

A PLURALIST (SOCIAL) SCIENCE



Patrick Thaddeus Jackson • The American University

THE SCIENCE QUESTION

- floating around Political Science since its earliest days
 - often used to discipline empirical work
 - critical to distinguishing knowledge from opinion
 - at the heart of “policy-relevance”
- not a lot of clarity about what “science” means
- look to the philosophy of science for some ideas

PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

- seeks to clarify the logic of scientific practice
- abstraction permits the reconstruction of that logic in artificial purity
- allows a clearer explication of the implications for empirical research
- defuse indefensible claims about knowledge
- end the mis-use of 'scientific' as a way to avoid concrete engagement with rival arguments

SCIENCE IS PLURALIST

- no single unified logic of scientific inquiry
- a broad definition of science:
 - systematic links between premises and conclusions
 - subject to public criticism and improvement
 - focused on producing worldly knowledge
- *lots* of room for variation within this space

NEOPOSITIVISM

- probably what most Political Scientists think of as “science” or “the scientific method”
- hypothesis-testing (falsification)
- covering-law generalizations connecting variables across cases (covariation as the mark of causation)
- IR constructivists (in particular) argue that this does not exhaust science
- Political Science and especially IR research practices are actually broader than neopositivism!

WAGERS

- provisional positions on likely unresolvable issues
- concern the “hook-up” between the mind and the world:
 - dualism / monism
 - phenomenal / transfactual
- no combination is fundamental; all are distinct
- wagers combine to support *methodologies*

A 2X2 TABLE

wagers	phenomenal	transfactual
mind-world dualism	neopositivism	critical realism
mind-world monism	analyticism	reflexivity

WHAT'S AT STAKE, I

methodology	status of knowledge	evaluation procedure
neopositivism	unfalsified conjecture	hypothesis-testing
critical realism	best approximation to the world	laboratory or transcendental argument
analyticism	useful account	analytical narrative
reflexivity	device for increasing self-awareness	theorize researcher's own social conditions

1. status of our knowledge

WHAT'S AT STAKE, II

methodology	type of causation	causal explanation
neopositivism	empirical generalization	subsume under general law
critical realism	dispositional	INUS-complexes
analyticism	ideal-typical and configurational	counterfactuals
reflexivity	dialectical	disclose unresolved tensions

2. signs of causation

WHAT'S AT STAKE, III

methodology	type of comparison	purpose of comparison
neopositivism	nomothetic	test hypothetical covariations
critical realism	contrasting	elucidate causal powers
analyticism	individualizing	specify particular configurations
reflexivity	de-naturalizing/ incorporating	provoke social change

3. use of case comparison

DIFFERENCE AND DIALOGUE

- no philosophy of science justification for a single uniform view of scientific methodology
- we must begin with difference and distinction in order to have a discussion
- we should be careful of so-called "mixed" research designs
 - can't simply combine methodologies without privileging one or assimilating others
 - can't introduce a strict common standard for evaluation without tacitly taking a methodological stance

IN DEFENSE OF PLURALISM

- there is no philosophically defensible alternative to pluralism—but a *rigorous* and *engaged* pluralism
- different methodologies answer different questions
- different approaches to the "same" topic yield diverse knowledge-claims that can be *valid in their own terms*
- this imposes a task of *translation* rather than synthesis
- efforts to be internally consistent afford such contentious conversations

As we approach the third millennium, our needs are different, and the ways of meeting them must be correspondingly rethought. Now, our concern can no longer be to guarantee the stability and uniformity of Science or the State alone: instead, it must be to provide the elbowroom we need in order to protect diversity and adaptability.

—Stephen Toulmin