

# *Research Methods*

## **Lecture 1**

# **The Philosophy of Social Science Investigation**

1. Four ways to study the Philosophy of Social Science that impact upon social science research
2. The historical development of the Philosophy of social science investigation, and the critique of, and impact upon, modern theories
3. Economic sociology as a strand of methodological social science investigation

# *1. Four ways to study the Philosophy of Social Science*

- a) Historical approach
- b) The study of issues and problems
- c) The study of contemporary movements and schools of philosophy
- d) Studying philosophical problems that arise specifically within each of the social sciences

## *a) The Historical Approach*

- examination of the major ‘schools’ and philosophers of an earlier period
- the philosophy of social science is the based on the study of the logic and method of the social sciences

Historically philosophers of social science have been concerned with:

- the differences and similarities between the social and the natural sciences;
- causal relationships between social phenomena;
- the possible existence of social ‘laws’;
- the study of the significance of structure and agency

## *b) The study of issues and problems*

- the study of issues and problems identified by writers and in the historical approach
- the philosophical attempt to identify any rationality in turn depends upon identification of causal explanation

*c) The study of contemporary movements  
and schools of philosophy*

- based upon controversy in the social sciences and critical reflection on society and social science
- similar economic, social, political problems, but differences in national traditions of investigation – means interaction and learning between philosophical social science traditions

*d) Studying philosophical problems that arise specifically within each of the social sciences*

- i.e. economics has developed a philosophical area all of its own – questions about the philosophical foundations of economics touch on the philosophically central issues of rationality, choice, and the nature of wants or desires

## *2. The historical development of the Philosophy of social science investigation, and the critique of, and impact upon, modern theories*

*Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857)*

*- The Course in Positive Philosophy (1830 – 1842)*

*- major contribution was to observe the circular dependence of theory and observation*

## Comte's philosophical account of social evolution

- society's 3 phases in its quest for the truth about social life ( a general 'law' of 3 stages of social evolution):

- *Theological stage* – nature mythically conceived;
- *Metaphysical stage* – nature conceived as being result of obscure forces;
- *Positive stage* – natural phenomena explained by their constant relationship

Comte's '*orthodox positivist*' approach is criticised for its observer bias and its structural limitations

- consequently, critical realists challenge orthodox positivist analysis as failing to address the real conditions in societies; that is the analytical conflict between

**STRUCTURE and AGENCY**

- do social structures determine an individual's (or organisation's) behaviour or does human agency?

### *3. Economic sociology*

- studies both the social effects and the social causes of economic phenomena
- Max Weber (1864 – 1920) – rationalisation and disenchantment in society associated with the rise of capitalism and modernity
  - *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)*

### *3. Economic sociology*

- analyses economic phenomena  
emphasising particularly the role economic  
structures and institutions play upon society
  
- AND the influence a society holds over  
the nature of economic structures  
and institutions  
*(circular process)*

## Daniel Bell (1974) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*

- argued that the history of humanity could be divided into 3 eras:
  1. pre-industrial
  2. Industrial
  3. post-industrial

## Bell's post-industrial society:

1. domination of the service sector;
2. growing importance of information technologies;
3. increased role of long term planning and modelling;
4. domination of technocracy and pragmatism over traditional ethics and ideologies;
5. increasing importance and use of technology and intellect;
6. Changes in traditional hierarchy of social classes (growth in importance of specialists)