Continental philosophies of the social sciences

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1. Introduction

In my view, there is no such thing as *a* continental philosophy of the social sciences. There is, at least, no consensual definition of what is precisely *continental* in any philosophical approach.[1] Besides, there are many approaches in the philosophy of the social sciences that are often qualified as *continental*, but there is no obvious connection between them. The most systematic attempt so far to find one is Yvonne Sherratt's (2006) monograph, where continental approaches would be appraised as different branches of the Humanist tradition. According to Sherratt, philosophers in this tradition draw on the ideas and arguments of the ancient Greek and Roman thinkers, since they understand philosophy as an accumulative endeavor, where the past is a continuous source of wisdom. Unlike empiricist philosophers in the analytic tradition, humanists see the world as *an intrinsically purpose-laden, ethically, aesthetically, and spiritually valuable entity*. However, once you adopt such a broad definition in order to encompass such different thinkers as Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger or Foucault, it seems difficult not to see humanistic traits in analytic philosophers as well. Moreover, when it comes to the philosophical study of actual social sciences, it is not clear whether adopting a humanistic stance makes, as such, any difference in the analysis: as we will see below, the arguments of the continental philosophers discussed here do not presuppose a particular commitment with, e.g., ideas from classical Antiquity.

Certain Greeks named those who did not speak their language *Barbarians*, but it was never clear who counted as a proper speaker of Greek. Similarly, there is no clear empirical division differentiating *continental* authors from philosophers of any other kind. I will, therefore, focus on a few paradigmatic instances of continental philosophies of the social sciences, discussing each one separately without any attempt to find a common thread.[2] The following three sections will deal, in this order, with Marxism, phenomenology and, more briefly, Foucault. I have chosen these three approaches for just one reason: they have had a real influence on how social research has been conducted throughout the 20th century.[3] There have been Marxist, phenomenological and Foucauldian social scientists and they can claim that their research methods are effectively grounded in philosophical principles that analytically-oriented social

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[1] Nonetheless, there have been several attempts at defining this dichotomy: for a sample, see D'Agostini 1997, Sáez Rueda 2002 and Piercey 2009.

[2] I have received comments and suggestions from competent scholars on each part of the paper, which I have acknowledged at the beginning of each of section. I am also grateful to Luis Arenas, Francesco Guala, Eric Schliesser, William Outhwaite and Jesús Zamora for their observations on the entire piece. Bruno Maltras provided much help in the analysis of the Social Sciences Citation Index.

[3] In my view, other authors such as Pierre Bourdieu or Clifford Geertz would have equally deserved a section in this survey, even if philosophers have not paid them much attention so far. It is clearly objectionable that I have not included a line on either Gadamer or, especially, Ricoeur. This latter certainly had important views on the social sciences that deserve consideration, but I could not trace a direct connection with the work of prominent social scientists —I do not claim it does not exist: I am just making my own limitations explicit. Gender-oriented research has had an impact on the social sciences (e.g., feminist economics), but the underlying philosophy is not necessarily continental. Given the usual time constraints, I have opted for the three approaches that seem to be at least equally popular among philosophers and social scientists. For a more extensive consideration of other "continental" approaches, see Turner and Risjord 2007.

scientists do not share. Next, I will focus on positive guidelines implemented in current social sciences rather than on principled philosophical discussions about how they should be cultivated. In the case of Marxism, this implies an assessment of major contributions in several fields, whereas phenomenologists or Foucauldians have so far been a dissenting minority with minor professional impact. I follow the (mostly) analytically-minded habit of working with case studies where methodologies are actually implemented. The aim of this chapter is just to show the relevance of continental ideas for certain research agendas, focusing more on their efficacy in actual scientific practices than on their internal philosophical merits. This judgment is admittedly analytically inspired, but I hope not entirely unfair to the continental accomplishments.

My own understanding of continental philosophy is partial and biased or, if you prefer, situated. I was exposed to these philosophies when I studied philosophy as an undergraduate in Spain and I do not have original views on any of the authors I will deal with: I draw on standard interpretations, which are not always consensual, and I will make my sources explicit at every step.[4] The first section is, then, about Marxism. It surveys its typical explanatory patterns (functionalism and methodological individualism) on particular issues in economics (value theory) and history (the connection between productive forces and relations of production). I will also discuss value judgments in the Marxist tradition, with a brief overview of the positivism dispute. In the second section, on phenomenology, I will present Husserl's views on the connection between philosophy and the social sciences of his times, discussing their implications for the assessment of cultural anthropology. I will also deal with Schütz's contributions to sociology and how they contributed to the articulation of ethnomethodology, the most accomplished phenomenological research paradigm so far. A quick discussion of the embodied approach to cognitive science closes the section. In the third and final section, I will explore Foucault's initial appraisal of the social sciences, that I take to generalize his experience with psychology. I also consider his more mature views on *governmentality*, trying to explain the success of this concept in current research across several fields. Each section can be read independently.

To many, my final conclusion will probably state the obvious. Marxism is of more interest today for philosophers than for social scientists —which is probably not a good thing for the former, since this usually implies neglecting the latter's more recent contributions. So far, phenomenology has only achieved success in actual social research today at the cost of dispensing with many of its central assumptions. Foucauldian-inspired research, finally, influential as it is, is based on minimal philosophical presuppositions, but these presuppositions are restrictive enough to limit the kind of analyses that are acceptable. By its own construction, it cannot aspire to become a mainstream paradigm. Obviously, none of this partial conclusion precludes that some other continental philosopher may succeed in inspiring social scientists in the near future, but I personally would not bet on anybody's success at this point.

[4] I avoid discussing primary sources, for the sake of brevity. The secondary literature I cite is never exhaustive, but rather, at most, introductory. Following these leads, I hope the interested reader will easily find more complete information.

2. Marxism

It is impossible to cover in just one section the many issues of interest for the philosophy of the social sciences arising within the Marxist tradition.[5] To a great extent, this tradition hinges on the interpretation of the works of Marx and Engels, but there is no agreement about how we should read them. The circumstances in which they were published or edited have significantly complicated (almost up to today) our understanding of many central points in Marxian thought. In addition, interpretative and political disagreement often came hand in hand: communist parties all over the world have justified their strategies in terms of fidelity to the "true" thought of Marx and Engels, generating a self-serving literature, still virtually inexhaustible.[6]

Nonetheless, its practical relevance certainly helps to explain the impact of Marxism in the social sciences of the 20th century. In the USSR, and then in many other communist regimes, Marxism was enforced among the social scientists by the ruling party, according to their interpretation of choice. In the Western world, Marxism could be adopted by a social scientist for purely intellectual considerations, but a certain degree of commitment with one or another communist party was not rare –and if there was none, this circumstance was often denigrated.[7] We may well wonder how relevant Marxian thought would have been, had there been no USSR. Perhaps, Marx's intellectual influence would have been more like, say, Comte's or Spencer's and, regarding politics, no greater than any other utopian socialist of his times. But, in point of fact, Marxism was either the dominant approach or one of the main contenders in many social sciences during the second half of the 20th century, playing a major role in the methodological literature of those disciplines.[8] By the same token, after the fall of the USSR, the philosophical discussion of Marxist social science has become increasingly rare, at least in mainstream philosophy journals in the English-speaking world.

The aim of this section is to survey the main issues in the methodological discussion around Marxian social sciences, comparing the Marxist approach, broadly conceived, with the mainstream methodological tenets in analytical social science. We owe this comparison mostly to Gerald Cohen, John Roemer, Jon Elster and the work of the September group in the 1980s and early 1990s, when the discussion stalled, with no major developments since then.[9] We will then briefly consider the functional

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[5] I am grateful to Andy Denis, Adolfo García de la Sienra, Andrew Levine, Daniel Little and Félix Ovejero for their comments on this section. They made their disagreement explicit at many points, so the responsibility here (more than in any other section) remains mine.

[6] My own understanding of the Marxist tradition owes much to Kolakowski 2005. Among Spanish Marxists, I am indebted to Sacristán 1983 and Bueno 1991. Walker & Gray 2007 and Glaser & Walker 2007 provide updated overviews. Carver 2003 and Little 2007 provide insightful presentations of this section's topic.

[7] E.g., the so-called professorial socialists (*Kathedersozialisten*) affiliated with the *German Verein für Socialpolitik* in the late 19th century

[8] A good overview is provided by the entries indexed under Marxism in the 1968 edition of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Sills 1968) and the 2001 *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Smelser and Baltes 2001).

[9] A quick overview and a basic reference list is provided in van Parijs 2001. I am clearly aware that taking sides with analytical Marxism, as I do in this section, is clearly questionable for most other Marxists, so the reader should be warned of my partiality. Certainly, it is historically misleading to present the Marxist tradition solely from the standpoint of its analytical reconstruction, which is only thirty years old and never played a significant role in Marxism as a social movement. Nonetheless, for most philosophers of the social sciences, analytical Marxism seems to be the standard approach to the discussion of Marx.

explanation, the controversy around the Marxian theory of value (in economics), methodological individualism, the central tenets of historical materialism and, to conclude, the treatment of normative issues in the Marxist tradition.

According to Elster (1985 p. 4), the main Marxist contribution to the methodology of the social sciences (analytically reconstructed) would have been the causal explanation of aggregate phenomena in terms of the individual actions that go into them: pursuing their individual goals, the actors bring about an unintended outcome, namely by making erroneous assumptions about one another. These unintended consequences could be beneficial (or not) to the actors. In Elster's view, Marx often considered these benefits as an explanation of the actions that brought them about. Hempel, Nagel and other philosophers of scientific explanation usually consider such a *functional* approach to explanation faulty if no *causal connection* is shown between the actions and their consequences. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand how an event in the future (the benefits) can generate an individual action without the actor anticipating it. This is the standard appraisal of Marxian functional explanations among analytical philosophers of the social sciences.

However, Marx was part of a broad philosophical tradition in which teleological explanations of social processes were considered acceptable.[10] For German idealists from Kant onwards, History could only be appraised through conceptual analysis, where concepts were somehow objectively inscribed in the social processes under discussion. Such concepts had a logic of their own: Marx took his own version from Hegel and this was *dialectics*. It presided over social aggregates (e.g., classes), guiding their development independently of the intentions of their individual members, who nonetheless benefitted from (or suffered) the consequences. Despite numerous attempts, there is still no consensual elucidation of Marxian dialectics, at least in the philosophy of the social sciences.[11] At most, the style of conceptual analysis cultivated by Marx in his economic writings has been somewhat clarified in terms of *abstraction* and *idealization*, but without much impact on actual social research.[12]

Indeed, many methodological debates in the Marxist social sciences can be interpreted in the light of the philosophical inspiration (roughly speaking, *analytic* or *continental*) of each side. One prominent example is the controversy about the Marxian theory of value, which has been going on for more than a century now.[13] Broadly speaking, the value of an economic good is the amount of *homogenized socially necessary labour time* it takes to produce it in a given social setting. For Marx, the value of a good would *explain* its exchange price. Yet, in Marxian economics this explanation may take different forms, deserving more or less attention depending on the philosophical taste of the reader. In many of his economic writings, Marx articulates the discussion of value

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Critical assessments of analytical Marxism can be found in Roberts 1996, Levine 2003, Tarrit 2006 and Veneziani 2008.

[10] On the sources of teleological explanations in social research, see Turner 2003. The connection between Marx and Hegel regarding this point was widely discussed in the 1960s, mostly around the works of Althusser: Lewis 2005 provides an introduction to these debates, even if it is partial to Althusser.

[11] For an overview, see Wilde 1991. Philosophical discussions of the role of dialectics in Marxian methodology in the light of contemporary philosophy of science are presented in Little 1986 and Walker 2001.

[12] On idealization and Marxian economics, see Nowak 1980, De Marchi & Hamminga 1994 and García de la Sienra 2007.

[13] Two overviews from a different perspective can be found in the latest edition of *The New Palgrave*: Foley and Duncan 2008 (constructive perspective) and Roemer 2008 (critical perspective).

drawing on Aristotelian (e.g., *form/substance*) and Hegelian (e.g., *essence/appearance*) categories, whose correct interpretation requires a certain degree of competence in the History of Greek and German philosophy.[14] Through these categories Marx would have articulated a general view of social life hinging on productive activities —e.g, Gould 1980. Value theory would illuminate how production is truly organized in capitalist societies and the explanation of market prices it yields allowed Marx to establish a conceptual connection between such disparate phenomena as, e.g., economic exploitation, class division or the future collapse of capitalism. The philosophical categories articulating this worldview are no longer part of the standard vocabulary of most social sciences, but many Marxian philosophers appraising economics in the continental tradition (e.g., Negri, Žižek) still rely on their own version of these concepts. Here, philosophy and the social sciences parted ways several decades ago.

But Marx's theory of value also owed a great deal to classical political economy, which sought to establish a concrete explanatory relation between values and prices. Marx tried to show that, in capitalist markets, commodities tend to be exchanged in a certain proportion to the labour time they "embody." Marx's key insight is that the profit earned in the exchange by the owner of the means of production of a good arise from the embodied labour contributed by the worker without payment. This surplus value measured the exploitation of the worker, independently of her own intentional economic choices. Marx attempted to state this proportion in algebraic terms, giving rise to the so-called *transformation problem*: it has been argued (Roemer 2008) that Marx's equations are either unnecessary for calculating prices or internally contradictory.

The transformation problem created a methodological dilemma among economists. Some argued that the labour theory of value should be abandoned for some other economic approach to price calculation (usually, neoclassical demand theory). At this point, this seems to be the choice of the majority within the profession. Others have tried to reform the equations, preserving the concept of value while arguing that its main role within the theory is the analysis of exploitation rather than exchange prices. More recently, John Roemer has restated the key Marxian normative insights about exploitation, using standard analytic tools in neoclassical economics, i.e., modeling the agents' interaction in a way that makes their individual choices explicit. I.e., their micro-foundations.[15]

Philosophers of the social sciences have appraised the dilemma created by the transformation problem from various perspectives. To name just a couple within the analytic tradition, on one hand, we find a number of set-theoretic (*structuralist*) reconstructions of the Marxian theory of value.[16] Here the concept of value is either epistemically justified in terms of the role it plays in the architecture of the theory or, alternatively, grounded in formal analyses of the measurement conditions of Marxian value. However, these reconstructions show that it is possible to clarify, in certain respects, the conceptual articulation of the theory, despite the transformation problem, but they do not provide substantive reasons to accept it. Analytical Marxists, such as Roemer or Elster, argue instead that there are, rather, positive reasons to reject it: whatever its aim, in most formulations, the concept of value is methodologically obscure, because it does not involve any consideration of the individual choices of the economic agents. For instance, it has been argued that Marx was interested in "abstract"

[14] See Wood 1993. My own understanding of this connection is shaped by Rockmore 2002 (regarding Hegel) and Arteta 1993 (regarding Aristotle).
[15] Again, see the references in Duncan 2008 and Roemer 2008.
[16] See García de la Sienra 1992 and Álvarez 1991 for an overview.

labour time, rather than in imputating "concrete" labour time to different commodities. But shouldn't the "abstract" be the aggregate of "concrete" instances? Once you incorporate micro-foundations into Marxian economics, you can either analyze exploitation or calculate prices without Marxian values.[17]

The point of contention illustrated by this case is whether the social sciences should adhere to methodological individualism or not —in Elster's minimal characterization: whether collective actions should be explained in terms of the desires and beliefs that enter into the motivation of the individuals participating in them. Marxists and other continental philosophers of the social sciences usually question such an assumption, whereas neoclassical economists and analytically oriented philosophers usually defend it.[18] Notice that this is more a conceptual than an empirical issue. The analysis of prices in neoclassical economics relies on individual choices as explained by utility theory. But for many decades this latter was accepted with hardly any positive experimental evidence, just as Marxian values were.

Again, the debate on methodological individualism can be appraised at two different levels. On one hand, it can be conducted as a conceptual discussion about social ontology: should we take individuals or, rather, groups of individuals (classes, for Marx) as the basic units of social analysis? Originally, this was mostly a controversy on the realism of the assumptions of each theory: on the neoclassical side, did utility theory represent any individual psychological process? On the Marxist side, how could class analysis account for individual choices? The debate was initiated by the Austrian school in the late 19th century and was somehow closed in the 1960s with the gradual turn to instrumentalist justifications of utility theory by neoclassical economists: as long as any economic theory provides good statistical predictions, we can dispense with the realism of its assumptions.[19] Whether neoclassical theories ever yielded such a good prediction remains a controversial issue, but their supporters were, at least, more eager to adopt econometric techniques than Marxian economics. For many Marxists, statistical analyses reduced social entities to aggregates of individual data, which was considered to be contradictory to the reality of classes.[20] This is, perhaps, why Marxism never really competed against neoclassical economics with predictions. However, most varieties of Marxism remained firmly committed to realism and resisted individualistic reductions of social aggregates.[21]

On the other hand, it can be posed as a reflection on the explanatory virtues of the analytical tools applied by neoclassical economics, namely decision and game theory. In these latter, it seems possible to interpret expected utility as a combined expression of the beliefs of the agents about the probability of the alternatives considered and their desires, i.e., the utility resulting from each of these alternatives. Hence, we may explain in principle the aggregated effects of individual decisions on intentional grounds. However, such an interpretation is often challenged on various grounds: first, expected utility theory can be applied to group agents, where there is a less clear intentional basis, and second, explanatory reductions to individual decisions are often theoretically

[17] The standard references here are Roemer 1981 and 1982.

[18] A survey of economic approaches to the individual agent can be found in Davis 2003. My own appraisal owes a great deal to García-Bermejo 2006.

[19] The final stage of these debates, hinging on Milton Friedman's 1953 methodological piece, is surveyed in Mäki 2009.

[20] For an initial exploration, see Hertz 2000 and Mespoulet 2008.

[21] We still find remnants of this debate in the objections of the so-called critical realists against mainstream economics. On critical realism and Marxism, see Bhaskar 1998, Lawson 2003, Baskhar and Callinicos 2007

unreachable and, even in game theory, the analyses of individual choices may depend on macro-features. Despite various attempts at a more precise definition of methodological individualism, there is no consensus yet and it is mostly defended on *heuristic* grounds: the formal analysis of individual decisions has led to fruitful theoretical results in many different social domains. However, holism in the Marxist tradition is no less difficult to define and, as of today, there are no consensual formal results providing a general framework for social analysis.[22]

History and economics were the two main disciplines in the Marxist social sciences. The central claim of the methodology of historical materialism is the connection between productive forces and relations of production, which we shall explore here following Gerald Cohen's (2000) reconstruction —once again, the best bridge, so far, between the analytical and the continental Marx. In Cohen's interpretation, the productive forces are, namely, the means of production (tools, raw materials, etc.) and labour-power. In turn, the relations of production are defined namely in terms of the property relations of the producers with regard to the means of production and their own labour-power (e.g., a capitalist worker owns the latter, but not the former), with some additional provisos. Marx's major claim is that, throughout history, the relations of production first "correspond" to the productive forces and then enter into a "contradiction" with them. The interpretation of this claim is controversial. In Cohen's view, the correspondence means that certain relations of production are optimal for the development of certain productive forces and this is why the former appear and take hold. When they are no longer optimal, the relations of production change. Hence, there is a functional connection by which the development of the productive forces explain the relations of production. For Marx, this functional link allows us to explain the transition between the different modes of production that feature in human history. Historical materialism thus affirms the (explanatory) primacy of the productive forces.

However, as we already mentioned regarding mechanisms, Marxian analyses usually do not provide all the necessary details for a coherent functional interpretation along the lines suggested by Cohen. Nonetheless, throughout the 20th century, Marxist historians applied this approach without much regard for explanatory patterns as such. The main point of contention was, instead, how to assess the autonomy of individuals in a materialist perspective. For instance, the so-called *structural* accounts of Marx prevailing in the 1960s granted them little autonomy, putting all the explanatory weight on the teleological connection between productive forces and relations of productions. This line was widely contested (e.g., the Althusser-Thompson-Anderson debate: Lewis 2005), but Marxist historiography never reached a clear methodological consensus about the role of individual choices in explanation.[23] It is interesting to notice that a somewhat clearer view of functional explanations was developed by an intellectual offspring of Marxism in anthropology, the cultural materialism school (Bueno 1978). Marvin Harris (1999) argued, for instance, that individuals select infrastructural innovations depending on their estimations of the costs and benefits for them, making the collective adoption of those novelties that increase the efficiency of their productive and reproductive processes more likely. This principle seems particularly plausible in the analysis of populations constrained in well-defined ecological niches, where the effects of certain cultural traits on the production and consumption of calories can somehow be measured. In these niches, individual choices about these traits can result

[22] Kincaid 2008 provides a quick overview. For a more extensive analysis, see Turner and Risjord 2007, pp. 213-395.

[23] For a recent sympathetic overview of Marxist historiography, see Blackledge 2006.

in the niches either sustaining or exhausting their carrying capacity, thus explaining why such traits survive or disappear. Even the best examples of such anthropological analyses are, nonetheless, controversial (e.g., Dawson 2002), but there is at least an explicit principle linking infrastructural changes and their cultural effects through individual behavior.

An implicit question in this methodological dispute is how autonomous individuals were in making their choices. This was a normative issue of foremost relevance,[24] and it often appeared in the debate on the practical implications of Marxist theories —or the *unity of theory and praxis*, to use a more traditional statement of the problem among Western Marxists. Marx was, indeed, as much an activist as a theorist and it often seems as if his arguments aimed to both describe and transform capitalist societies. How his arguments would achieve such a transformation was, again, open to dispute. Those who more explicitly denied their normative dimension (e.g., Lenin and the Soviet tradition) usually assumed that communist activists were just acting in accordance to the laws of history. Marxian theories would provide communist parties with the tools to properly interpret these laws and act accordingly. In this approach, Marxists would act instrumentally: given that communism is the objective end of History, and they want it to arrive, their political activity should just find the proper means to bring it about sooner than later. However, there have been Marxists, even if only a minority, who defended a more explicitly normative version of communist politics (e.g., Rosa Luxemburg or Antonio Gramsci). The most philosophically influential among them come from the Frankfurt School, namely Adorno and Horkheimer, on one hand, and Jürgen Habermas, still active today. Unlike other Marxists, they not only confronted their own tradition, but presented their case in open dialogue with Anglo-American philosophers. A good case in point, regarding the philosophy of the social sciences, is the so-called *positivism dispute* in the 1960s (Adorno 1976), bringing the Frankfurt school face to face with Popper and other critical rationalists. We will shortly consider here two crucial points in this debate, presenting Habermas' current stance regarding both.

The positivism in dispute in this controversy can be traced to the definition of economics presented by Lionel Robbins in *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1932): the unity of subject of the discipline lay in the "forms assumed by human behavior in disposing of scarce means." If the means are scarce and the agent must choose a particular combination of them in order to achieve her goals, the economist can provide a mathematical analysis of the degree of achievement (say, satisfaction) reported by each combination. It will be (instrumentally) rational for the agent to choose the combination of means that maximizes the achievement of her goals. About the ends as such, Robbins adopted a skeptic stance: these were value judgments and, in case of ultimate disagreement about them, we can only fight to solve the conflict. In *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), Popper added a corollary about what sort of political intervention the economist could advise to this view. For instance, the statistical analysis of demand theory could just ground what Popper called *piecemeal social engineering*. Testing how much a model deviates from empirical data predictions provides guidance for policy-makers, inspiring their reforms in the model. But since the model deals with just a few variables, usually complicated to isolate and measure, its application can only yield partial reforms. Popper claimed, against Marxism, that there

[24] But take into account that the dichotomy between facts and values was rarely acknowledged as such within Marxism: see Wood 1991 and Cohen 1996 about the controversial status of moral philosophy within Marxism. The standard study of Marxian ethics is Kamenka 1969.

were no general laws in History and any global transformation of society based on such laws was utopian.

In sum, for the positivist social scientist, the social scientists are neither morally committed to the transformation of society (or to any other normative position) as a result or their research. His theoretical contribution to this enterprise is necessarily restricted to the analysis of means for partial reforms. This instrumental view of science and rationality was widely contested in Frankfurt, with a view to criticize the theoretical approaches to society developed both in the "capitalist" and the "communist" world. Up until de 1970s, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightment* (1972) provided the most influential statement of this position. But nowadays the discussion hinges, rather, on Jürgen Habermas' restatement, perhaps because Habermas' view has been elaborated incorporating many insights from analytic philosophy.[25]

For Habermas, the pragmatics of linguistic communication reveals a use of language that is irreducible to instrumental rationality: speech acts commit the speakers to achieve mutual understanding, evaluating the epistemic claims that each of them undertake through their utterances. Communication requires the speaker to justify those claims for the sake of mutual understanding, creating a web of inferential commitments where words acquire their meaning. Social norms would be grounded on such communicative demand for mutual accountability, constituting publicly shared reasons for action. Instrumental rationality would only appear derivatively, against a background of shared meanings and social norms.

In Habermas' view, the social sciences should accept this irreducibly moral setting of our social life and appraise individual interactions taking their communicative dimension into account. Marx would have missed this in making the instrumental rationality of labour the key to any social analysis. The normative mission of the social sciences would be to contribute to the critical elucidation of the communicative practices that sustain our social life, as psychoanalysis did, paradigmatically. The social scientist should be morally committed to the advancement of democracy, understood as the regime that best promotes such communicative practices. It is open to discussion whether there is much left of Marx in Habermas, leaving aside the intellectual genealogy. Nonetheless, today Habermas provides the more articulated philosophical account of the connection between facts and values in the social sciences, a connection that the Marxist tradition struggled for decades to make (against positivism) without much intellectual success.

What is left, then, of Marxism for the philosopher of the social sciences? In 1986, Jon Elster closed *An Introduction to Karl Marx* with a chapter entitled "What is living and what is dead in the philosophy of Marx?" He listed six items that were still worth considering: dialectics and the theories of alienation, exploitation, class consciousness, ideology and technical change. In the last two decades, none of these topics, as such, has received major attention in any social science, at least if we judge according to informal searches conducted in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). Nonetheless, this does not imply that Marxism, either in its traditional guise or in its analytical reconstruction, lacks interesting developments: e.g., class analysis is certainly alive (Wright 2005) and there are very good Marxist historians still at work (e.g., Perry Anderson or Robert Brenner). The moral issues involved in exploitation and alienation

[25] For the purpose of this analysis, I will mostly follow Heath 2001. I have taken some insights about Habermas' view of the social sciences from Bouchindomme 2002. Key references for the reassessment of Marxism by Habermas are his works of 1971, 1976 and 1988.

are still discussed in philosophy, but, as happens with Habermas, dissociated from most claims traditionally linked to Marx and the Marxist tradition. Among the topics that Elster considered dead were all those discussed in this brief review, namely: scientific socialism, functionalism, Marxist economics and the theory of productive forces and relations of production. Another informal look at the SSCI provides evidence that none of these items are being widely discussed. Philosophers re-reading Marx today are motivated more by his moral intuitions than by the scientific cogency of the concepts he used to elaborate them. For these approaches, current debates in the mainstream social sciences apparently do not seem very relevant.[26] Habermas went further than anyone within the Marxian tradition in keeping the connection between social research and philosophy up to date, but only until the 1970s: the theories he discussed, e.g., in sociology or psychology, are not cutting-edge research paradigms anymore. Marx and Marxism will always be relevant for the philosopher who cares for the development of the social sciences and the Marxian tradition contributed to articulate many of our ongoing debates (e.g., explanation) in the field. However, if we want the philosophy of the social sciences to be driven by actual research in the target disciplines, it seems as if Marxism will not be a progressive research program to be considered in the 21st century.[27]

3. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is one of the major philosophical trends of the 20th century, with an impact only second to Marxism or analytic philosophy.[28] There is a phenomenological approach to most topics in philosophy and the social sciences are no exception: there is indeed, a phenomenology of the social sciences, with its own conferences and journals.[29] However, it seems as if the impact of this approach on actual research is minor, at least insofar as the Social Citation Index can capture it. And, so far, there has been no major debate confronting phenomenology with other philosophical accounts of social research.[30] In my view, this can be (partially) explained by considering, on one hand, Husserl's normative position regarding the social sciences. And, on the other hand, by how phenomenological claims are, so to speak, diluted when social scientists incorporate them into their theorizing. Let me first summarily present how Husserl introduced phenomenology in opposition to certain trends in the *Geisteswisseschaften* of his time.[31] I will then discuss the most accomplished attempt so far to transform phenomenology into an actual philosophy of the social realm, namely Alfred Schütz's attempt, and the impact of his ideas on ethnomethodology —as of today, the most successful phenomenological venture in the social sciences. I will quickly address an

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[26] This is, at least, how I read Carver 1998.

[27] Obviously, some think otherwise: e.g. Gamble 1999. Again, this section hinges on a particular approach to the philosophy of the social sciences, but there are alternative accounts in which Marxism fares somewhat better: see, for instance, Little 2003, pp. 196-203.

[28] I am grateful to Havi Carel, Jesús Díaz, Lester Embree, Pablo Hermida and Javier San Martín for their comments on this section.

[29] For a short hisstory of *The Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences* (and its journal *Human Studies*) see http://pages.slu.edu/faculty/harriss3/SPHS/aboutSPHS.html [Accessed on January 7th, 2010]. For a short overview of the phenomenological philosophy of the social sciences with an introductory bibliography, see Embree 1997, or for more extensive analyses, Fay 2003 and Outhwaite 2007.

[30] Nonetheless, there have been significant exchanges that did not attract the attention of either philosophers or social scientists: e.g., between Schütz and Talcott Parsons on social action, as documented in Grathoff 1978.

[31] Lester Embree (personal communication) reminded me that the *Geisteswissenschaften* (*human sciences*), going back to Dilthey, included the historical sciences and were, thus, broader than the social sciences. Whereas Husserl was concerned with the former, Schütz would focus instead on the latter.

emerging interdisciplinary paradigm that vindicates part of the phenomenological legacy, the so-called *embodied* cognitive sciences. A brief recapitulative discussion will close this section.[32]

In his landmark "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" (Husserl 1965), Husserl articulated phenomenology in opposition to a couple of alternative paradigms in philosophy emerging from positive research in psychology and history. [33] Experimental psychophysiology, as developed by W. Wundt, aimed at establishing a natural science of consciousness, in which mental phenomena would stem from physical events accessible in the laboratory. Historical research in multiple domains accumulated more and more evidence about the particularity of each manifestation of our social life. Historicism would make sense of such empirical diversity with classifications aimed at understanding their particularity, without normative considerations about their validity. According to Husserl, both naturalism and historicism promoted epistemic relativism, since there are no absolute grounds for scientific knowledge in any of them, just the particular psychological or social facts established by positive research on either our epistemic capabilities or what a concrete group called "science." Husserl constructed his phenomenology in contrast to such kinds of relativism.

Let us briefly examine the case he made in the Second Book of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology* (Husserl 1989). Husserl argued here that positive science presupposed a particular connection between mind and world that philosophy should elucidate. What scientists take as purely external events, for the sake of their own research, are always intentionally appraised, i.e., they appear in a particular aspect of our consciousness (they are perceived, remembered, expected…). Once we appraise the world in its connection with our subjectivity, we can discern an invariable and universal element in these multiple presentations of an object. Following Husserl, we can isolate and classify these elements according to their internal relations. Our world can thus be divided into different regions according to these universal and invariable structures. The sciences will study their empirical manifestations.

Husserl explained our access to these *a priori* structures through a set of concepts such as *eidetic reduction*, *epoché*, etc. whose precise interpretation is still debated by the different schools of phenomenology.[34] Putting aside here how we access the *a priori*, we should notice that Husserl distinguished three different types of *a priori* structures, depending on how the object appears in our consciousness. Each type corresponds to a particular mode of scientific inquiry. The natural sciences deal with the first type, where objects appear individuated by their temporal and spatial characteristics together with causal links to other entities, i.e., as *material things*. Psychology deals with the second type of *a priori* essences, those that appear in animal bodies exhibiting some sort of subjectivity, a kind of embodied first person perspective that is irreducible to psychophysical connections. Husserl was ambiguous enough to capture both human and non-human traits, again another issue of contention in the phenomenological tradition.

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[32] Not being a phenomenologist myself, my understanding of this tradition is strongly influenced by my colleagues Javier San Martín and Jesús Díaz who, together with Carmen López, run an active research group in phenomenology of the social world at my home university. See San Martín 2005 for an overview of this Spanish approach to phenomenology. Much to my regret, I can only provide a very incomplete picture of phenomenology, focusing on the thread that goes from Husserl to ethnomethodology through Schütz. Neither Heidegger nor Merleau-Ponty are mentioned, to cite just two prominent authors who wrote on the topics I discuss in this section. However, I do not think their inclusion would have changed my overall assessment.

[33] I owe this interpretation of Husserl to Díaz Álvarez 2003.

[34] My own understanding of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is based on San Martín 1986.

The third type of *a priori* refers to our social world and is captured by the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Items in this domain (be they groups, institutions, traditions, tools or works of art) present some sort of *motivational* connection (*Motivationsbeziehung*) to our consciousness: we appraise them acknowledging their intentional creation and we operate with them according to the intentions we discern. For Husserl, this intentional dimension can only be understood by reconstructing the particular *history* of each entity, which can never be explained in a naturalistic fashion.

The social sciences, therefore, have their own irreducible ontological realm. However, this created quite a thorny problem. On one hand, the natural and the social sciences each have their own types of *a priori* structures. But, on the other hand, the intentional dimension comes first in our appraisal of any object, whatever its ontological realm. How can we access, say, the universal laws of physics from our folk understanding of physical objects, whose *a priori* structure is always particular and culturally situated? Husserl tried to solve this apparent dilemma by articulating his concept of *Lebenswelt* (usually translated as *lifeworld*). This concept refers to our primary apprehension of the world, balancing its universal and particular dimensions. According to Husserl, even in a culturally situated setting, we are able to grasp universal structures, namely by drawing on perception. But Husserl never fully clarified how this transition from particular appraisals to universal structures takes place.

My colleague Jesús Díaz has defended an interpretation based on Husserl's text on the origins of geometry.[35] Ancient mathematical statements are expressed in a way entirely conditioned by their cultural context, but nonetheless we are able to grasp their ideal content, which is potentially universal. In order to grasp this content, we only need to master the argumentational skills that Ancient Greek philosophers first studied, which are preserved in the European tradition to this day. These argumentational skills allow us to discern universal structures not only in science, but also in art and other domains of our *lifeworld*. Despite the relative success of this concept among philosophers,[36] Husserl's stance is in contradiction to every form of particularism in social research.

For instance, phenomenologists like San Martín (2009) have been extremely critical of cultural relativism in anthropology, taking it to be a result of anthropological theory's inability to deal with the distinctions introduced above and account for the objectivity of, among other things, science.[37] In other words, from this phenomenological standpoint, anthropologists would be theoretically misguided in their appraisal of the particularity or universality of certain cultural items. Right or wrong, such an *a priori* approach is certainly at odds with the philosophical tastes exhibited by professional anthropologists throughout the 20th century, which is probably why phenomenology does not count as a major influence in their methodological debates, despite its influence on philosophers.

There have been less principled attempts at hybridizing phenomenology and social theory. Among these, the most accomplished social phenomenology is still that of Alfred Schütz. Schütz (1899–1959), a Viennese lawyer with a background in Austrian economics and interpretative sociology, spent part of his career in the United States and introduced phenomenology to American social scientists through his writings and

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[35] See Derrida 1978 for the English text with a commentary. I here follow the interpretation of Díaz Álvarez 2003, pp. 259-298.

[36] Mostly thanks to Jürgen Habermas, who made this concept part of his *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984)

[37] A more phenomenologically oriented anthropology, for San Martín, would be Cancian 1975.

personal exchanges.[38] Schütz's main contribution was to develop a phenomenological philosophy of the social sciences, namely by reinterpreting Max Weber's theory of action through Husserl's approach.

Instead of taking the subjective meaning of individual actions as a primitive category, like Weber, Schütz analyzed its phenomenological grounds.[39] His goal was to go beyond a merely commonsensical understanding of subjective meanings, isolating their *a priori* sources and explaining the emergence of a shared *Lebenswelt*. The operations of our consciousness analyzed by Husserl would also generate, for Schütz, the shared *structures of meaning* allowing us to understand each other's action. Each individual would appraise the social world from a particular perspective. Social agents would then make abstractions from these individual appraisals (here-and-now experiences), generating ideal types in order to grasp wider regions of the social world, temporally and spatially, gradually more and more distant from the *hic et nunc* self. Communication of increasingly abstract types generated inter-subjective meanings. The social sciences should account for this shared understanding of reality. Any purportedly objective concept they may construct (e.g., statistical aggregates) should always be interpretable from the point of view of these shared meanings, since, ultimately, they constitute the social world they intend to capture.

However, for Schütz, Husserl's approach had failed to solve the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity, which was necessary to deal with this relational dimension of the social world. He claimed instead that the social scientists should proceed from the natural understanding of the subjects under study, without paying so much attention to their transcendental foundations. Stimulated by American pragmatism, Schütz focused on the problem of why we take anything social as real. For him, our appraisal of the social world is structured according to the relevance we discern in any of its features —whether because these are externally imposed as relevant or due to their connection with our own purposes. We use different cognitive styles to deal with these relevant features, depending on the operations we perform on them. Together, these cognitive styles and the systems of relevance define meaning-contexts in the social world and each of them can be considered a reality of its own. Our sense of "paramount reality" arises, for Schütz, in the "world of working," our bodily interactions with relevant physical objects. We grasp the reality of other realms as variations on these basic experiences. However, we live through all these meaning-contexts, without presupposing any unified sense of reality: switching between realms may come as a shock for an individual. Any self is, in this respect, divided to some extent, depending on the variety of her world experiences. In this framework, the understanding of individual actions requires an analysis of how the agent articulates the different systems of relevance operating in her particular *Lebenswelt* (Hermida 2009) in a personal life plan. Despite being a scientifically reconstructed *ideal type*, this abstract plan should be understandable to the agent whose action is under analysis.

Schütz's philosophy of the social sciences is as much an ontology of the social world as a methodology for its investigation. However, this ontology stems to a great extent from categories already in use, at least in sociology, and Schütz's phenomenological twist

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[38] Like other German-speaking social scientists, Schütz emigrated to the United States fearing the ascent of the Nazis, condemning "Jewish phenomenology" (Wagner 1983).

[39] I owe my interpretation of Schütz to P. Hermida's unpublished doctoral dissertation (Hermida Lazcano 2001), conducted under the supervision of J. San Martín at the UNED, as part of San Martín's research project on the phenomenology of the social world. For a general overview with an updated bibliography, including the English editions of Schütz's major texts, see Barber 2010.

was never completely at odds with the sociological mainstream. Nonetheless, up to the present day, there has never been a mainstream Schützian social science, if we judge it, at least, by the content of the various compilations on the topic.[40] We may guess that Schütz never succeeded in bringing phenomenology closer to standard approaches in social theorizing. And the problem may, again, have been that the flavour of Schütz major categories was still aprioristic. The most successful research program stemming from Schütz's legacy is ethnomethodology, which, however, loses the phenomenological aspiration to objectivity and universality.

Originating in the 1960s with Harold Garfinkel's seminal contributions (followed promptly by Harvey Sacks and Aaron Cicourel, among others), ethnomethodology constitutes a broad and reasonably well-established research program in sociology[41]. However, the possibility of finding some sort of methodological or genealogical unity in this program is widely contested by its own practitioners, making it scientifically questionable for analytical philosophers of the social sciences. Since ethnomethodologists themselves question the idea of science promoted by these latter figures, this is not a debate in which progress can be expected. Even from a phenomenological standpoint, ethnomethodology may seem too radical, despite the debt Garfinkel acknowledged he had to Husserl, Schütz and Gurwitsch, challenging at the same time their misunderstanding of actual scientific practice.

Ethnomethodology is usually presented as the study of any kind of ordinary practice, trying to capture its *order* as it emerges from the activities of the participants. However, this ethnomethodological *lifeworld* cannot be more different to Husserl's or Schütz's: the aim is not to discern general eidetic or meaning structures, but rather to grasp the here-and-now arrangements the agents generate in their everyday activities. In ethnomethodology, action is not understood from abstract ideal types. The sense of reality that the participants "naturally" share can be questioned in order to apprehend it (e.g., in the famous disruption experiments conducted by Garfinkel), but this does not lead to a superior phenomenological appraisal of its foundations. Ethnomethodology deals with "haecceities," not with *ideal* structures.

Equally diverse, though perhaps less successful among social scientists than ethnomethodology, and also partially inspired by phenomenology is the *embodied* approach to cognitive sciences advocated in such diverse fields as ecological psychology, behavior-based AI or dynamic systems theory, to name just a few.[42] Whereas in the mainstream approach models of cognitive activities involve some sort of computational manipulation of representational inner states, as if it were a game of chess, embodied models of cognition treat them more like a game of pool, in which you need to take into account real-time physical interactions. In the case of human decisions, models should consider our sensorimotor interaction with a given environment plus our social interaction with other agents. All this is conceived of as a continuous process that should be modeled (and explained) as such: i.e., describing the range of changes that the agent-cum-environment system experiences over real time. In principle, there is no need

[40] See, for instance, Embree 1999 or Psathas 2004. Perhaps the most successful Schutzian approach was Berger & Luckmann 1966

[41] There are many surveys on ethnomethodology. Here, I have used Atkinson 1988, Maynard & Clayman 1991, Lynch 1999 and 2007. On the connection between phenomenology and ethnomethodology, see Psathas 1999 and, for a witness account, Garfinkel & Liberman 2007 and Garfinkel 2007.

[42] For a recent overview, see Calvo & Gomila 2008. One already classical contribution is Hubert Dreyfus (1972, 1992) phenomenologically inspired critique of artificial intelligence: see Kenaw 2008 for an updated presentation.

to invoke standard mental representations or a global plan of action. This certainly departs from standard intentional explanations in the analytical social sciences, where beliefs and desires alone account for decisions via expected utility theory.

Perhaps the most significant phenomenological trait in this literature lies in the claim that perception, rather than a passive reception of external information, is an enactive process inseparable from action.[43] When applied to action, Shane Gallagher (2005) has argued for an embodied alternative to standard theories of mind, in which we would not need belief or desire attribution to understand each other's actions. This understanding would often be primary, originating in body expressions that we would apprehend directly through perception without mental representations (as in the standard theories of mind).

However, we should note that the success stories of this emerging paradigm come mostly from studies of the lower levels of cognitive activity, whereas at higher levels (e.g., semantics or social interaction), empirical evidence is less compelling or, at least, it is open to a more traditional interpretation. Ultimately the question whether it is possible to exhaustively identify an agent's experience and the underlying sensorimotor exercise, as a fully embodied approach would require, remains a moot point. And it remains to be seen how coherent this is with the phenomenological view.

In conclusion, in phenomenology we find a conception of subjectivity that goes beyond the belief-desire analysis of intentionality prevailing in mainstream social science. For Husserl, we are able to grasp in our consciousness essential structures defining the social world, despite its cultural particularities. These structures also support, in Schütz's view, the meaning of our actions, providing patterns for their analysis. A substantial minority of social scientists has found inspiration here for their approaches Nonetheless, phenomenology is philosophically built up on *a priori* grounds that are often in conflict with the empiricist vein most common in social research, as we saw with San Martin's indictments against relativism as a sort of professional philosophy of cultural anthropologists. We have equally seen how the success of ethnomethodology owes much to the nominalistic deflation of phenomenological *a prioris*. As of today, the phenomenology of the social sciences should still strike a balance between Husserl's original normative project and the actual practices of scientists that it should engage with.

4. Foucault

It is an open question whether Michel Foucault was more a philosopher or a social scientist/theorist (e.g., Farrell 1989).[44] Historians were probably the first to appreciate that his work involved a new approach to their discipline.[45] And, indeed, Foucault's claims are grounded more on compelling accounts of the most diverse episodes of the past than on purely conceptual arguments —which are often confined to short, sometimes occasional, pieces. Hence, Foucault has no explicit philosophy of the social sciences but, nonetheless, we find a philosophical history of several psychological and economic ideas in his works. Even if historians of these disciplines usually do not find such narratives consensual, their conceptual articulation has provided inspiration for research in a number of social disciplines. In this brief section, I will try to present

[43] Classical phenomenologists provide various conceptual foundations for this claim: see Gallagher 2005 for a review.

[44] I am grateful to Thibault Le Teixier, José Luis Moreno Pestaña, Christopher Payne and Iara Vigo de Lima Onate for their comments on this section.

[45] See, for instance, Veyne 1996, Potte-Bonneville 2004.

Foucault's key ideas on the social sciences as they appear in two of his major works, trying to separate the influential parts from a number of claims that already seem outdated.

Foucault's earliest appraisal of what we would today call social science took place in the 1940s[46]: in 1949, he obtained a degree in psychology, taught it at the *École Normale* and even acquired some clinical practice. The psychology that Foucault learnt was a mixture of psychoanalysis, phenomenology and some experiments and tests. Despite this initial interest, Foucault proved to be sensitive to the arguments questioning the scientific status of psychology that proliferated in the Parisian 1950s.[47] A common thread in these critiques was the *conceptual confusion* of psychology, as judged by comparison either with *true* sciences or *good* philosophy. E.g., at this point Foucault showed sympathy for the approach of George Politzer, for whom Marxism provided a standard for science and philosophy alike. For Politzer, psychologists did not know how to articulate the physiological basis of mental disorders with their social roots and only a Marxist analysis of the articulation of these two dimensions would provide the grounds for a truly scientific psychology. Gaston Bachelard or even Maurice Merleau-Ponty adopted different epistemic standards but argued against psychology along the same lines. Over the 1950s and the early 1960s, Foucault was equally critical of the theoretical confusion of psychology in a series of minor (and a few major) pieces on psychology. Gradually, he lost interest in adopting a positive philosophical position about what psychology should be and opted instead for exploring the origins of its (ill-founded) concepts.

In 1966, in *The Order of Things* (1970) Foucault generalized this skepticism to the *human* sciences (*sciences humaines*), including here "some admixture of psychoanalysis and ethnography, certain kinds of literary analysis and various reflections of a Marxist origin" (Hacking 2002, p. 78). All these disciplines would analyze the representations we unconsciously live by, beyond our natural constraints. Focusing on representations was just a consequence of Foucault's main thesis about knowledge: namely, that it depends on our understanding of the nature of signs (particularly linguistic signs) used to formulate truths of each moment of history. *The Order of Things* is a general exploration of how signs were understood in several disciplines throughout history. According to Foucault, philosophy had traditionally dealt with conscious representations, but by the late 18th century, we came to accept that we were using representations that we could not access consciously. The human sciences emerged to study these, importing concepts and quantitative approaches from the natural sciences and restating traditional philosophical topics in purportedly positive terms. Foucault claimed that such an epistemic enterprise was bound to fail: the human sciences could never be real sciences, because it was impossible to turn every unconscious representation into a conscious one.[48]

Again, Foucault's skepticism was not based on an explicit analysis of the performance of their theories or methods —i.e., a philosophy of science. He opted instead for a genealogical theory of knowledge, aimed at exploring the representational standards underlying these theories and methods as they had emerged historically. For Foucault, these standards would be part of a system of conceptual possibilities (a *episteme*), that

[46] In this paragraph, I follow the sociological reconstruction of Moreno Pestaña 2006.

[47] It is tempting to apply here the same principles that M. Kusch used to reconstruct the German debates on psychologism in the late 19th century, namely as a defensive professional reaction on the part of philosophers: see Kusch 1995.

[48] I owe my understanding of *The Order of Things* to pieces compiled in Hacking 2002 and, more systematically, to Gutting 1989

each discipline (and each approach within each discipline) exploits for its own purposes. This system would constitute a kind of "historical *a priori*" implicitly assumed by all the proto-social scientists studied in *The order of things*. Foucault did not take sides with any of the epistemic alternatives they explored, but rather documented the difficulties all these disciplines found in defining their conceptual categories. In his interpretation, such difficulties would stem from the very articulation of our modern *episteme*: unlike in previous ages, we assume that human beings create every representation, but since the creator cannot be totally included in any of them, there is always something left out. Representations, as studied by the social sciences, are thus intrinsically limited and, as long as the modern *episteme* holds, social research will remain scientifically unaccomplished.

This part of Foucault's approach to the social sciences never gained wide philosophical currency, even among Foucauldian scholars: on one hand, reconstructing entire *epistemes* along Foucault's lines might have seemed excessively demanding to many[49]; on the other hand, the analyses of particular disciplines presented in *The Order of Things* failed to convince the competent scholars of their cogency, partly because of Foucault's exclusive emphasis on representations.[50] As Hacking put it (2002, p. 77), it might have been the first and last masterpiece of its kind.

However, Foucault's method, his so-called *archaeology of knowledge*, inspired many analyses of various social disciplines. In order to reconstruct these shared epistemes, Foucault focused not only on the masterpieces in each discipline, but on all sorts of minor works and *grey literature* used in actual practices. His assumption, again, is that epistemes emerge from the interaction of entire communities, rather than from the contribution of any outstanding individual. The participants in these interactions are not intentionally promoting any part of the episteme: unaware of its very existence, they unconsciously play by its rules. The reconstruction of the episteme, then, should not pay attention to the intentional meaning of any statement: there might well be no coherent view in any particular individual. The archaeologist of knowledge should try to extract it from multiple sources as it literally emerges in them in the historical process. Citing Hacking again (2002, p. 83), "Foucault propounds an extreme nominalism: nothing, not even the ways I can describe myself, is either this or that but history made it so." Such a nominalistic approach to historical records prevails today among many historians of science, preventing them from making the generalizations philosophers would expect.

Another influential part of Foucault's legacy is the political consequences of this nominalism. History makes things the way they are through relations of power operating in the very interaction of individuals, rather than imposed from above. It does not arise from the plans of particular agents or groups, since they are "made" in the same process. These agents use the social sciences to pursue their goals, giving rise, collectively and unintentionally, to relations of power: people extend and legitimize their grip on other people through scientific discourses that can be mobilized according to different strategies; but science can also help to resist someone else's impositions. Again, we will not find in Foucault a cognitive account of such discursive grips, skeptical as he was of psychology, but a thorough and compelling documentation of these power-plays in the most diverse context. Foucault adopted a positive tone in his analyses; personally, he was quite critical of a number of disciplinary institutions (e.g.,

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[49] For a general discussion of a Foucauldian approach to science studies, see Kusch 1991.

[50] See Leary 1976 for an early review essay. My assessment is based mainly on the fate of Foucault's approach in economics (paradoxically, not a proper human science in *The Order of Things*): see Lallement 1984, Amariglio 1988, Birken 1990; see also Vigo de Lima Onate 2010 for a general assessment. Tribe 1978 is usually considered as the best example of Foucauldian analysis in this field.

prisons), but he did not advocate for a particular alternative.[51] Once again with Hacking, once you establish there is no human nature, there is no salvation to promote: each practice creates its own dangers and the archaeologist of knowledge can only make their origin explicit.

In addition to this methodology for the historical study of the social sciences, there is another Foucauldian contribution that we should consider here. Namely, his concept of *governmentality*, paradigmatically presented in his 1978-1979 lectures in the Collège de France on *The Birth of Biopolitics* —edited only 25 years later: Foucault 2008.[52] With this concept, Foucault tried to capture the way a body of knowledge allows actual government. I.e., the articulation of the *episteme* shared by practitioners and theoreticians, from which ideologies, political agendas, discourses, social engineering techniques, etc., stem. Despite such a broad definition, the concept of *governmentality* is gaining increasing currency among scholars studying politics in various fields, perhaps because it pointed in a novel way to the interplay of theory and practice. As Francesco Guala (2006) once noticed, Foucault was probably trying to capture (although not exclusively) what we now call, after Donald MacKenzie, the *performativity* of the social sciences. I.e., the different roles they play when they become part of the social process they intend to analyze. Sometimes the participants in these processes use concepts from a given theory (*generic performativity*) in their discourse. *Effective performativity* occurs when, as a result of that use, something happens in the process they are involved in. Finally, what MacKenzie calls *Barnesian performativity* refers to those instances in which practical use of an aspect of a given theory makes the process under analysis more like its theoretical depiction.[53]

In *The Birth of Biopolitics* Foucault explored how certain varieties of economic theory came to articulate the *neoliberal art of government*, namely governing through markets. Unlike classical liberalism, neoliberal economists understood that market competition required government intervention, to monitor and maintain it. They constructed theoretical arguments in order to justify this intervention, appealing mostly to its efficiency as compared to other forms of social organization. Foucault documented the emergence of some of these arguments and their practical uses, suggesting (rather than showing) their performative effects: neoliberal government of actual markets made them come closer to the theoretical models of neoliberal economists. Foucault thus posed a dilemma for the philosopher of economics: we can only discuss the truthfulness of an economic model once reality starts being reformed to match it.

I think it is fair to conclude that Foucault certainly succeeded in pointing out a number of philosophically interesting issues in the history of the social sciences, documenting them in detail. His studies provide paradigms that have been widely imitated and will probably continue to be imitated.[54] It is open to discussion, though, whether his

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[51] Foucault often changed sides in politics throughout his career and, despite the widespread image of a philosophical rebel, the precise nature of his own political commitments —that were many, particularly in the 1970s— is still under discussion: see Moreno Pestaña (forthcoming)

[52] More precisely, Foucault discussed the concept of governmentality in a number of places —e.g., Foucault 2007—, but for the sake of simplicity I will just focus on Foucault 2008. For a general discussion on the implications of this work for the social sciences, see Cohen 2010. On Foucault's general view of the history of liberal and neoliberal economics at this point, see Grenier & Orlean 2007 and Steiner 2008. A wonderful Foucauldian study of British neoliberalism is Payne 2010.

[53] For the definitions, see MacKenzie 1996, pp. 16-14. For an alternative approach to the same phenomena, more directly connected to Foucault's approach, see Hacking 1999.

[54] A sample of recent Foucauldian monographs on various disciplines could include: Berns 2009, McKinlay & Starkey 1998, Miller & Rose 2008, Napoli 2003, Rose 2006.

nominalism can be further articulated into a more systematic philosophical or historiographical approach. In its present form, it has not attracted much attention among mainstream philosophers of science, but, with further developments, this may well change in the future.

5. Concluding remarks

The history of the social sciences shows that there is a certain continuity with philosophy. Analytical philosophers of the social sciences usually draw on the achievements of certain methods, usually mathematical approaches originating in economics. But, so far, their success has never been so outstanding as to close, once and for all, the philosophical debate about the scientific status of social research. Even if there is a mainstream in most disciplines, we often find alternative research agendas as well. Continental philosophies of the social sciences are usually tied to these alternatives, showing that it is possible to defend them on many different conceptual grounds. I guess that if continental philosophies seem attractive to many social scientists, it is because they offer the prospect of a somewhat radical reconstruction of current research practices, satisfying demands that they apparently leave unanswered. By way of conclusion, I would suggest that even if this reconstruction happens, it will probably be less radical than we would now expect from reading continental authors.

The case of Marxism, examined in section 2, illustrates this claim well. Though at some point in the late 19th century Marxism might have appeared as a contender to better established theories, it became as big as a social science could then be within a few decades. And it collapsed equally quickly. The most promising approaches to Marxism consist either of incorporating it (both philosophically and methodologically) into the analytical canon or reinterpreting its philosophical foundations, usually from a post-modern stance —implemented, if at all, in emerging fields such as cultural studies: see Dworkin 1997. Independently of our assessment of any of these prospects, if they succeed, Marxism will be substantially transformed in a way that Marx himself would have never expected.

This has already occurred with phenomenology. Here, there has never been the illusion of an orthodoxy (or the means to sustain it), as there was with Marxism: Husserl never made a direct impact on the social scientists. It has been claimed that most qualitative or hermeneutical approaches can be traced back, genealogically, to Husserl, making phenomenology something closer to the mainstream in social research. Were this true, it would prove that phenomenology is something philosophically less substantive than we would expect it to be. Ethnomethodology illustrates how far from Husserl's idea of science a phenomenologically inspired sociologist can go. With Foucault, philosophy does not come first, here but rather emerges from rich case studies, where particular philosophical points seem to be exemplified. The possibility of generalizing them into a general paradigm for the social sciences is still under discussion. And if a full-fledged nominalist approach is ever articulated, it might be Foucauldian, but we certainly will not find it in Foucault.

Paradigms in the social sciences have been coming and going relatively quickly and, skeptical as I am now, I have no final argument to exclude continental philosophies from coming to prevail in the elucidation of the success of the social sciences. But the evidence so far suggests that, even if they do, the sort of paradigm they will account for will probably be something different than what continental philosophers would want it to be now.

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