

**Philosophical Foundations of Social Research**  
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**Week 1 (History of Philosophy of Social Sciences) : Lecture No. 02**  
**Comte and Positivism; Epistemology and Ontology**

Hello everybody. Welcome to this second lecture of this massive open online course on Philosophical Foundations of Social Research. Before moving on to the second lecture, let us first see what we have discussed in the first lecture. In the first lecture, we have discussed how philosophy in its pre nineteenth century incarnation was divided into two parts namely natural philosophy and social and moral philosophy.

As we have discussed natural philosophy is nothing but science in the present sense of the term and moral philosophy is nothing but ethics in the present sense of the term. Natural philosophers that is scientists in the present sense of the term were engaged in epistemological questions. Whereas, the proponents of ethics or moral philosophers were engaged in ethical questions. When we try to integrate natural philosophy on the one hand and social and moral philosophy on the other or putting it differently when we try to integrate epistemology on the one hand and ethics on the other hand, we tend to arrive at modern philosophy of science.

Then, what we have discussed when we try to integrate epistemology with ethics or natural philosophy with social and moral philosophy: We tend to arrive at modern philosophy of science. Then we have discussed what may be the possible methods of science, namely from seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, the whole 300 years, 3 centuries: that what may be the possible methods of science, what we have witnessed there, inductivism and hypothesisism.

Inductivism suggests that the method of science is the method of induction. On the contrary, hypothesisism suggests that the method of science is the method of hypothesis. Inductivism was pioneered by Francis Bacon, whereas hypothesisism was pioneered by Rene Descartes. Inductivism is rooted in empiricism whereas, hypothesisism is rooted in or grounded in rationalism. Empiricism is based on experience, whereas rationalism is based on the reason.

And in this sense, we have discussed what are the steps in inductivism and hypothesisism in so far as the production of scientific knowledge is concerned. And how in empiricism, we tend to start with collecting observational data, then we tend to put forward tentative

generalization which must be verified and once it is verified it the tentative generalization becomes a law.

In hypothesis or in rationalism, we always start with a hypothesis, it is a tentative solution to a problem or hunch, then we must test the hypothesis. If the hypothesis is tested right, then it must be accepted. If the hypothesis is tested wrong, then it must be rejected. And what are the central characteristics of empiricism and rationalism we have discussed. This was what we had discussed in the first lecture.

### **Auguste Comte and Positivism**

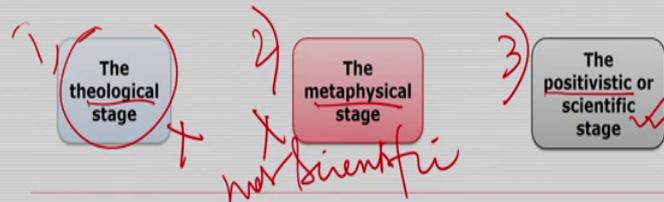
- The twentieth century begins with the emergence of a school of thought called positivism. Positivism is an extremely well-known and till recently very influential theory of science and its method. It is a closely knit set of tenets formulated with an admirable amount of clarity and consistency.

Coming to the second lecture, we are going to focus on one of the pioneering works within social sciences in general and sociology in particular and what are their methodological intricacies. And from here, we are going to look at positivism. And how Auguste Comte, who is considered the founder of sociology: earlier he used to use the term social physics from social physics, he coined the term sociology. And of course, there are certain arguments that people very often make that Auguste Comte cannot be considered the father of sociology or founder of sociology. But I also respect those arguments no doubt about it, but for the time being, we will go ahead with Auguste Comte's reflection on positivism and how he has come to the stage of positivism.

The twentieth century begins with the emergence of a school of thought called positivism. Positivism is an extremely well-known and till recently very influential theory of science and its methods. It is a closely-knit set of tenets formulated with an admirable amount of consistency and clarity.

## Auguste Comte and law of three stages

- The **law of three stages** is an idea developed by **Auguste Comte** in his work *The Course in Positive Philosophy*.
- It states that society as a whole, and each particular science, develops through three mentally conceived stages:



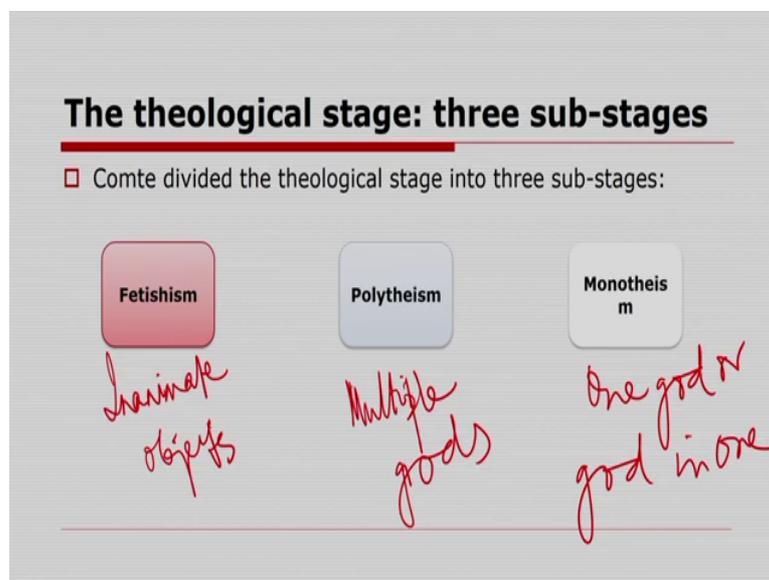
But before coming to positivism, how Auguste Comte tried to design different stages through which we have made a transition to positivism and it is popularly known as Comte's law of three stages. The law of three stages is an idea developed by Auguste Comte in his work "the course in positive philosophy" which states that society as a whole and each particular science develops through 3 mentally conceived stages. One, the theological stage, second the metaphysical stage, and the third, the positivistic or scientific stage.

Whereas positivism was synonymous with science, theology and metaphysics were not considered scientific. They are not scientific, whereas positivistic stage is scientific stage. We will go one by one in this lecture. And then we will move on to epistemology and ontology towards the end of today's lecture.

## The theological stage

- The theological stage refers to explosion by personified deities.
- In this stage, people believed that all phenomena of nature are the creation of the divine or supernatural.
- People failed to discover the natural causes of various phenomena and hence attributed them to supernatural or divine power.

What is the theological stage? The theological stage by Comte refers to the explosion by personified deities and in this stage; people believed that all phenomena of nature or the creation of the divine or supernatural, and people failed to discover the natural causes of various phenomena. And hence attributed them to supernatural or divine power. For example, if I say who has created us? Who has created human beings? Who has created plants? Who has created air? Who has created energy? Who has created water? Who has created the river? Who has created seas? Who has created oceans? Who has created this land? Who has created the forest? In a theological stage, the belief was that gods, goddesses, supernatural forces, they have created this, but then it also has its own argument. We will see. What kind of argument?



Comte tried to break this stage into 3 sub-stages. One is Fetishism. Secondly, Polytheism and thirdly, Monotheism. When I say Fetishism, Comte refers to Fetishism as the primary stage of the theological stage thinking, throughout the stage, primitive people believe that inanimate objects have a living spirit in them, also known as Animism. People worship inanimate objects like bridge stones, a piece of wood, volcanic eruptions etcetera. Through this practice people believe that all things root from a supernatural source. This is Fetishism. Like inanimate objects like a tree, wood, and so on. And they have a supernatural source.

At one point of time Fetishism began to bring about doubt in the minds of its believers that how is it possible that will worship an only tree, ocean, river and so on. As a result, people turn towards Polytheism. The explanation of things through the use of many Gods, multiple Gods. And primitive people believe that all-natural forces are controlled by different gods,

different goddesses and a few examples would be God of water, God of rain, God of fire, God of air, God of Earth, and so on.

And Monotheism, which is the last stage of the theological stage thinking because these are mentally conceived ideas. That Monotheism believing in one God or God in one. The proponents of Monotheism, they attributed it all to a single supreme deity. People believe primitive people believe a single theistic entity is responsible for the existence of the universe. Only one God is responsible for the creation of this universe, whether it is their human beings, whether their plants, whether their oceans, whether their forests, whatever you say, only one supernatural source.

Then basically the theological stage suggests that, that there is divine power, there is a supernatural force, which has created human beings, which has created this universe.

### **The metaphysical stage**

- ❑ The metaphysical stage is the extension of the theological stage.
- ❑ The metaphysical stage refers to explanation by impersonal abstract concepts.
- ❑ People often tried to believe that God is an abstract being. They believe that an abstract power or force guides and determines events in the world.
- ❑ Metaphysical thinking discards belief in a concrete God. The nature of inquiry was legal and rational in nature.

The second stage in the law of three stages is known as the metaphysical stage. If I have to pose a question, now. Who has created us? So far as the theological stage thinking is concerned, then, we will say that we are created by Gods and Goddesses divine power, supernatural forces. In the metaphysical stage, the same question will be answered differently, because the metaphysical stage stopped believing in Gods and Goddesses.

Rather, the metaphysical stage started believing in nature. Who has created us? Gods and goddesses have not created us in the metaphysical states, and the nature has created us, then our creation is mediated by nature. That is why human beings always contemplate on nature. That is they try to worship nature, nature as mother Goddess. Please do not confuse between the theological stage and metaphysical stage. Who has created us? This question elicits

answers from the theological stage like this, that gods, goddesses, supernatural forces, divine power have created us.

On the contrary, the metaphysical stage suggests that Gods and Goddesses have not created us, divine power has not created us, supernatural forces have not created us. Rather, we are the creations of nature. The metaphysical stage hence is the extension of the theological stage. The metaphysical stage refers to the explanation by impersonal abstract concepts. People often tried to believe that God is an abstract. They believe that an abstract power or force guides and determines events in the world and metaphysical thinking discards belief in a concrete God.

The nature of inquiry was legal and rational in nature, that's why nature has created us. For example, in classical Hindu Indian society, the principle of the transmigration of the soul, the conception of rebirth, notions of pursuit were largely governed by metaphysical appeal.

*Math Astronomy Chemistry Biology*

### **The positivistic or scientific stage** *Sociology*

- ❑ The positivistic or scientific stage refers to scientific explanation based on observation, experiment, and comparison.
- ❑ Positive explanations rely upon a distinct method, the scientific method for their justification.
- ❑ Today people attempt to establish cause and effect relationships.
- ❑ Positivism is a purely intellectual way of looking at the world; as well, it emphasizes observation and classification of data and facts.

Now, the same question, who has created us? In the theological stage was responded to by gods and goddesses have created us, in the metaphysical stage nature has created us, in the positivistic or scientific stage because by that time, so, many research works was also going on in the biological sciences, Charles Darwin and so on, the Origin of Species, principle of natural selection and so on. Marx was writing in the 19th century, many people were engaged in this research that, who has created us? Now, we are the creations of human action, human labor, as the argument was posed in the evolution of species and so on, we have evolved over a period of time.

That's why the positivistic stage is also known as the scientific stage. It refers to a scientific explanation that is based on observation, experiment, and comparison. Positive explanations rely upon a distinct method, the scientific method for that justification. Today people attempt to establish cause and effect relationship. Positivism is purely an intellectual way of looking at the world and also it emphasizes observation and classification of data and facts.

Comte, however, was conscious of the fact that the 3 stages of thinking namely the theological stage, the metaphysical stage, and the scientific stage or positivistic stage may or do coexist in the same society or in the same mind and may not always be successive. You may find they mutually coexist, there may be conflicts with each other, but they may coexist. Comte proposed a hierarchy of the sciences based on historical sequence with areas of knowledge passing through these stages in order of complexity.

The simplest in most remote areas of knowledge namely mechanical or physical are the first to become scientific according to Comte, these are followed by the more complex sciences those considered closest to us. The sciences according to Comte's law of 3 stages developed in this in such order as mathematics, then astronomy, and then physics, then chemistry, then biology, and then sociology, this is called the hierarchy of Sciences in Comtian schema and sociology as a science of society. Comte said it is the queen science, Queen of all sciences. The science of society does is thus the Queen science in Comte hierarchy, as it should be the most fundamentally complex.

Since Comte saw social science as an observation of human behavior and knowledge, his definition of sociology included observing humanity's development of science itself. Because of this Comte presented this introspective field of study as the science above all others, sociology would both complete the body of positive sciences by discussing humanity as the last unstudied scientific field and would link the fields of science together in human history showing the intimate relationship of scientific development on the one hand and social development on the other, scientific development on the one hand, and development of economy, culture, and policy on the other.

To Comte, the law of three stages made the development of sociology inevitable and necessary. Comte saw the formation of his law as an active use of sociology, but this formation was dependent on other sciences reaching the positive stage, other sciences mean these sciences: we have not reached sociology out of vacuum, but this is a hierarchy of

sciences from mathematics astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and then sociology for Comte.

This formation hence was dependent on the other sciences reaching the positive stage, positivistic stage. Comte's law of 3 stages would not have evidence for a positivistic stage without the observed progress and of other sciences through these 3 stages. Sociology and its first law of three stages would be developed after other sciences were developed out of the metaphysical stage with the observation of these developed sciences becoming the scientific practice used in a positivistic stage of sociology.

This special dependence on other sciences contributed to Comte's view of sociology being the most complex. It also provided an explanation for sociology being the last science to be developed, this is the last one. For Comte, not for others. Comte saw these results of his three-stage law and sociology, as not only inevitable but good. In Comte's eyes, the positivistic stage was not only the most evolved stage but also the stage best for mankind, because it is based on science, scientific inquiry.

Through continuous development of positive sciences, Comte hoped that human beings would perfect their knowledge of the world and make real progress to improve the welfare of humanity. He acclaimed the positivistic stage as the highest compliment of the human mind and as having natural superiority over the other more primitive stages.

Overall or if I have to recapitulate, what we have discussed now, that overall, Comte saw his last three stages as the starting point of the scientific field of sociology as a positive science. He believed this development, he believed that such progressive development to the positivistic or scientific stage was the key to completing positive philosophy and would finally, allow humans to study every observable aspect of the universe.

For Comte, sociology's human-centered studies would relate the fields of science to each other as progress in human history and make positive philosophy one coherent body of knowledge. Comte presented the positivistic stage as the final state of all sciences, which would allow human knowledge to be perfected leading to human progress. Then what are the central tenets of positivism?

**Positivism**

- Methodological ①
- Methodological monism ②
- Inductivism *Empiricism*
- Systematic verifiability
- Neutrality or objectivity
- Fact-value dichotomy
- Observations are pure and indubitable
- Unilateral relationship between observations and theory

*O → I*

*T → O*

*cannot be doubted*

Let us see what are the central characteristics of positivism, let us see. And then we will have a quick comparison between empiricism, rationalism, and positivism, and then we will move on to epistemology and ontology. What are the central features or central characteristics or central tenets of positivism? First is methodological, what is this? The proponents of positivism suggest that science is distinct from all areas of human activity or creativity because science possess a method unique to it, that other area of or non-sciences, they do not have a unique method that science has, that is called methodological.

The second one is methodological monism, which is the unique method we will see. The second one is methodological monism. Monism means single one, dualism means two. Pluralism means many. Methodological monism, what is that, that there is only one method, common to all sciences, irrespective of their subject matter. It may be astronomy, it may be physics, it may be chemistry, it may be biology, it may be mathematics, whatever you say. That there is only one method common to all sciences irrespective of their subject matter. Now, what is that single method, what is that unique method?

Positivists go ahead with the empirical model, the inductivist model that they suggested that the method of science is the method of induction that from particular instances we move to general instances. We have already discussed this I mean inductivism or empiricism.

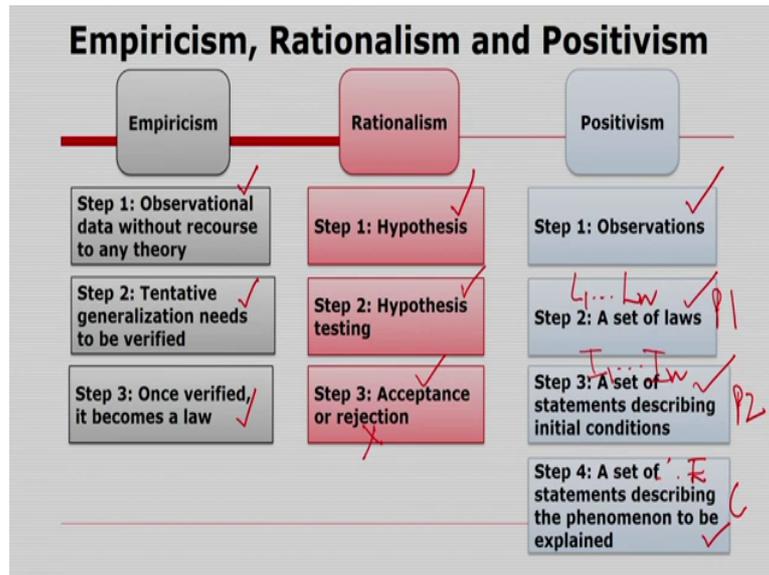
Now, the fourth one is that the hallmark of science lies in the fact that all scientific statements must be systematically verifiable, that inductivist schema also suggested that the general is and must be verified, once verified it becomes a law.

Then science must be neutral, science must be objective in nature, there should not be any subjective bias or prejudice like non sciences may have and there must be a binary or dichotomy between, dichotomy means two opposed groups if I say black-white, subject-object, image-text, then good-bad, right-wrong these are binary or dichotomies, there must be a dichotomy or binary between fact and value. If I say this is a computer, then this is a fact. But if I said this computer looks beautiful, then I add value to it. Because for me, it may look beautiful, for some others, for you, it may not look beautiful, that is why I add value to it. And science does not believe in value in the positivistic. Science always believes in facts.

That is why the positivists or the proponents of positivism argue that facts in science or scientific facts are value-neutral, whereas values do not have any factual content. And science, being the paragon of knowledge does not have any value commitments. It only has a commitment towards facts. As empiricists suggested that we must start with observations, positivists also argued that we must start with observations. But why? Now precisely because observations are pure and indubitable. Observations are pure in the sense that they do not have any recourse to theory i.e. no theoretical commitment, and observations cannot be doubted. Indubitable means cannot be doubted.

And there must be a unilateral relationship between observations and theory. Observation always leads to theory but the theory does not lead to observation there is always a unilateral relationship between observation and theory. Observations always lead to theory generation, but theory does not lead to observation in the positivistic schema, only in the positivistic schema. When we discuss popper and so on, when we move on progressively, we will find that our theory also may lead to the observation that cannot be any observation without any theoretical commitment, or any perspective. We will see that later on.

Now, for the time being then in the positivistic schema that observation leads to theory generation, but the converse is not true. I mean, in other words, theory does not lead to observation, and putting it succinctly theories are observation dependent, whereas, observations are theory independent. Observations are independent variables whereas theory is a dependent variable.



Then we will see, we will come to such comparison between empiricism, rationalism, and positivism. You will find in empiricism, we start with observations, we start with observational data without recourse to any theory. In rationalism, we start with a hypothesis and in positivism, we start with observations. In empiricism, we tend to provide a tentative generalization that needs to be verified. In rationalism, we tend to test our hypothesis whether it is right or wrong, in positivism we do that with a set of laws.

In the empiricist's schema, once the tentative generalization is verified, it becomes a law and in rationalist schema, if the hypothesis is tested right then it must be accepted. If it is tested wrong, then it must be rejected. And the positivistic schema, from a set of laws we tend to arrive at a set of statements describing initial conditions, I mean, this must be premise number 1, this must be premise number 2. And you need at least in logic in philosophy, you need at least two premises in social sciences, in sciences also today, you need at least two premises to arrive at a conclusion, this is our conclusion.

If I say, a set of laws, a set of initial conditions, and a set of statements describing the phenomenon to be explained, I mean if this is a set of laws  $L_1$  to  $L_n$ , this is a set of statements describing the initial conditions  $I_1$  to  $I_n$ . And therefore, you will tend to arrive at an explanation, then a set of laws, a set of statements describing the initial conditions, and a state set of statements describing the phenomenon to be explained. I mean from observations, laws, initial conditions, and explanation. This is how we try to compare and contrast empiricism, rationalism, and positivism.

## Epistemology and Ontology

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- Epistemology: a body or theory of knowledge
  - Positivism: supremacy of science over non-science
  - Interrogation of 'the' epistemology or 'the' science:  
Emergence of 'epistemologies' or 'sciences'
  - Ontology: What is being? What is existing?
  - Debates on structure and agency in social theory
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Now, we will discuss epistemology and ontology. As you have already pointed out, and these are significant implications for the way theoretical foundations and methodological devices have been deployed in social science research today. This is very important. Epistemology as we already know, that it is your body or theory of knowledge precisely because of the central philosophical and political questions that epistemology tends to address, that what is knowledge, what counts as knowledge, how is knowledge generated, and so on. And, we have also mentioned how positivism suggests the supremacy of science over non-sciences. Now, we are trying to see whether there may be the science, there must be single science or there must be a single epistemology or there is a plurality of epistemologies or a plurality of sciences.

The question ontology is the study of existence, nature of existence precisely because of the central philosophical and political questions that ontology addresses. What is being, what is existence? And then we will discuss debates on structure and agency in social theory.

## Epistemology and Ontology

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- Social science research in contemporary times is faced with several challenges – epistemological, theory-research praxis, researcher-researched interrelations and research for policymaking. Positivism  
Scientism  
Naturalism
- Epistemology deals with questions such as what is knowledge, what counts as knowledge, how knowledge claims are justified and nature of explanations, subject-object relations and fact-value relations. In other words, epistemology deals with theories of knowledge. Physicalism
- Ontology is concerned with the existential conditions related to material, social, cultural and political contexts.
- Hence, the question of relations between epistemology and ontology assumes importance. In other words, relations between knowledge and the context of its production and relations between facts and values have become important issues.

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Methodological Individualism
← Verstehen

In any discipline, there will always be a number of underlying philosophical predispositions in the projects of scientists, social scientists, people drawn from humanities, and so on. Some of these predispositions involve the nature of social knowledge itself, the nature of social reality, and the locus of human control in action. Scholars have disagreed about the extent to which the social sciences should mimic, should copy the methods used in social science in natural sciences. Whether we should borrow methods from natural sciences or not there are controversies. But essentially social sciences have borrowed so much from natural sciences so far as methods are concerned.

The founding positivists of the social sciences argued that social phenomena can and should be studied through conventional scientific methods. This notion of positivism as you have discussed is closely allied with scientism. You will find that when I say scientism, I mean everything is reduced to science. When I say naturalism, everything is reduced to natural sciences, nature, physical science, and physicalism, physical sciences.

Positivism always synonymous with scientism, naturalism, or physicalism. The doctrine that all phenomena are ultimately reduced to entities and physical laws. Opponents of naturalism, including advocates of the verstehen method – verstehen means an understanding of social actions- contended that there is a need for an interpretive approach to the study of human action. A technique is radically different from natural sciences. The fundamental task for the philosophy of Social Sciences has thus been to question the extent to which positivism may be characterized as scientific in relation to fundamental epistemological foundations. These

debates also range within contemporary social sciences with regard to subjectivity, objectivity, intersubjectivity, and practicality in the conduct of theory and research.

Philosophers of Social Sciences examine other epistemologies and methodologies, including realism, critical realism, instrumentalism, functionalism, structuralism, interpretivism, phenomenology, and poststructuralism. Social Science Research in contemporary times is faced with several challenges. Epistemological, I mean, what counts as knowledge? That challenge is also posed by ethics, what are the moral foundations of such knowledge? What is the relationship between theory and practice? What is the interrelationship between the researcher and the researched?

Suppose you are a researcher and you are going to study some community, what is the relationship between the two? And the research for significant policy-making. Epistemology as we have already said, deals with questions such as what is knowledge, what counts as knowledge, how knowledge claims are justified and nature of explanations, subject-object relations, and fact-value relations. In other words, epistemology deals with the theory of knowledge and ontology is concerned with the existential conditions related to material, social, cultural, and political contexts.

Though essentially all major social scientists, since the nineteenth century have accepted that the discipline faces challenges that are different from the those of the natural sciences. The ability to determine causal relationships, causal relationships means cause and effect relationships invoke the same discussions held in science meta-theory. Positivism has sometimes made with caricature as a breed of naive empiricism, yet the world has a rich history of application stretching from Comte to the work of the Vienna Circle, Vienna Circle means this *Verstehen* method, Understanding of social action.

By the same token, if positivism is able to identify causality, then it is open to same rationalist, non-justificationism presented by Karl Popper, which may itself be disputed through Kuhns concept of a Paradigm Shift. We will discuss these debates between Popper and Kuhn later on, in this course.

Early German hermeneuticians, the proponents of hermeneutics such as Dilthey pioneered the distinction between Natural Science and Social Science. This tradition greatly informed Max Weber and George Simmel's anti positivistic stance and continued with critical theory. Since the 1960's a general weakening of deductivist accounts of Sciences has grown side by side

with critics of scientism or sciences ideology, I mean everything is reduced to science i.e. scientism.

Habermas argues in his on the logic of the social sciences- let me quote Habermas here that “the positivist thesis of unified science, which assimilates all the sciences to a natural scientific model fails because of the intimate relationship between the social sciences and history and the fact that they are based on a situation-specific understanding of meaning that can be explicated only hermeneutically. Access to symbolically pre-structured reality cannot be gained by observation alone.”

Then, whatever we I mean howsoever produce knowledge is based on our positionality, or more often, it is based on the context of our social action, personality, perspective, and so on. Then this kind of Verstehen social theory has been the concern of phenomenological works, such as Schutz’s phenomenology of the social world and Gadamer’s truth and method. Phenomenology would later prove influential in the subject centered theory of the poststructuralists.

In the mid-twentieth century, linguistic turn led to a rise in highly philosophical sociology as well as so-called postmodern perspectives on the social acquisition of knowledge. One notable critique of Social Sciences found in Peter Winch’s Wittgensteinian text, the idea of social science and its relation to Philosophy back in 1958. Foucault provides a potent critique in his archaeology of the human sciences. Though Habermas and Richard Rorty - Richard Rorty was a pragmatist- have both argued that Foucault merely replaces one system of thought with another.

Because it is the study of existence that we are talking about in ontological questions. Because our action is dependent on the context. Our action depends on our positionality, our perspective, our belief system, and so on. One underlying problem for the social psychologist is that is whether studies can or should ultimately be understood in terms of the meaning and consciousness behind social action, as with folk psychology, or whether more objective natural materialist and behavioural facts are to be given exclusive study.

This problem is especially important for those within the social sciences, who study qualitative mental phenomena, such as consciousness, associative meanings, and mental representations because a rejection of the study of meanings would lead to the reclassification of such research as non-scientific. Influential traditions like psychodynamic theory and symbolic interactionism is maybe the first victims of such a paradigm shift, the philosophical

issues lined in wait behind these different positions have led to commitments to certain kinds of methodology, which have sometimes bordered on the partisan.

Still, many researchers have indicated a lack of patience for overly dogmatic proponents of one method or another; we must have multiple methods as against positivistic method that there is one method common to all sciences irrespective of their subject matter, that is, methodological monism. As and the Verstehen method suggested methodological dualism. And today, we tend to see methodological pluralism.

I was in Sweden for a conference in 2010. There I met Professor Michael Burawoy, he is a retired person from the United States of America at that time, he was the president of the International Sociological Association. I meant it was not the first time that I met Michael Burawoy, but I met Michael Burawoy in Hyderabad also in 2006 and 7, Now, first Chennai, then Hyderabad, then the United States, I mean, then Sweden, and then Japan and so on.

But what always, Burawoy argues that social research remains extremely common and effective in practice with respect to political institutions and businesses. Michael Burawoy has marked the difference between public sociology on the one hand, which is focused formally on practical applications, and academic or professional sociology on the other which involves dialogue amongst other social scientists and philosophers.

**Epistemology and Ontology**

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- Positivism: supremacy of science over non-science
- Interrogation of 'the' epistemology or 'the' science:  
Emergence of 'epistemologies' or 'sciences'
- <sup>Social</sup> Ontology: What is being? What is existing?
- Debates on structure and agency in social theory

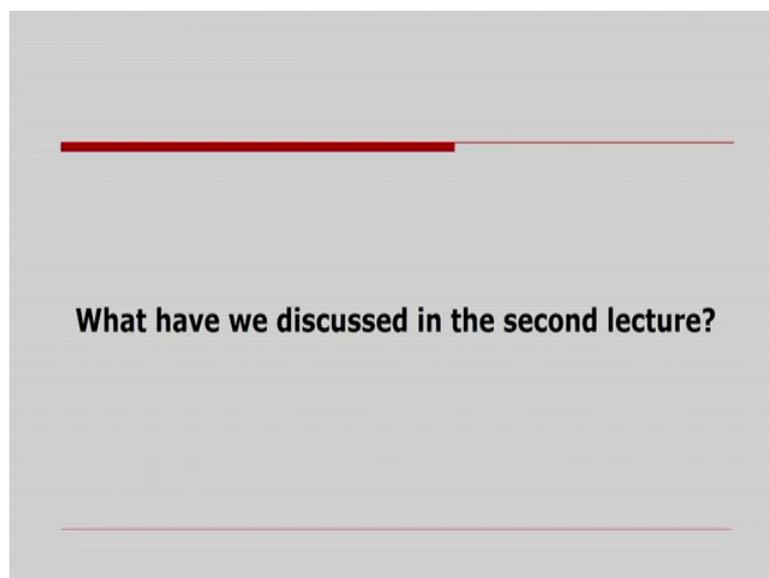
Giddens  
Roy Shrivastava

And if I have to look at debates on structure and agency in social theory, so far as the ontological questions are concerned, this is very important. It has been touched upon mostly by Anthony Giddens. He was the director of the London School of Economics and Political Science earlier, he is rated one of the most influential sociologists, social scientists in the

world today, and critical realists like Roy Bhaskar and so on. Structure and agency, this debate forms an enduring debate in social theory. What is important, whether structure or agency, whether it is structure or action? Do social structures determine an individual's behavior or does human agency?

In this context, agency refers to the capacity of the individuals to act independently on the structure and make free choices, where structure refers to factors which limit or affect the choices and actions of the individuals such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, and so on. Discussions over the primacy of structure or agency relate to the very core of social ontology. I mean, what is the social world made of? What is the cause in the social world and what is an effect?

One attempt to reconcile postmodern critics with the overlapping, overarching project of social science has been the development particularly in Britain of critical realism. For example, for critical realists such as Roy Bhaskar, traditional positivism commits an epistemic fallacy by failing to address the ontological conditions which makes science possible that is structure and agency itself.



Then, what have we discussed in the second lecture, we have discussed Auguste Comte and his last three stages namely the theological stage, the metaphysical stage, and the positivistic or scientific stage. And then, in the theological stage, how Comte divided the theological stage into three stages namely fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism. And what are the central tenets of the positivistic stage, what are the central characteristics of positivism, what are the central features, central tenets of positivism namely methodological, methodological

monism, inductivism, systematic-verifiability, objectivity and neutrality, objectivity or neutrality, fact-value dichotomy, observations are pure and immutable, how that is your unilateral relationship between observations and theory.

And then we have discussed, we have tried to make a compare and contrast between empiricism and rationalism and positivism. And then, we have discussed what is the relationship between epistemology and ontology, and how epistemology today must take into consideration the ontological questions. That is why I said, that is why we discussed how social science research in contemporary times is faced with several challenges problems ranging from epistemological, ethical, theory, research, practice, practice, researcher researched interrelations and research for policymaking and the question of relevance between epistemology and ontology assumes greater significance than ever before.

In other words, relations between knowledge and the context of its and the context of knowledge production, and the relations between facts and values have become important issues, if we want to integrate epistemology with ethics. Now we have come to the closure of the first week. What we are going to do in the second week, I mean, that will be the third lecture.

**Course outline**

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**Week 1 (Two Lectures)**

**History of philosophy of social sciences**

- Empiricism and rationalism
- Comte and positivism
- Epistemology and ontology

**Week 2 (Three Lectures)**

**Emile Durkheim**

- Rules of sociological method ✓
- Influence of sciences on sociology ✓
- Objectivity in social sciences ✓
- Social facts, autonomy of knowledge and the necessity of science ✓
- Commonsense and science ✓
- Comparative social sciences ✓
- Organic analogy and precursor to functionalism ✓

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We will find that we are going to discuss in the second week, 3 lectures. We will start with Emile Durkheim's rules of sociological method, and then we will move on to the influence of Sciences on sociology, objectivity, in social sciences, social facts, and the autonomy of knowledge or autonomy of sociology and the necessity of science, common sense in science, comparative social sciences, and organic analogy and precursor to functionalism.

These are significant methodological argumentative philosophical traditions that we are going to discuss in the second week. And in the third lecture, we are going to start with Emil Durkheim's rules of the sociological method. Thank you.