

## METHODOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

One question frames this course: To what extent and in what ways is the study of society different from the study of nature? Is sociology a science? In this way we will study the nature of sociology.

We begin by studying the meaning of science, the demarcation between science and non-science, science and mythology, science and ideology, science and pseudo-science. Since the war this distinction has become harder to make as the philosophy of science has shifted from the study of logical structures of science to the history of science, that is from science as it might or should be to science as it really is.

All too often both the defenders and critics of sociology-as-science operate with outdated notions of the nature of science. So what the defenders of sociology-as-science consider to be a science is no longer understood to govern even the "true" or paradigmatic sciences, such as physics, from which the model is borrowed. Equally, the hermeneutic critiques of sociology-as-science, which insist that the study of the social world cannot be conducted along lines appropriate to the natural world, miss the convergence between the newer concepts of science and hermeneutic principles. Indeed, it could be argued that the distinction is no longer between the natural and human sciences but between positivist and hermeneutic perspectives within both. In other words, what distinguishes different forms of knowledge is not the object of knowledge (natural world versus social world) but the interests of the knowing person in objectivist (positivist) or subjectivist (interpretive) methodologies.

Accordingly we begin this course with conventional views of science. We first consider the "inductivist" approach, here represented by Comte and Ogburn and then by Durkheim and then we turn to Popper's more deductive approach in his methodology of falsification. We then turn to two radical critiques of such "objectivist" views of science: first, Paul Feyerabend's anarchist perspective on methodology and second, Michael Polanyi's view of science as personal knowledge and passionate commitment. Having undermined traditional conceptions of science we must try to put something in its place. We will look for this in the work of Kuhn. But here there is still a problem of what constitutes scientific progress, or how we choose between different "paradigms." We will, therefore, and with Lakatos' attempt to formulate scientific development in terms of progressive and degenerating research programs.

After considering changes in the philosophy of science we will move into the "practicum" part of the course. In groups of three, students will familiarize themselves with the work of one faculty person and then interview that person to bring out his or her distinctive style as it relates to questions raised in the course. The interviews will be videotaped and played back to the class, where they will be discussed. In this way we will deepen our understanding of alternative approaches to sociology.

We then proceed to the third and final part of the course where we concentrate on a different tradition of thought, known variously as "geisteswissenschaften," or the human sciences which argues that models for understanding the natural world are inappropriate for studying the social world. We begin with Weber's methodological prescriptions and practices for situating the social sciences between natural sciences and the cultural sciences. From here we turn to more radical rejections of the applicability of science to the social world. In arguing against the study of social causality as found in

Weber in particular and in the social scientific enterprise more generally, which reduces sociology to the understanding of human behavior. In his perspective the sociologist must strive for neutrality and not impose his or her own interpretative framework on the subjects of study. Rabinow regards that such neutrality as impossible. We inherently bring biases to the field and indeed, he argues the goal of sociology is to discover and situate those biases in one's "tradition". We come to understand ourselves through interaction with other. Here science disappears or is reduced to one but not the only one self-understanding of the observer. Foucault restores the scientific axis but only to make it the foundation of the modern form of domination which works through normalization, surveillance and examination. Social science is not impossible but dangerous. Knowledge and power are interlocked. Gouldner offers a related account of the connection between sociology and the welfare state, but appears more optimistic about the potential autonomy of intellectuals. Finally, we glimpse the panorama offered by Habermas who rescues a place for "positivism" alongside "hermeneutic" and "critical" comprehensions of the world. Each of these three forms of knowledge is constituted by corresponding interests.

Throughout the course, the different methodological perspectives will be discussed in connection with concrete studies. Apart from the ones mentioned above, we will discuss recent reinterpretations of the famous Western Electric Studies, struggles over rival interpretations of the Weimar Republic, Keller's understanding of the relation between gender and science, Shils' conception of sociology as "tradition," Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Geertz's account of the Balinese cockfight, Smith's discussion of a sociology for women, and Bourdieu's theory of science as a field of struggle.

The course will be structured as follows. Seminars led by myself and by students will alternate. Students will break up into groups of three or four to give presentations and they will be responsible for preparing and distributing discussion questions to the class before the seminar and directing the discussion in the seminar. Students will also work together in groups to prepare, conduct and video the interviews with faculty.

Apart from the presentations and interviews there is a short paper (no longer than twelve double spaced typed pages), critically examining either Stanley Lieberson's, A Piece of the Pie or Judith Stacey's, Brave New Families.

The course is only open to first year sociologists. There are no auditors or incompletes.

## SCHEDULE

\* refers to student presentations; # refers to readings in course reader, available at Instant Images.

August 26                      Introduction

August 28 Comte, *Course of Positive Philosophy*, Introduction, ch.1 (#1)  
Ogburn, "The Folkways of a Scientific Sociology" (#2)

Comte was the first to systematically use and develop the concept of positivism. what did he mean by it? What are the differences and similarities between his and Ogburn's views of the practice and goals of sociology? In what ways, if any, do these two conceptions of sociology as a science leave you troubled or dissatisfied? What do you find attractive or defensible in either or both of these conceptions of sociology?

September 2 LABOR DAY

September 4\* Durkheim, *Suicide*, Preface, Introduction, Book I, chapters, 1,3; Book II, chapters 1,2,3,4,5; Book III, chapter 1.

September 9 Durkheim, continued.

In the opening pages of *Suicide*, Durkheim asserts the distinctiveness of sociology as the science of society, a science that should model itself after the natural sciences. to what extent does Durkheim carry out what he prescribes? To the extent that prescription and practice diverge is this a technical problem that we could resolve today? Is it an inevitable problem for a sociology that pretends to be a science? Are there different conceptions of science embedded in *Suicide*?

September 11\* Popper, "Science: Conjectures and Refutations" and "Truth, Rationality, and the Growth of Knowledge" (#3).

September 16 Alex Carey, "The Hawthorne Studies: A Radical Criticism," and Richard Franke and James Kaul, "The Hawthorne Experiments: First Statistical Interpretation."

Polemicalizing against metaphysical reflection Durkheim claims to apply the method of induction, that is starting with a delimited set of facts he derives his theory of suicide. Popper argues that the method of induction is fundamentally flawed as a means of deriving laws and that verification cannot be used as a principle demarcating science from non-science. He replaces induction and confirmation as the universal method of science with conjecture and refutation. Is his perspective any less full of paradoxes? How do we know when a falsification is a falsification and not a brilliant confirmation? Do his falsifications involve a whiff of verification? Is there any tension between the pursuit of verisimilitude and the pursuit of falsification? What do Carey and Franke and Kaul's "refutations" of the Hawthorne Studies say about the practice of Popper's "logical negativism"?

September 18\* Feyerabend, *Against Method*, pp. 17-180, 295-310.

September 23                      Selections from the case of Feldman/Turner versus Abraham (#5)

As accounts of what does or should happen in science, are the falsification and confirmation approaches so flawed that "anything goes"? Does this mean that there is no demarcation between science and non-science? Is Feyerabend saying more than any method has its limitations? How does his account of Galileo's struggles match his interpretation? In reality does he go beyond Popper? Does Feyerabend's analysis of the conservatism inherent in orthodox models of science -- that theories tend to generate facts that are self-confirming -- apply to sociology? In what ways does Feyerabend's account of scientific change illuminate the struggle between Turner/Feldman and Abraham?

September 25\*                      Polanyi, Personal Knowledge. Sections on "Objectivity," "Skills," "Intellectual Passions," "The Fiduciary Programme" and "Conviviality". (#6)

How can Polanyi claim that "personal knowledge" is also "objective knowledge"? What is the role of the empirical? What is his measure of scientific progress? How do we know when one theory is truer than another? Does Polanyi demarcate between science and art?

Both Feyerabend and Polanyi underline the "extra-scientific" dimension of science. They are both suspicious of theories of scientific development that are confined to empirical controls. In this they share a common antipathy to positivism. What "controls" do they put in its place? Do their different accounts of science explain their advocacy of different political orders?

Keller links notions of science to conceptions of gender differences and gender domination. She pursues an alternative idea of science involving an interactive relation between subject and object. How different is this from Polanyi's insistence on the importance of personal knowledge. Is there a distinctively feminist approach to science?

October 2\*                              Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.

October 7                                Edward Shils, "Tradition, Ecology, and Institution in the History of Sociology," (#8)

The philosophers we have read so far have defended their conceptions of science with carefully selected cases of celebrated scientific discovery or debate. Kuhn's thematization of the "paradigm" and his introduction of the distinction between normal and exceptional science lend themselves to a sociological understanding of the scientific community as a whole. How does his formulation differ from Popper's? From Polanyi's? What is his criterion of scientific development? Is it defined by the scientific community (which would lead the philosophy of science into the arms of sociology) OR is there a universal criterion? What accounts for a paradigm shift? How does science enter a revolutionary period and how is normalcy and consensus then restored? How well does Shils' account of the history of American sociology fit into the Kuhnian framework?

October 9\*                   Lakatos, "Science and Pseudo-Science" (#9)  
                                   Burawoy, "Marxism as Science: Historical Challenges and Theoretical Growth."  
                                   (#10)

Where does Lakatos depart from Kuhn? What relevance do Kuhn or Lakatos have for the development of sociology? Are you persuaded by Burawoy's attempt to show that Marxism is a progressive research program?

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October 14 - October 30 Watch and discuss interviews.

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November 4\*               Weber, The Spirit of Capitalism and the Protestant Ethic.

So far we have tried to see to what extent different models of science may be applicable to sociology. The interpretive or hermeneutic school radically disavows the relevance of science to sociology. Weber provides us with a link between the two approaches, claiming to combine both explanation and understanding, analyzing causality through the examination of human intention. How well does he execute this program in PE&SC? How would you contrast Durkheim's and Weber's approach to science, laws, and causality?

November 6               Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics."  
                                   (#11)

At the heart of Weber's methodology is his insistence on the separation and mutual irreducibility of "fact" and "value"? How then does he see the relationship between the two? If the sociologist must be clear about his values before embarking on his analysis does this lead to "relativism"? What does Weber mean by the "value neutrality" of the sociologist. Why does he defend it? How does he understand the nature of scientific explanation? Does Weber take the progressive character of science for granted?

November 11\*             Winch, The Idea of Social Science.

November 13             Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (#12)

Winch repudiates Weber's "causal" analysis as impossible in the social sciences. Instead he embraces Weber's view of social action as intentional. Language becomes the metaphor for social life in which people are viewed as rule followers. What are the limitations of this metaphor? Does Winch have a place for the sociologist, such a central figure in Weber's methodology? Is his approach as presuppositionless as he pretends? Winch defends the interpretive approach to sociology but does he

slip into a relativism that cannot justify itself? Is there any place left for comparative sociology? In what ways does Geertz illustrate the advantages and shortcomings of Winch's approach?

November 18\* Rabinow, Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco.

November 20 Smith, "A Sociology for Women." (#13)

Whereas Winch says little about the sociologist, Rabinow brings the sociologist to the front of the stage, alongside the people he [Rabinow] studies. The goal of sociology becomes the self-realization of the sociologist through interaction with those he or she is studying. Is this possible without some form of scientific explanation of those one is studying? What would Weber have to say about Rabinow's interpretive sociology? Inasmuch as the aim of social research is the development of a deeper self-understanding through the interaction with other does this lead to a gendered sociology, a sociology for men and a sociology for women? What might Smith have to say about Rabinow's reflections? Does Smith advocate constituting those one studies as "other"? What is the link between Dorothy Smith's phenomenology and a "sociology for women"?

November 25\* Foucault, Discipline and Punish, Part One, chapter 1, Part Three, chapters 1,2 and 3; Part Four, chapter 3.

November 27 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason." (#14)

Smith attributes an interest in domination to the false universality claimed by sociology. Foucault takes her reasoning to its logical conclusion. Where Rabinow thinks social science is either impossible or irrelevant to the task of interpretation Foucault recognizes the possibility of social science but considers it to be evil. He restores the scientific dimension only to regard it as the embodiment of power relations in society. How would Foucault criticize Winch, Rabinow and Smith? How successful is Foucault in identifying social science with domination. Is his attempt to justify the theory of the prison with empirical data consistent with his theory of knowledge? What would Foucault think of Weber? Is Bourdieu's account of science as a field of struggle consistent with Foucault's analysis of disciplines? Does Bourdieu offer more hope for a sociology that is critical of domination?

December 2\* Gouldner, "Sociologist as Partisan" (#15).

While Gouldner underlines the external forces shaping sociology, he leaves an opening for the sociologist to resist. How would Foucault and Bourdieu differ from Gouldner in their analysis of sociologists? Do they have different conceptions of power? Where does Weber fit in this debate?

December 4                    Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective" (#16)

Habermas as always is a grand synthesizer. How would he criticize Winch, Rabinow, Foucault and Weber? In what ways does Habermas' "knowledge constitutive interests" differ from the conception of interests in Smith, Foucault and Gouldner? How do his knowledge constitutive interests reconstruct the two parts of the course? Is he successful? Are there problems with his understanding of science?

### **INTERVIEWS**

Preparation for the interviews will involve one or two meetings with the faculty person prior to the interview as well as reading his or her major works. I will finalize the list of faculty during the first week of classes.

### **PAPER**

I have chosen two books both with contrasting approaches to sociology. They are Stanley Lieberson's, A Piece of the Pie or Judith Stacey's, Brave New Families. You should choose one of them to evaluate in no more than twelve double spaced typed pages. The purpose of the paper is to take seriously the questions of the author but to point to problems in the way they seek to answer those questions. In doing so you should draw on one or more "models" of sociology from the course. The paper is due absolutely no later than December 12.