

Research Methods II: Lecture notes

These are some notes to give you some idea of the content of the lecture they are not exhaustive, nor always accurate! So read the referenced work.

Consider the approaches to research and their underlying methodologies and what the implications might be for the way we look at social activities and understand them.

Have to do research rather than just think about it, but there are fundamental problems in the social sciences in how they see what they do.

Hence we need to have a pluralist perspective.

Consider how this conclusion is reached by considering how methodology has developed.

What are the alternatives:

Foundationalism -basics
Philosophy of science > sociology of science
Language and reality
Postmodernism -Foucault and Derrida

Other alternative methodological perspectives
Structuralism and Marxism
Critical Realism

Social Science and Philosophy

Reason why interconnectedness of the social science and philosophy

- Foundationalism -Descartes
- Epistemology -the enquiry into the conditions of the possibility of knowledge. Is treated as prior to empirical research
- To protect against scepticism need to identify sound unchallengeable means or methods of acquiring knowledge
- Need to feel system of knowledge based on secure foundations
- True knowledge must rest on firm unquestionable truths

Distinguish:

Ontology > "What kind of things really exist in the world"

Epistemology > evaluating claims about the way the world can be known to us

Not answered by empirical enquiry as engaged in examining the general nature and significance of empirical enquiry

Attack on Foundationalism has been a major feature of recent thinking.

Science and Social Science

Research is undertaken to discover something not already known

In science:

Descartes and Locke argued > distinctive success of scientific knowledge is it possessed a method -scientific method.
If applied this method then produce knowledge of the world

Later this came to be questioned:

In social sciences:

- topics of social science are topics for members of society
- what is the basis of intellectual authority of the researchers
- treat research methods as a technology
- but methods may be treated as instruments but they operate within a set of assumptions

Role of philosophy ???

Have seen positivism. Now lets go through developments

Developments

Following Dow (1997) mainstream methodology

Main influences from philosophy of science

- Take position that rule for good science apply to all disciplines
- Usually look at physics

Logical positivism > logical empiricism
> all scientific statements testable
> instrumentalism

Popper:

- axioms allowed to be immune from testing
- critical rationalist position
- perpetual subjection to falsification

But Duhem-Quine

- > to test a theory empirically have to make so many assumptions to get to the point where you can test that it is not clear whether testing the law or the assumptions
- >Impossible to put falsification into practice in economics.

Also facts are value laden

Gained force with Kuhns arguments of competing paradigms with no best rules

Lakatos

- Less stringent rules than Popper
- Allow for persistence of theories in the face of contrary evidence
- Research programmes > hard core of unquestioned principles, with a protective belt of theories derived from them
- The belt evolves, as falsification does not lead to abandonment if it is a progressive research programme, but does if it is degenerative
- Addresses Duhem-Quine thesis as the theoretical propositions form the body of the

theory

But Lakatos criterion of scientific progress is like Poppers -empirical

Feyerabend

- Scientific change and progress is the conversion from one myth to another
- Results from influences/interests/ideology not the application of scientific method
- Not against science only its pretensions

All challenged the capacity of science to identify truth
role of methodology in setting universal rules

Language and reality -in social sciences

Empiricist/positivist perspective > social phenomena 'meaningful' in nature and are constituted through language

Wittgenstein:

Tried to end traditional philosophy by arguing that philosophy's problem was only a confusion of how language worked

But autonomy of grammar > nature of reality which determined the meaning of words

- meaning of a word is its position within a complex
- capacity to connect language with the world presupposes social relations

Winch criticism of the social sciences

Difference between social science and science

Other people are doing things and they know what they are doing the researcher doesn't

What is interpreted by researcher could be completely wrong

Seen as attack on materialist and realist positions

Post Modernism

Hughes and Sharock: Approaches which argue social phenomena not intrinsically meaningful

1. Post empiricism > Quine behaviourism: only observable phenomena count as topic of scientific study. Indeterminacy of translation
2. Post structuralism

Development of structuralism

-tried to deal with social science through linguistics

Saussure > words of a language are differentiated with units characterised by their difference

Levi Strauss > apply model of structural linguistics to anthropology to demonstrate

universality of logical thought. Compare myths -logical structure - savages and advanced

> meaning produced by system of language not just by individual

> displace/ decentred the subject

> give new content to ideas of Marx and Freud

but criticisms

- that it should be reflexive
- reflexivity led to distinction between science and ideology

major break with modernism: Lyotards 'grand narrative'

Foucault

Relativist rather than absolutist

Concerned with the problem of how we acquire knowledge of nature and society and how we know something about the world outside

Episteme rather than paradigm

-Football analogy -opposing teams are paradigms, tactics are the theories, episteme is the rules of the game. The rules let us know who has won the game. They can change
 -Foucault "In any given culture at any given moment there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge.

Divides Western thought

1. Renaissance: middle ages up to end of 16th century. Mainly 16th
2. Age classique: 17th and 18th centuries
3. Age of History: 19th century onwards
4. Modern

Renaissance:

Three way system of viewing knowledge
 Things: out there
 Signs: allow us to recognise things
 Resemblance/similitude: links signs to things

Problem resemblance > gives meaning to signs
 >is means by which recognise signs
 > is the signs themselves

so always possible to collapse to one element

Result: knowledge unlimited but empty
 Treat signs as if they were things in nature

Example is how perceived money
 The nature of the monetary
 General price level and influx of gold

Age Classique

System broke down in the 17th century giving the Age Classique
 Language/signs became separated from nature
 Became instruments by which man analysed society
 Language > transparency and neutrality

Descartes > knowledge attainable by comparison

Artificial signs preferred over natural as chosen for simplicity/applicability etc
No conception of distance between the sign and what is signified

Money > can be exchanged for anything with a price

Makes it precious (its form not content)

Mercantilists made the shift

Physiocrats relative values in terms of tableau of exchanges,

Creation and ordering of value

Age of History

Knowledge became concerned with organic structure of things

-internal relations between elements

-no longer order things

-what is observed could be tip of the iceberg -need to investigate

-History becomes crucial to understanding

Shift occurred in 2 stages

1. Adam Smith: labour connected to wealth, value related to need. Did not invest labour as economic concept
2. Ricardo: split concept of labour. Energy and time bought and sold. productive activity origin of value

New causal series; accumulation arises

New view of relation between needs and scarcity -labour needed because of reduced productivity of land

Language loses its transparency

Ricardo > CMP temporally overcomes scarcity

Marx > CMP potential to overturn

Important implications for how we judge HET etc

New modernism

Language and other form of representation > discourse = complex structure governed by the system of rules which identifies the things that can be talked about, the things that can be said about them, the things that can be said by which type of person.

Such discourses are contingent (patients require a hospital system; mad v criminal)

-specific socio-historical conditions lead to specific organisations and organising activities

Since formation of objects integral to the development of discourse > connected with power

Categories of language are an imposition on the world > language of social control

Foucault > political purpose

What appears:

natural	> expose	>	arbitrary
Logical	> them	>	contingent

>erode their social and intellectual authority and make them easier to overthrow

In this way the idea that rational thought implies authentic representation of reality is a

nonsense.

Deconstruction

Briefly

Derrida > critique of the whole Western philosophical tradition

Following Hegel > opposition > how overcome

Unlike Hegel > show how can be undermined

Presence and absence: speaking and writing

Positivistic > knowledge and certainty deal with presents

Structuralists deal with contrasts

But meaning of word is through contrast > depends upon things which are abstract as much as present > it is an open not a closed system

So should allow text to speak to bring out its own indefinite, uncertain, internally divided character and to display continuities

This can be progressive but also regressive (DeMan)

Critical Realism

Attempt to recover the idea of social 'science'

Roy Bhaskar > 'transcendental realism' or critical realism

-Science is contingent historically and socially produced

-Ontological realism > recognise the real mind independent world

-Epistemological relativism > science and knowledge is human activity and is culturally and historically shaped

-Nature of things in reality not always the same as their description.

-Dualism overcome through transformational model of social action

-Social structures preexist/are precondition for individual action but are also product of them

Basically: open systems are organic > range of understanding > but there are still underlying structures and processes

Empirical testing:

Constant conjunction of events > scientific law

Experiment > closed > intervene in reality to control

> if don't control don't get constant conjunction of events

> in reality don't get

Real tendencies > are not constant conjunctions

> laws > mechanisms > real tendencies

Bhaskar has developed his work over time

New dialectical critique: critical realism is not transformational (debate in Capital & Class)

Developments in Economics

Search for some independent standards for economic theorising continues, though some now accept that there may be more than one standard. This has led to the analysis of what economists do and how they argue

McCloskey analysed the rhetoric of mainstream economics

- Departed from official methodology

- Prescriptive methodology unhelpful for economic discourse

- Persuasiveness was criteria used to appraise theories

Rorty:

- Hermeneutic approach to science

- Relation between scientist, text and content organic rather than atomistic

- Emphasis on tolerant understanding of range of approaches

Others; literary criticism of economic texts

Compatible with the application of postmodernism

Postmodernism:

- Strong position: dualistic opposition to rationalism

- Reject assumption of sovereign independent actor

- Rejection correspondence theory of truth

- Rejection of idea of progress

- Denies role for prescriptive methodology

- Reject notion of general

- By implication denies basis humanism or govt intervention

- Methodological individualism incompatible

Developments > discomfort ; appear to reject any foundation economic theorising

But in fact intrinsic to alternative approaches are ontological foundations

So:

Rhetoric > description of actual economic theorising

Hermeneutics > interpretation of practise

Postmodernism > belief in fragmented nature of reality

So pluralism should follow from pluralist ontology

- The old dualistic -truth/no truth comes from analysis of a closed system

- Epistemological shift > generates knowledge more apt for an open system

Dialectical process > Thesis of modernism with claim to absolute truth

Challenge is to develop:

- >Antithesis of postmodernism and the denial of truth

- >Synthesis a new approach to generate knowledge

In economics this is being confronted by developments which argue for a pluralistic perspective -as Dow- and within particular approaches

A return to Keynes's philosophy

- logical certainty is limited in open systems
- empirical certainty is limited "

Critical realism

- developing a critique of economics as above
- not clearly developing an alternative (see the debate in *Capital and Class*)

Marxism: reinterpreting Marxist economics. Has occurred across the subject but specifically in the journal *Rethinking Marxism* -eg Resnick and Wolff