

DANIEL STEEL & FRANCESCO GUALA, eds. 2011. *The Philosophy of Social Science Reader*. London: Routledge.

The Philosophy of Social Science Reader, edited by Daniel Steel and Francesco Guala, is a welcome, well-organized, and brilliant collection, offering a novel look into a field that has changed enormously in the last 20 years. Edited by two increasingly important philosophers of the Social Sciences, the book reflects both in its approach and content a significant generational shift within the discipline. This shift has many dimensions, and the authors present an original summary of these transformations at the start of the book. Perhaps the change is best embodied in the fact that the philosophy of social science works now in much greater dialogue with the social sciences that it is supposed to portray, and this is reflected, in turn, in Guala's and Steel's own trajectories, where the latter has a background as anthropologist and the former currently contributes to the field of behavioral economics.

The volume collects 28 essays in seven different parts, with each part beginning with clear and insightful introductions that outline the editors' vision of the topics. The structure in each part is the same: a classic piece that sets the debate in a particular domain or topic, followed by three or four more recent articles (written, in the majority of cases, after 1990) that reflect new approaches, arguments, or twists to both perennial and new questions in the Philosophy of Social Sciences. In the general introduction to the volume, the editors provide an encompassing account of the recent changes in the field, which they group under four headings.

First, under the topic of *disunity*, Steel and Guala discuss the liberating effect that the abandonment of certain ideas regarding the unity of science has had for the philosophy of social science, namely: the rejection of physics as a model to all scientific enquiry; the idea that all disciplines must share the same methods; or the notion that there is a radical breach between the natural and social sciences, in which only the former can aspire to be truly scientific. Once free of these misrepresentations, those interested in the Philosophy of Social Science do not need to feel they are devoting their energy to a residual or minor field vis-à-vis general Philosophy of Science.

A second cross-sectional theme in the field's new outlook refers to *interdisciplinarity*. The authors argue that the growing trend to blur disciplinary boundaries, both within the different social sciences (as in collaborative instances among political science, anthropology, and economics, for example) and across the natural and the social sciences, are giving rise to some of the better social scientific work and also, and perhaps more importantly, to entire new fields, such as neuroscience.

Third, and relatedly, the introduction to the *Reader* registers changing attitudes toward the possibility of a *naturalist* philosophy of social science, understood as one that considers scientific and philosophical research as contiguous and rejects ideas that associate philosophical inquiry as either a superior or an accessory activity compared to the sciences it studies. In this respect, Guala and Steel underline one attractive feature of the field the book is devoted to, as philosophers of social science have traditionally had a better chance than say, fellow philosophers of physics, when it comes to be taken into account by practicing scientists.

A final theme of special relevance to the field's transformation is the issue of *values*, where the authors endorse a "third way" that has made its path through in between supporters of the idea of value neutrality of science (and social science) and those advocating an openly activist role for the social scientist. In contrast, in this middle position, the relationship between values and social science is more complex but also more interesting, and acknowledges the fact that social science interacts with its object in ways that are inherently value-laden.

The authors' interest in the question of values in the social sciences is indicated in the first of seven parts that organize the book. The section starts with a contribution by Nagel, revisiting the Weberian ideal of a value-free science, and the rest of the contributions complicate the picture deploying the arguments in favour of a standpoint epistemology (Fricker, Wylie), or spell out how values shape the object of the social sciences (as in Hacking's interactive kinds).

The second section, on causal inference and explanation, inevitably starts with Hempel's adaptation of his covering law model to history, followed by Kincaid's defense of the use of *ceteris paribus* laws in social scientific explanations. A second group of contributions shifts the focus to newer approaches to causality: Woodward's manipulationist account of causation and his defense of invariance as a central feature of explanation in the special sciences are followed by Steel's own piece. The article tempers some of the enthusiasm raised by the proponents of mechanistic accounts of causality as the remedy to solve the problems of causal inference. A final brief article by Scheines explains the logic of directed causal graphs and the way in which they assist causal inference to then argue how the latter is also possible through observational studies, provided that some assumptions hold in cases in which experimental ideal interventions are unfeasible or undesirable. A third part of the volume starts off with Geertz's classic text that describes the main elements of his 'interpretative anthropology', and justifies the relevance of *thick descriptions* to the full understanding of the social object and its many symbolic layers. Contributions by Jones, Goldman, and Stuber are put in a sort of dialogue for and against different theories of interpretation. Overall, though the editors are right in underlining the far reaching consequences of this debate for our idea of both the social scientific object and its method, this chapter is more self-contained, and perhaps less obviously connected in an immediate way to the rest of the book.

The fourth part of the Reader starts off attesting the depth of the rational choice revolution, which by the 21st century has annexed (sometimes more peacefully, sometimes less so) practically every theoretical program in nearly every social scientific discipline. The authors trace the historical origins of rational choice theory and stress how difficult it is to really assimilate this theory and its workings to any pre-existing label by philosophers of science. The first two pieces in this section, by Harsanyi and Kahneman, are aimed, respectively, as samples of recent developments, and challenges found by rational choice theorists. The role of Phillip Pettit's piece in this part is less straightforward, as it provides an argument about the possibility of successfully depicting social mechanisms by means of assuming a distorting picture of self-centered individuals: the function of *homo economicus* is that of capturing a virtual mechanism that

can potentially act as an actual force if social outcomes were to be pushed off the equilibrium path. As interesting as Pettit's piece is, and though it deals with the relationship between the plausibility of assumptions and the predictions of the model, it only provides the reader with less than a taste of the active discussions around the role of modelling in economics and social science.

More generally, modelling practices in the social sciences and their related epistemological puzzles is an area that receives less attention in the volume than one would have expected. Models are not only a topic of obvious and growing interest to practically all social science practitioners, but also a rare locus where philosophers of the social sciences collaborate with fellow philosophers of science. Though a few pieces dealing with the interpretation of economic models are suggested as further reading, perhaps a full article, or more ambitiously, a whole section on the subject could have been part of this volume. Volumes like this one, regardless, may always be liable of not being inclusive enough. As another example, Guala's last article in this section, showing how rational choice theory and experiments were combined in the construction of the market for airwave spectrum by the US Federal Communication Commission is a piece that offers, among other things, a captivating look at the status of game theory as a technology, but perhaps offers too small a window for the reader to look into the burgeoning area of experimental social science.

The next part in the Reader starts off with Lukes' classical piece on Methodological Individualism and is followed by more recent pieces by Van Hees and Sawyer on the possibility or desirability of reductionism.

The sixth section of the volume deals first with conventions through one of Lewis' texts and Gilbert's critique of his concept. A text by Searle on institutional facts that offers an introduction to his social ontology is also included. Bicchieri's introductory chapter to her opus on norms completes the section, which provides an accessible introduction to the matter, connecting nicely with the last part of the book, devoted to cultural evolution including articles by Dawkins, Sperber, Richerson and Boyd, and an example of evolutionary game theory by Alexander and Skyrms.

Once again, the arrival of the Philosophy of Social Science Reader is great news to the discipline, both because it provides an excellent outlook to those interested in it, and because it attests how exciting the field has become in the last years.

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MAURICIO SUÁREZ, ed. 2011. *Probabilities, Causes, and Propensities in Physics*. Dordrecht: Springer.

In *Probabilities, Causes, and Propensities in Physics*, Mauricio Suárez collects eleven interesting, challenging, and far-reaching essays about probability, causality, and propensities as they pertain to modern physics. All the essays are from eminent philosopher of physics and science, and each is of a very high calibre. Whilst the essays are quite