

Nature and Culture*

Introduction

My title intends to associate my effort with Dewey's Experience and Nature, better titled, he later thought, Culture and Nature. My main interest is to reconsider naturalism in the light of recent debate in the philosophy of the social sciences. I motivate this with a brief genealogy.

My teacher at Buffalo, Marvin Farber, often quoted the definition of naturalism of his teacher, Ralph Barton Perry: It was, simply, the generalization of the sciences. The idea is sufficiently serviceable for some purposes, but of course, it leaves much out, including, both how these sciences are to be conceived and how they are related. Farber, a student of Husserl, was founder of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, and through this important journal, he was also a close friend of Patrick Romanell. People are still surprised when I tell them that Farber's 'uncautious' naturalism--which included deep sympathies with Marxism--were directed squarely at phenomenology. Another of my teachers at Buffalo, William T. Parry, was a founder of Science and Society. As I later discovered, my philosophical views owe to him as well.

These naturalists all believed in science, but it must be admitted, I think, that up until very, very recently, empiricist philosophy of science, a subdiscipline which, we need to remember, emerged only in the 1950's, dominated all thinking about science. Presumably, everyone knew what science was. While there were problems which occupied philosophers of science, these, presumably, did not affect the general posture of naturalism. The physical sciences, of course, were the paradigm.

As regards these, anti-naturalists had no qualms. But since at least Dilthey, the question of a human science had been very much contested. Could one hold, for example, that as there were physical laws, there were social laws? Could one argue that explanation proceeded in terms of these, just as, presumably, it does in the physical sciences? Could one hold that, even ideally speaking, the terms of the social sciences could be 'reduced' to terms in the 'physical language'?

Indeed, anti-naturalism could be defined as the view that epistemological and ontological differences in the domains of nature and culture demand a wholly different methodology. Beginning with the Kantian cleavage between an empirical (phenomenal) realm subject to knowable law and an intelligible realm where agents are free, late nineteenth century thought dichotomized Eklären (causal explanation) and Verstehen (interpretative understanding), the nomothetic and the idiographic, the domain of nature and the domain of history. For anti-naturalists, then, even if the methods of the natural sciences are apt for the investigation of nature, by virtue of the meaningful, linguistic or conceptual character of the human sciences, the methods of the human sciences need to be toto coelo different. They require a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach.

"Objective" vs "Subjective" Weltanschauungen?

This bifurcation was the operative idea behind Maurice Natanson's 1963 much used anthology, The Philosophy of the Social Sciences. In his forward, Natanson wrote:

Two distinctly opposed philosophical attitudes are taken as polar positions underlying the social sciences: let us, for want of satisfying alternatives, call them "objective" and "subjective" Weltanschauungen.¹

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As the book unfolds, sociologist and naturalist, George Lundberg is put against Simmel's neo-Kantianism, essays by Ernest Nagel and C.G. Hempel on concept and theory formation in the social sciences are paired with one on the same topic by Alfred Schutz, an essay by A.J. Ayer is juxtaposed with one by Merleau-Ponty. But perhaps most striking was the exchange generated by Thelma Lavine's incisive essay, 'Note to Naturalists on the Human Spirit.'

Lavine sharply criticized any naturalism which was 'content to be defined by a principle of continuity of analysis conceived of in terms of experiment and empirical verifiability....' This amounted, she insisted, 'to forfeiting its status as a positive, i.e., constructive philosophy.'² Naturalists not only exaggerated experimentalism but they confused the method of naturalism with methods stipulated by naturalism for inquiry into all types of subject matter. Finally, Lavine charged that naturalists had 'thus far been able to satisfy its new-found concern with the human spirit by recommending the method of experimentation to the social sciences.' By default, they had failed to show that naturalisms were not, finally, materialisms. On her view, these weaknesses could be overcome, but only if naturalists developed 'a naturalistically reconstructed method of Verstehen.'³

Lavine's essay brought sharp rebuttals from both Nagel and Natanson. Nagel found that 'the "difficulties" she claims to find in current naturalism are only doubtfully genuine; and the specific recommendation...of questionable worth.'⁴ Natanson much approved of Lavine's criticism but found that her recommendation was, finally, incoherent: 'To reinvoke naturalistic criteria as correctives for a reconstructed naturalistic method is to take a step forward and follow with a step back.'⁵ For Natanson, since Verstehen was 'foundational,' the 'way out' was 'the transcension of naturalism in favor of a phenomenological standpoint.'⁶ Indeed, after saying that W.I. Thomas, Cooley and Mead were 'all representatives of the phenomenological standpoint,' Natanson offered that this 'transcension' could be achieved by adopting the phenomenological stance of Edmund Husserl.

In what follows, I argue that both Nagel and Natanson were wrong and that Lavine was correct. But to do this requires rejection of mainstream, empiricist, neo-positivist philosophy of science, including especially its characteristic philosophy of language and the (still dominating idea) that explanation proceeds by subsumption under law. Instead, I draw on recent work in realist philosophy of science.⁷ In turn, I offer that in terms of this view of science, a human science may be secured with a robust naturalism of the sort defended by John Dewey and George Herbert Mead.⁸ On the present view, anti-naturalisms thrive because, beginning with the debates of the last decades of the nineteenth century, both sides of the argument have shared in assumptions about both nature and culture and about what natural science is. They still do.

Nature and Culture

Nature exists independently of human activities.⁹ Society (and, not trivially, knowledge of nature) does not.¹⁰ On the present view, society is best construed as a relatively enduring ensemble of social relations, relatively enduring because social relations are incarnate in the activities of persons.¹¹ There would be no society without human activity. There would be no human activity without 'culture,' broadly, everything which has meaning, including then, language and 'the total range of material objects that are regularly used by people in mediating both their social and their environmental actions.'¹² Although the activity-dependent character of society has implications for inquiry in the social sciences, this fact does not, emphatically, call for anti-naturalism.

The philosophical basis for such a naturalistic (yet, non-reductive) view of society is hinted at by Marx (especially in The German Ideology), and developed by G.H. Mead and Dewey. Alternative--and on the present view, badly mistaken 'naturalisms' --are offered in the nineteenth century positivist formulations of Spencer, Haeckel and Engels and in more recent 'eliminative materialism.'¹³

For Dewey and Mead, life and mind are emergent evolutionary products; but as Tiles has argued, it is critical to see that most theories under this banner amount 'to little more than dualism back from the laundry.'¹⁴ Characteristically, it is acknowledged that life and mind evolved, but then argued that mind is consciousness and that its contents are 'ideas' (or intentions), qualities directly known only to 'subjects.' Within, then, this Cartesian framework, meaning and communication require either reductionist strategies, for example, verificationism, behaviorism, or they remain miraculous, at the very least wanting of some non-naturalistic solution.

A fully naturalistic posture will not merely allow mind (culture, meaning and society) an evolution from the sentient, but will reject what Dewey called 'intellectualism,' the two-fold error of operating with an incomplete (abstracted) picture of what is to have [an] experience of seeing and recognizing, and other hand, [imposing] on all experience, specifically sentient experience, a structure which is present only in sophisticated (cognitive) developments of sentience.'¹⁵

One cannot, I think, underestimate the hold of 'intellectualism' on philosophers, psychologists and social scientists who seek an understanding of humans and society. Semantic theories of language, current 'cognitive science,' talk about 'the cultural system' as in Parsonian-influence theory or more radically, in the cultural work of Geertz or his opposite, Levi-Strauss, is anti-naturalist, even platonist in this way. Similarly, the Parsonian conception of the affective as providing only motivating, non-cognitive role in action, recent rational choice theory and the idea that all knowledge is discursive knowledge each thrive on 'intellectualism.'

For Dewey, three general 'plateaus' are easily--and empirically--discerned, 'each of which incorporates the function and relations of those below it, and is such that it cannot be understood in isolation from the level (or levels) below it...'¹⁶ The first plateau is inanimate nature. In strongly realist terms, Dewey writes that 'atoms and molecules show a selective bias in their indifferences, affinities and repulsions, when exposed to other events.'¹⁷ For realist theory of science, 'things,' both the things of ordinary experience and the highly abstracted theoretical things of advanced science, are metaphysical 'compounds.' Ordinary table salt is a compound of different kinds of molecules even while it is mostly NaCl. NaCl, of course, is a theoretical entity, an item of the current ontology of science. Realist philosophy of science is strongly naturalistic in holding that 'nature' exists independently of mind, even if the nature of nature is a scientific problem, to be settled by inquiry.¹⁸

In contrast to empiricisms, 'laws' are not statements about empirical regularities but assertions about the dispositional powers of things--their 'selective bias's'-- and these are understood as 'natural necessities,' in Dewey's terms, 'essences.'¹⁹ Theories are conceived as 'representations' of enduring structures or mechanisms. On this view, theories have essential non-sentential dimensions, what Harré termed 'imagined paramorphs,' models of causal mechanisms at work in the world.²⁰

The second general plateau, life, is distinguished by 'the way physico-chemical energies are interconnected and operate. Animate bodies seek 'to maintain a temporal pattern of activity...to utilize conserved consequences of past activities so as to adapt subsequent changes to the needs of the integral system in which they belong.' Thus, 'iron as such exhibits characteristics of bias or selective reactions' but 'iron as a genuine constituent of an organized body acts so as to tend to maintain the type of activity of the organism to which it belongs.'²¹ In an organism, it functions not to become iron-oxide (as it would in a hinge), but to contribute to metabolism. As Dewey sees, how some 'element' of a concrete composite behaves depends upon its (theorized) dispositional properties, on how in the 'integrated system,' it is related to other 'things,' and on how the composite is related to 'things' external to it. It is because iron--Fe--is what it is that it has properties which enable it to function differently in different relations. Compare here hinges in New Mexico and Honolulu.

We experience patterns not invariances. Patterns are the result of relatively stable configurations of causal mechanisms. Salt (usually) dissolves in water; for human percipients, gold is--almost always appears--yellow; and to shift the example to the domain of society, there is a strong positive correlation between poverty and one-on-one crime. Indeed, in terms of Dewey's most basic metaphysical category, there is both precariousness and stability because 'the world' is not, as empiricists have it, a determined concatenation of contingent events but a contingent concatenation of ensembles of complexly related natural necessities, a world of genuine change and novelty. The implications of this for a proper understanding of science are, without exaggeration, simply enormous.

Meaning, Mind and Society

But if 'vitalism' in biology is no longer persuasive, mind remains a problem, not only in the persistent mind/body dualism (and epistemological individualism) of most general psychology, but in the social sciences, in what is, effectively, a radical bifurcation of nature and culture.

As Dewey says, 'upon the whole, professed transcendentalists have been more aware than have professed empiricists of the fact that language makes the difference between brute and man.' 'The trouble is,' he continued 'that they have lacked a naturalistic conception of its origin and status.'²² For Dewey (and Mead), society, meaning and mind are tightly linked and a genetic account is indispensable if we are not to fall into 'the philosophic fallacy,' the conversion of 'eventual functions into antecedent existence.'²³ Dewey's move, to shift the problem of mind to the problem of language, sounds remarkably au courant. But his naturalistic account of its origin and status has yet to be taken seriously. We can usefully supplement Dewey's account with G.H. Mead's.

Creatures which lack language nevertheless 'gesture.' Thus the perception by a dog that another 'is ready to attack becomes a stimulus ...to change his position or his own attitude. He has no sooner done this than the change of attitude...causes the first dog to change his attitude.' 'We have here,' Mead notes, 'a conversation of gestures.'²⁴ To be sure, it would be an error to say these acts have meaning for the animals. Dewey and Mead insist that 'meanings do not come into being without language' and these creatures lack language.²⁵ On the other hand, as Tiles writes, 'animals which do not already respond to each other's behavior cannot respond to each other's intentions to produce modifications in their behavior.'²⁶ The plateau of co-ordinated animal response is not irrelevant to communication at the linguistic plateau even if it is not reducible to it. Consider, then, a linguistically apt creature.²⁷

Gestures can become 'significant symbols.' That is, 'vocal gestures can arouse in an individual making them the response which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals.' They can come to 'stand for' a particular act or response. Significant symbols are meanings.

Mead wrote that the difference between a gesture and a significant symbol is that 'the individual is conscious of the meaning of his own gesture.' Indeed, Mead often refers to intentional acts which 'entail an elaborate mental process.'²⁸ David Rubenstein calls this an inconsistency in Mead and says that it was the reintroduction of the 'psychical entities' he tried to eliminate which invited interpretation of him as a phenomenologist. But this (not uncharacteristic) reading is a huge error, in Dewey's terms, a straightforward product of 'the philosophic fallacy.' Neither Dewey nor Mead deny that persons are conscious or that they have intentions. Rather, it is their claim that meaning cannot be explained in terms of 'intentions' (or 'intentional objects, psychic or otherwise). Thus, if someone is to be taken as, e.g., making a request, as Tiles writes:

he has to be taken to have responded to the object not as a stimulus but from the standpoint of the [other]. And what establishes the possibility of thus adopting the standpoint of the other is the recognition of the regularity of the relationship holding between gesture and completed act.²⁹

These perceived 'regularities' are the foundation of socially constructed linguistic universals. In the absence of this plateau, meaning can not be made intelligible. Thus, semantic theories which try to define meaning in terms of truth conditions without acknowledging that linguistic acts (or their vehicles) presuppose social activity fail to explain how a linguistic vehicle could get meaning. They must, finally, either beg the question or postulate meanings.

It is also to deny nominalism, the dominating posture of Hume-inspired empiricist philosophies of language. As consequences of social interactions which depend upon regularities which can become habitualized and standardized, neither meaning nor essence are 'adventitious and arbitrary.' Yet, as important, linguistic universals are not platonic entities or formulae which prescribe their application. By explaining meaning, Dewey can also account for philosophy's enduring fallacies regarding it: Thus, 'meanings that were discovered to be indispensable to communication were treated as final and ultimate in nature itself. Essences were hypostatized into original and constitutive forms of all existence'--the philosophic fallacy at work.³⁰ There is no objection to talk about either meanings or essences--as long as one fully appreciates them to be nothing more than relatively enduring social products.

On the other hand, exactly because meanings (and essences) are grounded in regularities of interaction and are the product of these, they are both objective and remain revisable. For Dewey, 'meanings are rules for using and interpreting things; interpretation being always an imputation of potentiality for some consequence.'³¹ As before, gestures depend upon expected outcomes which presuppose the regularities of past experience. Accordingly, use is constrained, neither 'adventitious or arbitrary,' but because in acting, agents decide, use is revisable. In noting that 'the scope and limits of application are ascertained experimentally [practically] in the process of application,'³² Dewey anticipates what has come to be called a 'finitist' conception of rules, the idea that since there is no universal or 'natural' scale for weighing similarity against difference, the application of rules (including meaning-rules) are contingent judgments by actors using materials at hand.³³ As I argue subsequently, the implications of seeing that meanings are both 'objective' and reproduced and transformed by practice are critical for social science.

Epistemological Individualism

The failure to see that meaning is to be found in transactions is propelled by the failure to see that there is a radical difference between 'individuals with minds' and 'individual minds,' the characteristic posture of epistemological individualism. To avoid a solipsism of the present moment, epistemological individualists need to hold that the experienced world is shared by individuals; but if it is not a social product, this world needs to be the world of the naive realist where things are, pretty much, as they appear. Thus, in the mind independent world, there are red apples, even if we must learn to call them 'red apples.' If, however, we take modern physical science and the evidence of history and anthropology seriously, we need to acknowledge that the capacity to identify the most mundane things of experience requires, in addition to our evolved 'natural' capacities, a massive system of meaning which has been historically, regionally, and locally bequeathed. Indeed, the failure to acknowledge this would seem to be consequence of both 'intellectualism' and the conversion of eventual functions into antecedent causes. As Dewey insists,

The whole history of science, art and morals proves that the mind that appears in individuals is not as such individual mind. The former is in itself a system of belief, recognitions, and ignorances, of acceptances and rejections, of expectancies and appraisals of meanings which have been instituted under the influence of custom and tradition.³⁴

A more esoteric example may make the point clearer and show also its relevance to the present essay. According to Bulmer, the terminal taxa of the Karam correspond very well with some 70% of the cases with species identified by a scientific zoologist. The cassowary is an instance of non-correspondence. Karam have the taxon 'yakt' for birds and bats, but the cassowary is not placed in this taxon. Instead, it appears in

a special taxon, 'kobity,' making it a non-bird/non-bat. For Bulmer, this is an error explained by Karam willingness to allow 'culture' to supercede 'objective biological facts.' But on the present view, what counts as an objective scientific fact depends upon practices which may differ from culture to culture. If we think that Karam taxonomy is wrong, it is because we have reason to think that the practice of science generates better taxonomies.³⁵

It should be clear enough that the text just quoted from Dewey does not betray an Hegelian, objective idealist prejudice. On such views, mind is severed from 'natural existence' and individuals merely 'participate' in mind. Here I refer you to the customary bifurcation of 'cultural system' and 'the social system,' to the standard notion of 'socialization' wherein selves are empty vessels into which meaning is poured, and to the 'normative determinism' so characteristic of mainstream sociology. The foregoing account of meanings gives us the resources to hold that the idea of 'individuals with minds' admits of a fully naturalist interpretation. The difference between it and an idealist alternative, unfortunately, is easily missed.

The idea of social super-mind is a philosophical nightmare because it precludes agency. It makes agents merely 'bearers' of cultural systems which, in the last analysis, determine action. By contrast, for Mead and Dewey, because meanings are 'modes of natural interaction,' culture is the continuous evolving product of recognitions and ignorances, acceptances and rejections, and expectancies and appraisals which are themselves the medium and product of conscious activity. Mind is social, not in the sense that cultural meaning is intersubjective--between subjectivities--but in the sense that meanings are public, in the world, and not (only or merely) in our consciousness.³⁶

Empiricism, Phenomenology and Anti-Naturalism

Philosophical positions have never been irrelevant to the practice of social science--most often, I am afraid, for ill.³⁷ Attacks on empiricist philosophy of science, beginning in the 1950's joined with phenomenological criticisms of empiricist social science. Both were unsettling to the mainstream, dominated, then-- and still, if less so, by the 'objectivist' Parsonian synthesis. But these criticisms did not encourage a re-thinking of naturalism in non-empiricist terms. Rather, they encouraged anti-naturalism. I must be brief.

The work of Schutz, no doubt, was critical. On the one hand, his work contained many valuable insights, for example: that sociological constructs are constructs of social constructions, that the 'stock of knowledge' is held in 'typified form' and dispersed, and that common-sense knowledge is 'a patchwork' in which 'clear and distinct experiences are intermingled with vague conjectures; suppositions and prejudices cross well-proven evidences; motives, means and ends, as well as causes and effects, are strung together without clear understanding of their real connections.'³⁸ This contributed heavily to undermining the Parsonian theory of action, including, critically, the still standard theory of rationality.³⁹

Similarly, Schutz's idea, derived and extended from Husserl, of a 'life-world' which is the taken-for-granted beginning for inquiry (the epoche of 'the natural attitude'), was a strong solvent for the naive realism of mainstream social science.⁴⁰ On the other hand, as Farber insisted, the life-world fell 'like manna from heaven, as an unexpected answer to the prayer of persons seeking an alternative to the world view of a scientific philosophy, but for whom the existentialist bill of linguistic fare [was] inpalatable.'⁴¹ Even a 'mundane phenomenology' could not (as Natanson agreed) consistently be grounded in naturalism. The trouble was not that Schutz remained committed to Husserl's transcendental project, but that he retained, as Giddens noted, 'the unbilical tie to the subjectivity of the ego. For Schutz the social world is "strictly speaking, my world."⁴² Schutz did acknowledge that to study the social world, it was necessary to 'abandon the strictly phenomenological method.' But while he was comfortable to assume the existence of 'the social world,' not only did intersubjectivity remain, philosophically, a problem, but 'the social world' seemed, at least, to be nothing more than a construction of consciousness. Put in other terms, it was difficult see how to incorporate either the 'natural' context or the relatively enduring consequences of action into the account. Moreover, 'interpretative social science' was restricted to describing and clarifying 'what is thought about

the social world by those living it.' This thoroughly descriptivist, ethnographic orientation, even in the hands of sensitive inquirers, lost even the hint of causal explanation and in consequence, any capacity for critique. Finally, while Schutz often said that it was the aim of sociology to obtain organized knowledge about 'the world of cultural objects and social institutions'--leaving unclear what exactly this meant, the discovery of 'in order to' motives became central task for sociological explanation. That is, phenomenology encouraged a highly psychologized notion of social science.⁴³

Garfinkel, a student of Parsons, seems to have begun with Schutz, and before he was finished, offered a radical and powerful alternative to the Parsonian 'action frame of reference.' This included a strong emphasis on agency, and rejection of 'motive analysis' in favor of inquiry into 'situated actions.' This was profoundly propelled by his generalized use of 'indexicality' (indirectly owed to Peirce) and by finitism (derived from Wittgenstein).

Garfinkel, however, was but ambivalently naturalistic. On some readings, e.g., his principle of 'ethnomethodological indifference' was not merely a recommendation to bracket temporarily aspects of the empirical world, but was converted into an ontological commitment wherein, as Giddens wrote, 'social phenomena "exist" only in so far as lay actors classify or identify them as 'existing'⁴⁴--an 'intellectualist' dip into voluntarism and idealism. Moreover, like Schutz, Garfinkel was preoccupied with the conditions of action, ignoring almost utterly the consequences of action, intended and unintended. Thus, neither could he sustain an adequate notion of social structure. While he acknowledged that actors had resources which were the medium of their actions, his actors became so thoroughly disconnected from their bodies and the larger pre-existing contexts in which they acted that these resources reduced to abstractly detached meaning-rules. In effect, his 'intellectualism' led him to ignore the fact that his agents were fleshly, interested actors contexted in a geographical environment and embedded in a socially sustained, but not always transparent social relations of power. Worse, betrayed by epistemologically generated worries, he often suggested that these meaning rules were not 'about' anything. As in current anti-realisms, participants could cooperatively reconstitute them at will.

By the 1970's, phenomenologically-inspired social science remained on the margin, but the unsatisfactory character of both mainstream and Marxist approaches was more than noticed. The response was 'cultural studies,' inspired by the 'structuralism' of Levi-Strauss and Saussure and then, in response to this, both 'post-structuralism' and the hermeneutical approach of Clifford Geertz, and, finally, by Marxist writers responding to Althusserian 'structuralism.'⁴⁵ Powerfully encouraged by the epistemological criticisms of empiricism, including here Kuhn's ambivalent Structure of Scientific Revolution, the work of Schutz, Garfinkel and Erving Goffman, the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Gadamer, and the more radical post-structuralism of Foucault and Derrida, 'cultural studies' betrayed an decided shift toward idealism. As Alexander rightly pointed out,

in so far as [sociological theory] seeks a purely hermeneutic analysis--not only is there always a cultural reference for every action but...there is only a cultural reference. Every change in action, every source of stability, everything that works for the good, everything that works for the bad--all must be explained in terms of the search for meaning itself. Every culturalist theory is...a form of sociological idealism.⁴⁶

Nor did Marxists escape the drift toward idealism--especially those taken by strong readings of Gramsci (a student of Croce) and by 'post-modernist' epistemology.⁴⁷ The response, in my view, is neither a return to 'materialism,' nor to some pseudo-solution which demands that we think 'dialectically' about 'culture' and 'material life.'⁴⁸ On the present view no such dialectic is possible because divorced of culture, material life is utterly empty. Here we are betrayed by systematic ambiguity as regards the very idea of 'culture.' At one time, 'culture' was used inclusively to refer to 'forms of life,' to ensembles of meaningful patterns of activity which included work, play, marriage, worship. More recent cultural studies, however,

have conceived culture far more narrowly, in terms of 'mentalities,' 'values,' 'symbolic codes,' 'signs,' 'texts,' and 'discourses' that are effectively, if not explicitly autonomous.⁴⁹ We need to return to the older idea; but we need to do this, as already suggested, with a strong agent centered naturalistic conception of mind and society. That is, instead of supposing that meanings have independent existences, we need to see them in contexts of action.

A Naturalistic Alternative

More particularly, we move in the right direction by putting the insights of Schutz and Garfinkel onto the naturalistic footing provided by Dewey and Mead. As Rubenstein rightly said, it was a major motive of 'phenomenological' and 'verstehen' approaches to social science to describe action in terms of mental components in order to combat the 'naturalistic' inclination to treat action and social phenomena in the same way one treats the meaningless properties and events of nature. On the other hand, it was a major motive of empiricists to argue that 'reliable knowledge cannot be established about what is essentially private to the actor.'⁵⁰ But if the foregoing is sound, there is no reason to be suspicious of an approach that insists that the category of meaning is indispensable to the understanding of human behavior, and for the same reason, there is reason to be suspicious of those philosophies of language which inform empiricist philosophy of science. As work by Kuhn, Polanyi and more recent sociology of scientific knowledge make clear enough, the meaning of scientific terms depends not on 'operational definitions' and other semantic devices, but in taking account of science as a social activity in the sense of Dewey and Mead.

First, with Schutz, we can endorse Verstehen and the idea that sociological terms are constructions of what are already social constructions, what Giddens has called 'the double hermeneutic.' Social science (in contrast to the physical sciences) is involved in theorizing and communicating about an already meaningful social world. But because Verstehen is not some form of empathetic understanding--indeed, is a presupposition of any human activity, including, then the practices of natural science, social science requires no special observational methods.

Second, pace Garfinkel, instead of a one-sided emphasis on action as meaning, we can shift to action as praxis, as Giddens writes: 'the involvement of actors with the practical realization of interests, including the material transformation of nature through human activity.'⁵¹ So construed, 'culture' is not bifurcated from 'material activity,' but is understood as inseparable, substantively and analytically, from it.⁵²

Third, in consequence, 'all social research has a necessarily cultural, ethnographic or 'anthropological' aspect to it.'⁵³ In other terms, 'qualitative' research is an indispensable component of social science. This will be largely descriptive, even though, inevitably, it will theoretically informed, and thus, not only is literary style not irrelevant to the accuracy and communicability of such descriptions, but social scientists must draw on the same sources of 'mutual knowledge' drawn on by novelists and journalists.⁵⁴

But, fourth, because meaning is not 'in the head,' and 'experience' is not reducible to conscious contents, we need to distinguish practical knowledge from discursive knowledge. That is, while the present view centers agency and, unlike most mainstream and Marxist views, acknowledges that actors have complex skills and knowledge which they employ in acting and interacting, if we are to avoid the 'intellectualist fallacy,' much of this knowledge is not discursively available. As Bhaskar says, it is 'tacit and implicit, spontaneous and not reflective, a matter of know-how rather than know-that.'⁵⁵ Accordingly, even if what is discursively available (or made available) is true, acquiring knowledge of the beliefs of actors will not be sufficient to establish an understanding of their social world. That is, even a good ethnography must go well beyond 'what people think about their world.'⁵⁶

Of course, since social activity cannot be described at all unless the inquirer knows what actors know, accounts from actors are necessary and play a critical role in enabling us to assess accounts offered inquirers. But indeed, there is good reason to hold that beliefs discursively available are not always true!

While practical activity is skillful and intended, it does not require true belief as regards the conditions of action. In part this is because action always has an unintended consequence, viz., the reproduction and transformation of the very conditions of action. We do make history but, as Marx insisted, not with a plan and not with materials of our own choosing. Unacknowledged conditions, unknown and unintended consequences, self-deception and other obstacles limit our ability to cognize fully and accurately the social world which our own actions sustain. Were it otherwise, there would hardly be a point to human science.

This means, sixth, not only that social science can enlarge the understanding of members, but by so doing, it can have a critical and emancipatory dimension. That is, because the domain of the social sciences comprises social objects, e.g., institutions, social practices and social relations which are the product of social activity, and because this domain includes beliefs about these activities, when these beliefs can be shown to be false, distorted or otherwise inadequate, agents have grounds to change these social forms. Consider the belief that males are superior. If this belief is constitutive of the relations which define the nuclear family, then if (as women increasingly appreciate!) this belief is false, people have good reasons for altering these relations--as indeed, they have been doing! That is, Eklaren, the effort to explain how these forms have come to be and why people have the beliefs they have is an essential part of the task of social science.

Seventh, such explanation is not via subsumption under law. On the present, realist view, success in the theoretical sciences depends upon the capacity to abstract a strata of the world and to identify, theoretically, causal mechanisms within that strata. Such theory gives us an understanding. We gain, thus, an understanding of tensile strength by appeal to physical theory. But because the theoretical powers of 'things' are never operating in a closed system--other 'causes' are always operating on them--there are patterns, but no invariant empirical regularities. Everything that happens is caused, but it is complexly caused, a function of the causal powers of the 'things' of the world and their continuously changing relations and configurations. For example, one explains the collapse of a landing gear by appeal to the tensile strength of the materials and a host of other pertinent causes, including, perhaps, the historical effects of the maintenance schedule and the decision to make an emergency landing on a field not heretofore used by such aircraft. Because causal conjunctures are contingent, we are often in a position to explain something which happened when we could not have predicted it. Stellar mechanics is the worst possible paradigm for a science exactly because, as regards the pertinent 'variables,' the solar system is relatively closed.

Explanation in social science has the same form, involving, on the one hand, the effort to identify the social mechanisms or structured processes being sustained by the activities of agents, and on the other, the effort to grasp, concretely, the capacities which they have and the constraints to which they subject, what they know and understand, and, finally, the uses to which they put their capacities and knowledge. Because all these are historically variable, social science, in contrast to the most successful of the physical sciences, is inevitably concrete and historical--and for the same reasons, it could never be finished.⁵⁷

For example, one begins to understand a capitalist society by identifying the 'logic' of capital. That is, given the (very different) resources made available by capitalist social relations, as a consequence of their actions, intended and unintended, actors will promote a tendency toward over accumulation. To be sure, because between Japan and the United States, or between the US in 1929 and the US today, there will be immense differences in the concrete forms of these relations and their relation to other structured practices, there will be differences in the capacities, constraints, and forms of knowledgeability between actors in these different times and places.

On the other hand, the tendency to over accumulation will surely figure in any account of the Great Depression, even if, as noted, any plausible account will need to integrate a host of other processes, contingent events, and decisions by persons, acting and interacting, as always, as cultural beings with beliefs and a range of meaningful material objects.

I conclude with what for me is the most important idea: The foregoing implies that the anti-naturalistic Kantian bifurcation of 'freedom' and 'determinism' needs to be thoroughly rejected. The problem of human freedom, naturalistically understood, is the problem of possessing the capacity to act in realizing one's genuine interests; and this involves understanding the sources of constraint and limitation, and then transforming these to 'needed, wanted and empowering sources of determination.'⁵⁸

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1. Maurice Natanson (ed.), Philosophy of the Social Sciences (New York: Random House, 1963), p. viii..
2. Thelma Lavine, 'Note to Naturalists on the Human Spirit,' in Natanson, op. cit., p. 252.
3. Ibid., p. 254, 258.
4. Ernest Nagel, 'On the Method of Verstehen as the Sole Method of Philosophy,' in Natanson, p. 262.
5. Maurice Natanson, 'A Study in Philosophy and the Social Sciences,' in Natanson, p. 282.
6. Ibid., p. 283.
7. To be clear, the realism assumed here is not of the variety associated with Hilary Putnam or Richard Boyd. It is, roughly, the 'policy realism' of Rom Harré, an explicitly pragmatic version of realism, still too little appreciated in the USA. See Rom Harré The Principles of Scientific Thinking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Rom Harré and Edward Madden, Causal Powers (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975) and most recently, Harré, Varieties of Realism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). See also Roy Bhaskar, A Realist Theory of Science, 2nd Edition (Brighton: Harvester, 1979) and The Possibility of Naturalism (Brighton: Harvester, 1979), and my A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).
8. I say 'of the sort' here since my interest is not to represent either Dewey or Mead. I use them to develop a position which is both naturalistic and realistic. Although influenced by R.W. Sleeper's defense of Dewey as a 'transactional realist,' I suspect that Dewey would not be entirely happy with the sort of realism defended here. See R.W. Sleeper, The Necessity of Pragmatism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
9. For discussion, see Marvin Farber, Phenomenology and Existence: Towards a Philosophy within Nature (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967).
10. It thus that naturalisms need to be committed to strong versions of the sociology of knowledge. See P.T. Manicas and Alan Rosenberg, 'Naturalism, Epistemological Individualism and "The Strong Programme" in the Sociology of Knowledge, Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior, 15 (March 1985) and Manicas, 'Naturalizing Epistemology: Reconstructing Philosophy,' in John J. Stuhr (ed.), Philosophy and the Reconstruction of Culture: Pragmatic Essays After Dewey (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1992).

11. See, in addition to my History and Bhaskar's, The Possibility of Naturalism, Anthony Giddens, The Constitution of Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
12. See A. Martin Byers, 'Structure, Meaning, Action and Things: The Duality of Material Cultural Mediation,' The Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior, Vol. 21 (March, 1991), p. 3.
13. Thus Rorty's physicalist idea that every speech, thought, theory, poem, composition, and philosophy will turn out to be completely predictable in purely naturalistic terms. Some atoms-and-the-void account of micro-processes within individual human beings will permit the prediction of every sound or inscription which will be uttered (Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 387.
14. See J. E. Tiles, Dewey (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), p. 49. I follow Tiles's excellent account.
15. Tiles, Dewey, p. 55.
16. Tiles, Dewey, p. 56.
17. John Dewey, Experience and Nature, The Later Works, 1925-1953 (Southern Illinois Press).
18. We need to distinguish philosophical ontology, what is presumed by inquiry, from scientific ontology, the result of (ongoing) inquiry. See Roy Bhaskar, A Realist Theory of Science.
19. Following James in his Principles, Dewey argues that 'things are defined by means of symbols that convey only their consequences with respect to one another. "Water" in ordinary experience designates an essence of something which has familiar bearings and uses in human life... But H₂O gets away from these connections, and embodies in its essence only instrumental efficacy in respect to things independent of human affairs' (Experience and Nature, (p. 160). In the foregoing terms, H₂O is represents a theoretical entity, real but not 'empirical.' On 'natural necessities,' see Harré and Madden, Causal Powers.
20. See Harré, Varieties of Realism. On the present view, it is an error of considerable importance to think of theories as 'interpreted' deductive systems.
21. Experience and Nature, p. 192?
22. Experience and Nature, p. 140).
23. 'The fallacy converts consequences of interactions of events into causes of the occurrence of these consequences' (Experience and Nature, p. 200). As Dewey recognized, this fallacy is widespread, but nowhere more vivid than in accounts of mind and of society. The former are epistemologically individualist in positing as given, an available language, beliefs expressed in this language and a rationality independently of the social relations which generate these. Accounts of society are methodologically individualist in believing that social relations are not presupposed in action. See below.
24. George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self and Society, edited with an introduction by Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 43.

25. See Dewey, Experience and Nature, p. 226 and Mead, Mind, Self and Society, p. .
26. Tiles, Dewey, p. 89.
27. See Derek Bickerton, Language and Species (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) for a superb evolutionary account of the genesis of linguistic capacity.
28. David Rubenstein, 'The Concept of Action in the Social Sciences, ' Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior, Vol. 7 (October, 1977), p. 212.
29. Tiles, Dewey, p. 93.
30. Experience and Nature, (p. 153).
31. Experience and Nature, (p. 155). Meaning is not 'a peculiar kind of thing,' a Platonic Idea, a 'subsisting concept' or "'logical in a style which separates logic from nature.'
32. Ibid., p. 156.
33. The idea is also critical to Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations, although it may well be that Wittgenstein's version is not entirely free of nominalist fantasy. As we note below, finitism is a central part of Garfinkel's theory of action. My criticism of his use of the idea is that he ignores the powerful constraints of enduring social relations, well recognized by Dewey and Mead.
34. Experience and Nature, (p. 180).
35. Exploiting Harré's policy realism, I exploit this idea in my 'Naturalizing Epistemology: Reconstructing Philosophy,' in John Stuhr (ed.), Philosophy and the Reconstruction of Culture: Pragmatic Essays After Dewey.
36. On the other hand, to say that mind is social is not deny the individuality of individuals with minds. 'Personality, selfhood, subjectivity are eventual functions that emerge with complexly organized interactions, organic and social' (p. 171). As Dewey wrote:
Mind denotes the whole system of meanings as they are embodied in the workings of organic life; consciousness in a being with language evolves denotes awareness or perception of meanings...The greater part of mind is only implicit in any conscious act or state; the field of mind--of operative meanings--is enormously wider than that of consciousness ...Mind is, so to speak, structural, substantial, a constant background and foreground; perceptive consciousness is process, a series of heres and now (E&N, p. 247).
37. See my History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences.
38. See John Heritage, 'Ethnomethodology,' in A. Giddens and J.H. Turner (eds.) Social Theory Today (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 230, quoting Schutz.
39. Roughly, actors distinguish means and ends, articulate governing norms, and assess 'evidence' based on application of 'scientific knowledge.' For some discussion, see John Heritage,
40. More recently, of course, 'deconstruction' has been an even more powerful solvent.

41. Marvin Farber, Phenomenology and Existence, p. 122. It is some interest to note that Farber and Schutz were very close colleagues during the early years of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research. Schutz's biographer writes: '...it was the close connection and collaboration with Farber, more than anything else, that was responsible for the early realization of Schutz's intention to establish contacts with American philosophers and find an opportunity to address American philosophical audiences' (Helmut R. Wagner, Alfred Schutz: An Intellectual Biography, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Peter Hare reports that the archives of PPR show that Farber struggled hard to keep the pages of the journal open.

42. Giddens, p. 31]

43. Avowed followers of Weber also often express what is at least a tension here, between a psychologistic explanation of some act and a sociological explanation of acts of that sort. Thus, one may need an 'in order to' motives to explain why some particular person commits a crime, but understanding what structures criminal behavior will require more and other than this. See my 'Intelligibility and Idealization: Marx and Weber,' in Craig Dilworth (ed.), Intelligibility in Science (Amsterdam: Eidtions Rodopi), forthcoming.

44. Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Method, p. 42.

45. For a useful critical overviews, see Anthony Giddens, 'Structuralism, Post-structuralism and the Production of Culture,' in A. Giddens and J.H. Turner (eds.), Social Theory Today (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987). For Geertz, see The Interpretation of Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1973) and criticism by Jeffrey Alexander, Twenty Lectures, Lectures 16, 17. As regards Marxism, see Perry Anderson, Arguments within English Marxism (London: Verso, 1980); Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,' in T. Bennett et al (eds.) Culture, Ideology and Social Process (The Open University Press, 1981).

46. Alexander, Twenty Lectures, pp. 311-312.

47. On Gramsci, see Paul Piccone, ; A useful compendium is Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988). As the editors note, 'as little as twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to imagine such a project and such a volume' (p. 2). See especially the essays by Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, Chantal Mouffe, and Ernesto Laclau.

48. The most powerful non-reductionist Marxisms come from Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. On the present view, Williams's Marxism is far and away to be preferred. Hall ('Cultural Studies') quotes Thompson that 'the dialectical intercourse between social being and social consciousness--or between "culture" and "not culture"--is at the heart of any comprehension of the historical process within the Marxist tradition...The tradition inherits a dialectic that is right but he particular mechanical metaphor through which it is expressed is wrong.' But is is hard to see how the 'dialect' is right in the absence of clarity about could be the 'right' metaphor? On the other hand, Thompson is quite correct to bring together 'the two elements--consciousness and conditions--around the concept of 'experience.

For Williams, there is no interesting sense of 'dialectic.' Indeed, it nowhere appears in his important book, Marxism and Literature (1977). Instead, Williams insists that talk about 'base/superstructure,' 'economy,' 'culture,' and then, problems of 'determination' and 'mediation' are predicated on reifying abstractions. This is, he insists, particularly ironic since Marx's central emphasis was on a conception of productive activity in which 'labour and language, as practices, can be seen as evolutionary and historically constitutive' (p. 33). As Hall says, disappointingly, 'Williams so totally absorbs "definitions of experience"

into our "ways of living", and both into an indissoluble real material practice-in-general, as to obviate any distinction between "culture" and "not-culture" (p. 26) This is, of course, very reminiscent of Dewey.

49. As Roy D'Andrade has remarked: 'When I was a graduate student, one imagined people in a culture; ten years later culture was all in their heads (Andrade, 'A Colloquy of Cultural Theorists,' in Richard A. Schweder and Robert A. LeVine (eds), Culture Theory, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 7).

For a representative sample of work which puts culture 'all in their heads,' see K.C. Alexander and S. Seidman (eds.), Culture and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). The conjunctive 'and' in the title betrays the problem of much recent work.

50. Rubenstein, 'The Concept of Action in the Social Sciences,' p. 232.

51. Giddens, New Rules, p. 53.

52. As Paul Willis has insisted, 'there is no question...of counterposing the 'cultural' with the 'productive' of the 'real,' as if the former had no actual constitutive role in the basic social relations which govern the form of...society (in Alexander and Seidman (eds.), Culture and Society, p. 184). Thus, the class relations of British proletariat toward the end of the century and of jute workers in British India in this century were fundamentally different. See Chahkrabarty.

53. Anthony Giddens, The Constitution of Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 284.

54. Indeed, it is far to say that as regards communicating an understanding of cultural milieu, novelists and journalists often do a better job than do academic social scientists!

55. Roy Bhaskar, Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation (London: Verso, 1986), p. 163.

56. See Craig Reinerman,

57. See Giddens, Constitution of Society, p. 219.

58. Roy Bhaskar, Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 76. Bhaskar's book is a systematic naturalistic critique of the work of Richard Rorty.