH AT ONCE.

Yet the ethnicist who thinks that he can love whilst he is conscious of applying the general rule by his action is not loving. The simple fact that he believes to apply the rule perverts his action from an act of love into an act of duty. ....He who knows the rule and is rich of knowledge has more trouble to love than the child because he must have forgotten the general rule again before he can really love again."... Consciousness of the abstract meaning of the act transforms its concrete character and value. (p.7)

12. ERH asks, "What is the nature of love?" It is a spontaneous act that is discovered, not presupposed as with duty. "He who does not discover that he loves with surprise and even with a kind of panic does not love at all. It is, then, right to pretend that ignorance and unconsciousness must precede this surprise and this discovery." (p.7) Love is rooted in the subconscious of the lover's personality!

The major distinction here is between love rooted in the subconscious and love of an ideal (for instance the good, true, and beautiful), which is love of concept rather than of an individual. Love of truth, beauty, and goodness cannot be equated with faith, love and hope related to social affairs.

13. Basically, ERH's entire argument rests on the observation that humans function in an alternating state of both consciousness and unconsciousness. Love, faith, and hope work only in a state of unconsciousness, spontaneousness, and creatively. Creativity usually, if not always, stems from the same root, unconsciousness.

14. In sum, the major difference between social and natural science lies in the fact that natural science calls for two levels of consciousness, 1) the object being research, and 2) the rational consciousness of the scientist which is omnipotent over the object, manipulating, watching over, changing adjusting the method. ON THE OTHER HAND, the social scientist needs three levels of consciousness. In addition to the two of the natural scientist, he needs to be spontaneously conscious, this is to say, his attitude should be one of rediscovery, to know when to forget (possible errors of past judgments). One who omits this attitude is in danger of never discovering possible erroneous assumptions from the past.

The following are the final three paragraphs of the essay which seemed difficult to condense:

In the process of man versus nature man is allowed to be like God, omniscient, conscious, ubiquitous, not sleeping, not forgetting, watching and mindful for ever. In the process of man versus society man is not allowed to be the same at all the time. Society's transformations, its vital processes depend on a perpetual change of consciousness and a variety of self-consciousness. The sociologist himself must point the way to this rotation and law of transformation by heeding the phases preceding and following his own action as much as the phase conceded to him.

In the relation between Society and the Social Sciences, the Scientist is responsible for more than his science. He is responsible for a second thing too, namely the word, 'and' in the phrase Society and the Social Sciences. A method of the Social Sciences is not a method of economics, or history, or law only, it is the method of how sciences can become and remain aware of their functions in society which are expressed in the unconscious word 'and'.

This, then, is the philosophy of the Social Sciences that they recognize an attitude of the scientist transcending his rational pride and uniting him, in the third level, to all men who have acquired the knowledge when to know and when to forget, when to love and when to legislate, when to trust and when to investigate, when to teach and when to educate, when to rest peacefully in the autumnal starlight of generalities and when to burn ardently from the fire of sudden spring-fever. The syllogism of logic gives man the power over nature. The seasons of grammar make man a member of society. [RF - Here ERH refers back to the previous paragraphs where he discusses the different roles of the "I" and "you" and "he."] The social sciences are discovering the potentialities of man and the conditions for their realization. Their philosophy teaches that and how the discovery of these potentialities must not interfere with their realization. For there is a time for every purpose and for every work. (p.9)

## Appendix - The Philosophy of Academic Science from 1600 to Present Day

1. ERH's assertion is that there are basically 3 sciences, natural, theological, and social; and that each represents a different dimension of experience, requiring a different method for analysis.
2. Further, the former two, natural and theological, were never intended to deal with society. In the following, he makes the case as to why these are inadequate for social analysis. The purpose of these methods is to describe nature and God (the ultimate creative force of the universe).
3. Theological science (scholasticism) begins with a belief in a few facts and observations; the life and death of Jesus, Resurrection and miracles, "...from which a tremendous science of deductive truth is derived. The METHOD assumes belief in these facts and searches for the meaning that harmonizes with them." (p.10)
4. The dialects and rhetorics taught the doctors of the middle ages how to dispute and how to hold different opinions on the same facts. "The shortcomings of this method in facing new facts are obvious. But it had great merits too." (p.10) He goes on to point out that the Greek philosophers who held different points of view never raised the same problems. Each philosophical school dealt with different problems and different facts (with matter, or ideas, or the nature of beauty, or of pleasure). Scholasticism was fruitful because it attempted to find all possible truths about the same facts and thus, an epistemology could be created. THIS IS WHY ERH CONTENDS THAT SCHOLASTICISM IS WITH US TODAY, AS ITS PRINCIPLES OF DIALECTICS AND LOGIC ARE THE BASIS FOR MODERN DISCUSSIONS OF VALUES, (of Kant, Heidegger or Nicolai Harrmann). (p.10)
5. ERH believes this was a fundamental contribution to our thinking. "Something timeless and eternal is at our disposal through the work of the medieval science." (p.10) He goes on to point out that, in the argument about two sides of an issue, a hierarchy of values comes out of the disputation, on both sides, "...in which the lower values are made into elements of the bigger solution." This statement infers the basic nature of the problem statement (at least a dialectical problem). This is to say, if two proposed solutions of a social science problem whereby each by itself seems logical, but paradoxical, then the truth is to be found in a higher principle that combines both positions, rendering each, part of a larger whole.
6. IN THE FOLLOWING I FIND A BRILLIANTLY SUCCINCT DESCRIPTION OF THE MODERN METHOD OF NATURAL SCIENCE:
 

"A" observes two processes in Europe, X and W, and formulates a common rule or system explaining both. "B," in Africa, observes Z and V. "C" reports from Mexico three more observations, O,P, and R. Z,V,O,P and R contradict the rule derived from X and W in Europe. Research man "D" proposes an experiment which we may call T. D tells the truth, by testing the

European, African and American observations. How is he going to do it? He must add, to the empirical observations already made, some more which are not empirical. The experimental observation transcends the empirical because in it as many elements of the observed facts as possible are taken up separately. The crucial test of the experiments adds, to a series of causal observations, one or more observations of a different nature because they are produced, on principle, in a vacuum.....What then is the essence of the experimental method? Its essential feature is the addition of observation. The principle of the natural sciences is to increase the mass of observed facts. (p.11)

## **ERH goes on to the conclusion:**

Scholastic evaluation increases artificially the number of possible opinions on a limited set of facts. Naturalists increase artificially the number of observed facts to be interpreted by a limited number of theories. All natural or cosmological philosophy, after Descartes, is willing to doubt all observations and rely exclusively on the self-evidence of logic. ....In the philosophy of values and the social sciences our relation to facts and theory is precisely reversed. In a theory of values we have innumerable interpretations, but keep down the number of facts. In a science of nature we expand the numbers of facts, but keep down the numbers of interpreting theories.

7. Social science is then built on a foundation of both theological and natural science methods "...with the most efficient dialectics and the most symbolic logic have done their work." (p.12) He goes on to point out that philosophy has changed its direction twice already in modern times (scholasticism and symbolic logic as described above), and now needs a new turn, one that deals with contradictions. "It will never allow for one language only...On the other hand it will check the meaningless atomization of the scattered score of sciences around men which revel in disorganized statistics and footnotes on footnotes to facts." (p.12)

Finally, ERH asserts that the grammatical method is essential to a science of society, because there are many cultures with different values, and the basic question is "How can they learn to live together in peace so that they can progress?" The different values may be contradictory, and therefore ERH adds "...a theory of Minima and Maxima of Contradictions." (p.12)

[RF - These statements are somewhat enigmatic, and the explanation vis a vis the grammatical method is incomplete in this essay, but its necessity is more fully explained in other essays, for which this one is complementary.]

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