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What's New in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences?

Guest Editors' Introduction

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In July 2006, the Urrutia Elejalde Foundation held its ninth Summer School on Philosophy and Economics, bringing 30 philosophers of the social sciences to the Basque Country to discuss what was new in the field. In this special issue of *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, we present a small selection of the topics that were discussed in San Sebastian. The three papers we have compiled here exhibit fresh ideas and promising research agendas about social explanation for the near future.¹

In her paper, "Explanatory Pluralism and Complementarity," Caterina Marchionni distinguishes two types of relation of micro- and macro-explanations. Assuming that explanations are assessed in terms of criteria, such as their completeness, breadth, and depth, there will be what she calls "weak complementarity" when you cannot increase any of these explanatory virtues by integrating them. When you can, there is "strong complementarity." In this case, the explanation is progressive, and there are no grounds to defend the autonomy of each type of explanation and hence pluralism. Integration does not amount to reduction, though: Marchionni presents an analysis of how network analysis can connect statistical distributions and individual strategic decisions, exhibiting the typical explanatory virtues of strong complementarity.

1. Besides the authors of the papers selected for this monograph, invited speakers included J. Francisco Alvarez, Patrick Baert, Christina Bicchieri, Alain Bouvier, Nancy Cartwright, Jeroen van Bouwel, Ian Jarvie, Francesco Guala, A. Moreno Bergareche, and Petri Ylikoski. There were also contributed papers by Sabine Döring, Till Grüne-Yanoff, Tilman Hertz, Floris Heukelom, Alessio Moneta, Juan V. Mayoral, Armando Menéndez Viso, Michiru Nagatsu, Menno Rol, Hauke Riesch, Ana Santos, Paul Sheehy, and Obdulia Torres.

Frank Hindriks' "False Models as Explanatory Engines" presents a program to analyze the explanatory virtues of unrealistic economic models. According to Hindriks, we should first appraise them through the following counterfactual: "If the model assumptions were true, the model implications would obtain." Being true in another possible world, these models become relevant in our own world when their assumptions are *concretized* and potential explanations are obtained. If these latter are empirically confirmed, the counterfactual truth of the original idealized models would be justified, despite their actual falsity. By way of example, Hindriks discusses how potential explanations can be obtained from the Modigliani-Miller irrelevance theorem about the capital structure of a firm.

In his paper, "A Preference for Selfish Preferences," Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca reconsiders the role of rational choice theory in the explanation of political action. Whereas economic markets create an institutional context that justifies the attribution of self-interested preferences, it is not so clear that we are justified in reinterpreting the different motivations that drive our political choices in this framework. The author discusses several methodological faults in a number of standard micro- and macro-explanations of political behavior. The paper closes with a plea for the introduction of different formal approaches in political science that can cope with a more diverse range of preferences.

Let us just briefly draw the attention of the reader to what we consider new here. First, the possibility of reorienting the debate on scientific unification, finding a third way between individualism and holism. As Marchionni shows, networks constrain individual decisions as much as they are generated through them.² Explanations of this sort exhibit a structure that is neither reductive nor pluralistic: Marchionni's account in terms of explanatory virtues is one possible way to tackle with it. A second novelty can be found in the analytic turn advocated in Hindriks' paper: Philosophers of the social sciences have so far been relatively shy about using analytical metaphysics to address actual explanations. Hindriks invokes the Lewis-Stalnaker possible-world semantics to make sense of the modal assumptions that are often implicit in the discourse of economists and shows how they can yield testable explanations. Finally,

2. We were exposed to the virtues of network theory in a previous edition of our Summer School coordinated by Toni Calvó-Armengol, who himself presented some of the results that Marchionni came to discuss three years later in San Sebastian (and expands now in her paper). Toni Calvó prematurely abandoned us when we were drafting this introduction, depriving the social sciences of one of the most talented economists of his generation. Everyone at the Urrutia Elejalde Foundation sorely regrets this.

Sánchez-Cuenca brings to our attention recent debates among political scientists that do certainly benefit from philosophical analysis. The use of formal methods in political science is mature enough to see whether they deliver as much as they did in economics. We hope that you will find all these papers as fresh and worth discussing as we do.

Let us express our gratitude to all the authors and referees that took part in the process, to the University of the Basque Country for hosting our interdisciplinary meetings for more than a decade now, and to the Urrutia Elejalde Foundation (and to Prof. Alfonso Dubois in particular) for making it all possible. We hope that you will find all these papers as fresh and worth discussing as we do.

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