

KNOWING AND THE KNOWN:

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
LECTURE 3: REALISM

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HOLES AND CRITIQUES

- REMAINS ON THE OBSERVABLE SURFACE OF THINGS
- COVARIATION DOESN'T ACTUALLY EXPLAIN ANYTHING
- TACIT ASSUMPTIONS:
 - CONSTANT CONJUNCTIONS OBTAIN
 - THE WORLD AS A CLOSED SYSTEM

CORRELATION AND CAUSATION

- NEOPOSITIVISTS SAY THEY AREN'T THE SAME...
- ...BUT NEOPOSITIVISTS HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT CORRELATION
- DEFINITION OF NEOPOSITIVIST "CAUSE":
 - $X \rightarrow Y$ (SUFFICIENT); $\sim X \rightarrow \sim Y$ (NECESSARY)
 - "WITH PROBABILITY P" DOES NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

LIMITATIONS

- IF SOMETHING HAPPENS ONCE, WAS IT CAUSED?
- REAL-WORLD DATA IS IMPRECISE AND AMBIGUOUS
 - STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES = CLEAN DATA TO APPROXIMATE PRESUMED "REAL" CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP
- SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION RULED OUT BY DEFINITION

CAUSAL POWERS

- ROM HARRÉ, STUDENT OF JOHN AUSTIN
- NOT STATISTICAL TENDENCIES, BUT DEEPER PROCLIVITIES
- CAN MANIFEST AS STATISTICAL TENDENCIES IN PARTICULAR ENVIRONMENTS (LABORATORIES)



BEYOND THE EMPIRICAL

- PERCEPTION NOT EXHAUSTIVE
- "UNOBSERVABLE" TOO IMPRECISE
 - THINGS AN OBSERVER HASN'T EXPERIENCED OR PERCEIVED
 - THINGS NO ONE HAS EVER EXPERIENCED OR PERCEIVED, AT LEAST NOT YET
 - THINGS NO ONE COULD EXPERIENCE OR PERCEIVE, EVEN IN PRINCIPLE

TYPES OF “UNOBSERVABLE”

I haven't observed	unobserved	Angor Wat	go see it
we can't observe (yet)	undetected	Neptune; electrons; Higgs boson	build detector
we can't observe (in principle)	undetectable	single quarks; higher dimensions; social structure	?

THEORETICAL OBJECTS

- KNOWN BY WHAT THEY DO
- ABDUCTIVE INFERENCE FROM OBSERVED OUTCOMES
- HAVE TO BE ISOLATED AND VETTED:
 - IN A LABORATORY
 - VIA TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT

REALIST EXPLANATIONS

- CAUSAL POWERS IN AN OPEN SYSTEM
- SEQUENCE AND INTERACTION MATTER
 - PLANT SEED BEFORE WATERING
 - SEED ONLY GROWS IN APPROPRIATE SOIL, ETC.
- IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, AGENCY KEY
 - THE LINK BETWEEN CAUSAL POWERS IS OFTEN AN AGENT'S ACTIVITY
 - ACTUALIZING POTENTIALS
 - BUT ALSO BOUNDARIES ON/OFF ACTION

METAPHYSICS?

- CAUSAL POWERS HAVE TO BE UNDETECTABLE
- NO CRITICAL POTENTIAL OTHERWISE
- THE DANGER IS "ONTO-THEOLOGY"
- THE REMEDY IS SHOWING HOW CAUSAL POWERS EXPLAIN SPECIFIC OUTCOMES
- EMPIRICISM IS CONSERVATIVE;
METAPHYSICS CAN BE REVOLUTIONARY

PROGRESS

- REALISM CLAIMS TWO KINDS OF PROGRESS:
 - EXPLANATORY PROGRESS (RICHER SCIENTIFIC ONTOLOGY)
 - SOCIAL PROGRESS (ELIMINATING ILLUSIONS)
- "CRITICAL" = NORMATIVE BUT BASED ON REAL CAUSAL POWERS
- REALISM MAINTAINS THE SUBJECT-OBJECT, KNOWER-KNOWN DIVIDE