

# Knowing and the Known:

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science

Lecture 1: The Task and the Inheritance

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# Inescapability

- \* “Philosophy of science is about as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds.” -- Richard P. Feynman
- \* but:
  - \* as far as we know birds have no theory of “birdness”
  - \* social scientists *do* have an implicit theory of science
  - \* so do the various audiences with whom we communicate

# My Goals

- \* stop the use of erroneous claims about “science” to shut down conversations
- \* provide a more adequate lexicon for discussing the epistemic status of our empirical claims
- \* clear up persistent misunderstandings that unfairly reinforce one flavor of science: *neopositivism*



# What PoS Is

- \* builds on, or follows after, science
- \* aims to elucidate the *logic* of scientific inquiry
- \* asks *how*, and sometimes *why*, science works:  
accounting for the success of science
- \* does *not* resolve questions of scientific fact

# Methodology vs. Method

- \* method: technique for gaining information
  - \* counting, interviewing, reading
  - \* data-collection; maybe some data-analysis
- \* methodology: rationale for using particular methods to answer particular questions
  - \* research design and status of empirical claims

# Methodology vs. Method

- \* social scientists generally lack the vocabulary for talking in depth about properly methodological questions
- \* no widespread literacy in philosophy of inquiry
- \* methods rather than methodology, *even among dissidents*
- \* rejection of “methodology talk” by very critical scholars
- \* as a result, methodological differences get reduced to issues of *method*



# Consequences

- \* “science” without any qualifiers
  - \* unified logic of inference that assumes away all of the interesting philosophical questions
- \* “explanation” = “accounting for variance”
  - \* “ideational variables” vs. material interests
- \* “mixed methods”
  - \* as if case studies + large-n regression + a formal model were anything other than *incoherent*

# The broad category

- \* “science” = detached, impersonal knowing
- \* *episteme*: general/factual/intellectual
  - \* not technical or aesthetic or ethical
- \* emphasis on the form of a knowledge-claim
- \* *systematic, public, worldly*



# Modes of Knowing

	non-evaluative	evaluative
non-expressive	Epistemic	Engineering
expressive	Aesthetic	Ethical

# History

- \* contemporary PoS reacts to two seminal articulations:
  - \* Descartes, and “Cartesian anxiety”
  - \* logical positivism (the Vienna Circle)
- \* both of these are subsets of The European Enlightenment as a philosophical/cultural/political project
  - \* “by Reason alone”
  - \* the problem is, what do to with *empirical observation*?