

# Foundations of Philosophy

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Many of the problems of philosophy are of such broad relevance to human concerns, and so complex in their ramifications, that they are, in one form or another, perennially present. Though in the course of time they yield in part to philosophical inquiry, they may need to be rethought by each age in the light of its broader scientific knowledge and deepened ethical and religious experience. Better solutions are found by more refined and rigorous methods. Thus, one who approaches the study of philosophy in the hope of understanding the best of what it affords will look for both fundamental issues and contemporary achievements.

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*Elizabeth Beardsley* / *Monroe Beardsley* / *Tom L. Beauchamp*  
 Temple University / Temple University / Georgetown University

# Three Sides of Social Science

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Not so long ago, there appeared in the "True Facts" section of the *National Lampoon* the following report:

A bus carrying 5 passengers was hit by a car at the corner of Sarah Street and Cook Avenue in Saint Louis, Missouri. By the time police arrived at the scene of the accident, 14 bystanders had boarded the bus and begun complaining of back injuries. All were taken to a nearby hospital.

"How absurd!" we cry. An explanation of why it is absurd is hardly called for, though the explanation comes forward immediately. People are not supposed to act that way. The bystanders were not—before or after boarding the bus—in a position to attribute their back injuries to the accident. The rule is that one can make such attributions only after being causally affected by the accident in question. It is a further rule that one can move on from such a complaint to press claims for damages only when the attribution is in place. The bystanders' complaints were flagrantly out of place in two ways: first, in the attribution, which the bystanders implicitly made by raising the complaints inside the bus; second, in the claims, which we understand the attribution to be preparing for.

We may learn something from spelling these matters out carefully. However, if social science does this for us, it risks being banal, telling us little more than we already knew. It would be different if we were outsiders. Suppose we did not know about the practice of suing for damages or

know that public transportation agencies are regarded as fair game for such litigation. We would find both the bystanders' behavior and the amusement created by the report of it very puzzling. Social science, just in helping us make sense of what was going on, could then tell us a lot that would be news to us. We are outsiders when we find ourselves dealing with exotic cultures. In another culture, perhaps, no one can get back complaints treated except by joining a group of patients collected from the site of an accident. We are also outsiders when we deal with subcultures not our own in our own society. Law courts and the legal profession constitute a subculture. Social science can tell us a lot, for example, which we could not find out by reading the laws on the books, about how litigation is actually carried on in court and on the way to court. It can tell us what outcomes to expect for various sorts of claims for damages. Would claims as baseless as those that the bystanders are preparing to press ever get a hearing in court? If not, at what stage and by what devices are they blocked?

### THREE VIEWS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Some philosophers incline to hold that everything that can be intelligibly and suitably attempted in social science consists wholly in bringing to light what the actions that people do signify. Social science tells us when the actions are appropriate—in place—and what expectations they give rise to. I shall call this the "interpretative" view of social science. The philosophers who hold it would not agree, nor would I, that social science so conceived is confined to explaining to us how we are to understand what is going on in cultures or subcultures not our own. They would recognize the risk of banality. They would point out, however, that there are all sorts of subtle aspects of our own actions that we probably have not reflected on closely. Just when, for example, are we prepared in ordinary life to hold some person or firm responsible for injuring another? How far does our everyday conception of responsibility match that upheld by the courts?

Interpretative questions of the sorts favored by these philosophers take us inside the bus incident and lead us to view it as the participants do. We appreciate, for example, what is in the mind of the bystanders. We thus understand their actions as virtual participants ourselves. We also participate, virtually at least, by reacting to what they do and intend to do. We laugh at it, deplore it, let it pass with tolerant amusement, or prepare to block it. Yet is this all that we might be moved to think about the incident? Are there not other questions that we could raise about it, which would not fit into the interpretative view?

There certainly seem to be. Some of them would arise for us if we were interested—on the part of the city, the bus company, or the insurance company—in keeping claims for damages within manageable limits. We

would then want to find out what we could do about the times and circumstances that led people to start up such far-fetched claims for damages as the bystanders, getting on the bus, were preparing to make. Are they penniless? Unemployed? Heavy gamblers who have had a run of bad luck? With these questions, we would be looking for causes of the bystanders' behavior. We would be hoping to discover, along with the causes, generalizations about the times and circumstances under which claims like the bystanders' are forthcoming. Do such claims start up less often on payday, when people feel flush with funds? More often after big games, when people have lost a lot of money in heavy betting? More often in hard times than in prosperous ones? These are questions looking for connections between statistical quantities. We might hope, however, to get beyond the statistical connections to causal generalizations asserting that whenever certain conditions were satisfied—and only then—would there be people making claims like the bystanders'.

Philosophers and social scientists (more often, as things stand, social scientists than philosophers) who think such questions constitute the agenda of social science take what I shall call the "naturalistic" view. (It is often, somewhat misleadingly, called "positivism.") If it has any room at all for the questions about rules and meaning that preoccupy the interpretative view, the naturalistic view tends to underrate them. It finds them too banal to be interesting. The naturalistic view prefers questions that according to it invite treatment by methods taken over from the natural sciences. These methods commonly begin with the observation of loose connections. They look for various conditions that make the occurrence of certain phenomena more probable. The methods in question aim to identify more perfect connections as inquiry proceeds. In the end, ideally, they look for conditions that lead without exception to the phenomena in question.

On the interpretative view, it is a mistake to try to use the methods of the natural sciences in the study of social phenomena. For just in being social such phenomena imply the presence of human intelligence, intention, and choice. One champion of the interpretative view, Charles Taylor, in a typical expression of it, holds that social science in the naturalistic tradition is impaired by "sterile" notions about methods. In consequence, and to its dire impoverishment, it "excludes a consideration of social reality as characterized by intersubjective and common meanings."<sup>2</sup> It is, on the interpretative view, a mistake, too, to think it even possible to have laws and theories about social phenomena comparable to those that we have for the realm of nature. Some say that it is impossible to make descriptions of social phenomena value-free. Purported scientific findings about politics will therefore always be distorted by political prejudice. Some say that it

<sup>2</sup>Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," *The Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971-1972): 3-51.

is morally wrong to degrade human beings into objects of would-be scientific study. Others say that, degrading or not, to do so is bound to belittle or ignore what is most distinctive and significant about social phenomena. It is said—and here critics resisting the use of scientific methods are joined by some critics championing those methods—there are no exact, universal laws about social phenomena, understood in the terms that currently make those phenomena significant to us. Some go on to say that there are no causal generalizations of any sort to be had with such terms.

At the very least, it may be objected that the search for causal generalizations, fruitless or not, takes us very far away from the joke about the bus incident. In the crossplay of meanings and rules lies the heart of the joke. A third view of social science takes us back toward this crossplay but raises considerations too melancholy to revive our laughter. On this view—which I shall call the "critical" view of social science—the questions to be raised about the bus incident most prominently include questions like the following: How is it that the bystanders feel so little responsibility for the public institutions of their society (if the government runs the buses and will have to pay damages)? Alternatively, if some privately owned transportation firm is involved there seems to be a breakdown in trust between the bystanders and the firm. They are all agents and participants in market arrangements. But why are the bystanders not willing to abide by the rules of the market, which exclude force and fraud? In either case, are they alienated from their own society? Do they have cause to be, in disadvantages imposed upon them? The critical view refuses to take at face value the rules that may be cited by the interpretative view. It wants to know, whose interest is served by the rules? How do the people whose interest is served get into the position to exercise power? Through what devices does that power operate?

Many philosophers and social scientists who adopt the critical view incline to think of their view as superseding the other two. More exactly, they have so little sympathy with the naturalistic view that they incline to think of social science insofar as it answers to their view as doing a better job of what the interpretative approach begins. So the critical view, too, in its way, tends to demand exclusive rights. Which of the three views shall we choose? Many people—many social scientists—may resist choosing between them. Rightly so. Yet nothing like a systematic acknowledgment of the merits of all three views prevails. Few people, moreover, seem to realize how robust all three views are, and how complexly interconnected.

### ARE THERE THREE SIDES CORRESPONDING TO THE THREE VIEWS?

All three views will have merit if each picks out features of social science that the others disregard. To each of them, furthermore, there will then

correspond some instances in social science. That they have such instances, at least potentially, has already been established, one might argue, by the differences in the three lines of questions raised about the bus incident. Yet it would be much more convincing evidence of correspondence and merit to produce actual specimens. Moreover, if such specimens are produced, one of the main things that I have to say about the three views will already be established: None of them can be granted what each tends to claim—exclusive truth.

I am about to produce three actual specimens. The naturalistic one carries out a comparison of American and Canadian political parties. The interpretative one aims to expose certain life patterns of unemployed (or underemployed) black laborers in Washington, D.C. The critical one aims to expose certain limitations of government and party competition in liberal democracies, particularly as regards policies about employment. In the course of examining these specimens, beginning in this chapter but continuing in the succeeding ones, I shall be elaborating my account of the three sides of social science that answer to the three views. (I shall revert again and again to the same specimens throughout the book. They have been chosen just because they offer such rich possibilities for comment.)

The differences between the three sides, striking at first sight, will survive this closer examination. Social scientists working on any one of the three sides will characteristically be preoccupied with different topics. They will be asking different questions in a different style and spirit. They will be pursuing different objectives. They will be seeking to give different sorts of explanations. They will be looking for different sorts of impact upon current policies and activities.

Yet as the argument proceeds, I shall be showing how these real differences coexist with a great number of parallels. On all three sides, for example, there are group facts as well as person facts, opportunities for quantitative methods, and parallel successes in meeting the standards of empirical science. I shall also be showing that there are many points of mutual dependence between the three sides. In this demonstration, I shall concentrate upon the relation between the naturalistic and interpretative sides. In methods and sorts of questions, I shall argue beforehand, the critical side of social science reduces to a mixture of methods and sorts of questions from the other two sides. The reduction leaves standing nevertheless all the important features that entitled the critical side to distinctive attention in the first place.

The naturalistic and interpretative sides are complementary in ways that go far beyond mutual support—*itself remarkable*—in the exchange of information. The complementarity extends to mutual presupposition between the key ideas of the two sides: causal regularities on the naturalistic side; settled social rules on the interpretative. In the end, it will become plain that the interdependence of the two sides, hence of the three, is so intimate that the three sides of social science are consistent with fundamental unity.

It is not a homogeneous unity, as in a bottleful of milk. It is a unity, but a heterogeneous one, as in a cloth woven from yarns of different textiles or (as in the case of critical social science) of different colors.

#### OTHER ISSUES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

The book is thus organized to deal chiefly with the question, How are the three sides of social science, once recognized, related to one another? Will the book cover enough of the standard issues in the philosophy of social science to serve as an introduction to the field? It will. The chief question—the superquestion—of the book invites attention to the standard issues. They will figure in the argument as subordinate questions. A recent list of “the four major questions for the philosophy of social science” includes “(1) the cross-cultural question; (2) the humanism-scientism question; (3) the individualism-collectivism question; (4) the fact-value question.”<sup>3</sup> The list comes from a book very different in outlook from this one, but I think it is a reasonable list. The present book will have something substantial to say about all four questions on it.

It will have most to say about the humanism-scientism question. Indeed, this question runs through the book, since the interpretative view of social science has been arrayed against the naturalistic view precisely as a means of defending humanism against scientism—that is to say, against unwarranted extensions of natural science. I shall also be treating the individualism-collectivism question in a number of passages expressly set aside for the purpose of distinguishing person facts from group facts and discussing their relations. My treatment of the fact-value questions—Can we establish facts in social science without committing ourselves on values? Should we try to?—will be concentrated in the discussion of critical social science. This is the connection in which it arises most urgently as a programmatic difference within social science. The cross-cultural question will be treated and answered in the course of recognizing that the regularities, like the settled social rules, discovered by social science may be transitory and may vary from one culture or region to another. I shall argue that discovering these regularities is a respectable scientific achievement notwithstanding; and so is discovering the rules.

The book will treat a number of standard issues somewhat more particularized than any on the list cited, among them intentionality and the distinction between reasons and causes. I do not claim that I shall be treating all standard issues. One that I shall do little more than refer to, then set

<sup>3</sup>Graham MacDonald and Philip Pettit, *Semantics and Social Science* (London: Routledge, 1981), 1.

aside, is the nature of functional explanations. Even a book that dispensed with an overall argument in favor of an issue-by-issue survey would inevitably omit some issues and slight others. More important, it would not offer the compensation that comes with my overall argument. Answering the superquestion about the relation of the three sides, I shall not only be offering a resolution of the most salient current controversy in the philosophy of social science, a controversy generated by the three views. I shall also, by reconciling these philosophical views to the extent that they admit of reconciliation, be giving a comprehensive philosophical account of the character of social science.

#### NATURALISTIC SOCIAL SCIENCE

Producing a specimen of naturalistic social science will, as things currently stand in the philosophy of social science, create more surprise and more controversy than producing a specimen from either of the other two sides. With philosophers, naturalistic social science is quite out of fashion. But I shall bring forward my first specimen on the naturalistic side, choosing one that in overall preoccupation concerns facts quite different from those that preoccupy the interpretative view. Philosophers and social scientists who hold that view often think only of how individual persons act in the presence of others ready with the appropriate expectations to interpret the actions. They often quite ignore facts that have to do with how groups operate—groups maybe as large as nations—together with the institutions that the groups maintain.

In a famous article, Leon D. Epstein, an American political scientist, took up the problem, “Why do Canadian political parties, unlike American parties, put in disciplined and cohesive performances in the national legislature?”<sup>4</sup> Canadian parties in Parliament in fact vote as blocs just as British parties do. Yet in other respects Canadian politics is more like politics in the United States than it is like politics in Britain. Like the United States, Canada is a diverse nation spread out over a large land area (*F*<sub>1</sub>). Like the United States, it tends not to divide politically on a class or ideological basis (*F*<sub>2</sub>). Like the United States, it is organized constitutionally as a federal system (*F*<sub>3</sub>). Like the United States, it has national parties that outside the national legislature are no more than very loose federations of relatively strong state or provincial parties (*F*<sub>4</sub>). What Canada does have in common with Britain is the British parliamentary system (*F*<sub>5</sub>). Executive authority rests in a strong cabinet selected from legislators belonging to the party holding a majority in the House of Commons. It is

<sup>4</sup>Leon D. Epstein, “A Comparative Study of Canadian Parties,” *The American Political Science Review* 58 (1964): 46–59.

this circumstance that Epstein singles out as the solution to the problem. He holds that Canadian political parties are cohesive in Parliament because they operate under the same sort of parliamentary system as the British one.

Notice how Epstein arrived at this conclusion. Beginning with the problematic feature ( $F_c$ , parties cohesive in the legislature) that Canada shares with Britain but not with the United States, he asks in what other respects is Canada like Britain and not like the United States? In the other respects that he considers,  $F_1$ ,  $F_2$ ,  $F_3$ ,  $F_4$ ,  $F_5$ , he observes that Canada is like the United States and unlike Britain in all except respect  $F_5$ . The respects in which there is no difference can hardly be supposed to cause Canada to be different in respect to party cohesiveness.  $F_5$ , however, is an eligible candidate for being a cause. In  $F_5$ , as in the problematic feature, Canada is like Britain rather than the United States.

This reasoning illustrates the methods outlined by J. S. Mill for identifying causes.<sup>5</sup> The illustration shows, moreover, that the methods admit of application, just as Mill claimed, in a case where we have no opportunity to conduct experiments. Then we must rely on sorting out observations of phenomena that take place without design and intervention on our part. Mill says, "If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon." This is the Method of Agreement, illustrated in the present case by the comparison of Canada with the United Kingdom. Mill says further,

If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs and an instance in which it does not occur have every circumstance in common save one, that one occurring only in the former, the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ is the effect, or the cause, or an indispensable part of the cause, of the phenomenon.

This is the Method of Difference, illustrated in the present case by the comparison of Canada with the United States. Since both Methods are present, we may also say that the present case illustrates the method that Mill gives third, the Joint Method of Agreement and Difference.

Now, it may be asked whether Epstein's study illustrates any of these methods very exactly. Have the circumstances been so exhaustively enumerated that we can be sure that Canada has only one circumstance (besides parties disciplined in Parliament) in common with the United Kingdom, and every circumstance save one in common with the United States? Surely not. This would be true even if, with a good test for relevance, we could

confine ourselves to taking relevant circumstances into account. The most that we can say is that if any of the circumstances that Epstein has taken into account is the cause of party cohesiveness, Mill's methods pick out the British parliamentary system as the only plausible candidate.

But at the very least by doing this the methods and Epstein's reasoning in accordance with them have thus led to a hypothesis about the cause worth standing by until a better one is produced. Thus, for an early stage of investigation, is a perfectly good scientific result. Even at the latest stage to which the investigation might be carried we would still have only a hypothesis, a statement liable to be upset when further circumstances are taken into account. Even at that latest stage, Mill's methods would apply with less than perfect exactness, because there would still be—there always will be—further circumstances.

What does Epstein's hypothesis amount to, granting that what is asserted in it may have less than a perfect claim to truth? There are three points important to note. First, it supplies a solution to the problem that was taken up, and the solution is a singular causal statement. The British parliamentary system is what causes Canada to have political parties that are cohesive in the legislature. True, the British parliamentary system is not an event. Some philosophers would use "cause" only for an event. Even they would have to grant, however, that the British parliamentary system may rank as a causal condition, and ordinary usage supports calling any causal condition a "cause." Second, like other singular causal statements, the present statement about the British parliamentary system implies a counterfactual: If Canada did not have the British parliamentary system, but had the American one instead, while other things were the same, Canada would not have cohesive political parties. As a singular causal statement, moreover, it also implies a causal generalization. This is the third point. Epstein himself takes his finding to offer a lesson for any nation that wants to have cohesive political parties: Such a nation, he says, "must import more than a parliamentary system as such; it must . . . import the British . . . parliamentary system." The implication to the causal generalization emerges from an analysis of what it means to assert the singular causal statement. The British parliamentary system could not be held to be a cause in this instance if it does not in like circumstances have the same effect.

Epstein's finding—the singular causal statement about Canada—is the solution to a problem about the operation of political parties in that country. It simultaneously offers an explanation of the feature of their operation—their cohesiveness—that raised the problem. Moreover, recast, the several points consolidated in the singular causal statement offer an explanation that rests on an explicitly general premise. The causal generalization supplies this premise: Whenever a country has a British parliamentary system, it has cohesive political parties. A second premise, also an element of

John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, 7th ed. (London: Longman's Green, 1868), 425-448. See also J. L. Mackie, "Mill's Methods of Induction," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1967), vol. 5, 324-332.

the singular causal statement, is that Canada has a British parliamentary system. The third element of the singular causal statement follows as the conclusion: Therefore—that is why—Canada has cohesive political parties. The deduction from the generalization may be more or less probable. If the generalization is only a probable one, the conclusion and the explanation will be only probable too.

In all these respects—in being a solution, in being a causal statement, in being connected with a generalization categorical or probable—Epstein's finding conforms to patterns found in the natural sciences. So it does, too, in the observations and reflections that went into arriving at it. Those patterns may not be found everywhere even in the natural sciences, though I think they are common. Sometimes, in the natural sciences, generalizations are not of a sort that can explain singular facts as deducible from them. They do not make those facts certain or even probable. They just say how frequently they are to be expected. Epstein has evidently got further than this. Even if he had got only so far, what he would have been doing would have been scientific.

It is true that getting as far as he has, Epstein has not got far enough to escape various doubts (which he himself alludes to). One might wonder whether "the British parliamentary system" could be completely defined independently of having cohesive parties in the legislature. One might wonder whether, insofar as they are separate facts, the system is not to some extent the effect of having the cohesive parties rather than the other way around. One might ask whether the respects in which Canada, the United States, and Britain had been compared included all the respects that might be causally important. One might contend that, as a rather rough and ready finding, the finding and any generalizations that it implies are likely to be superseded by a more refined analysis.

A more refined analysis might, among other things, make more explicit the relation between the condition of having the British parliamentary system and other conditions that combine with it to produce cohesive political parties. Epstein is not entirely clear about whether he has identified a sufficient condition or a necessary condition or a condition both necessary and sufficient for having cohesive political parties. This lack of clarity is typical of causal thinking. It arises from the ways, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, in which the idea of a necessary condition and the idea of a sufficient condition both enter into the ordinary notion of a cause. A more refined analysis of the kind that I am alluding to would specify in an acceptably complete way just what sorts of conditions are involved and just how they are related.

One might have doubts about whether this could be done easily or even, in the face of the inevitable looseness of Mill's methods, whether there is any good criterion for achieving it. These doubts, however, should not be allowed to discredit gains in knowledge just because—inevitably—the

knowledge gained is imperfect. They do not, any more than the others mentioned a moment ago, put Epstein's work outside the sphere of science. Solutions, causal statements, generalizations (laws, or at least what are offered as laws), and explanations throughout science are subject to just these sorts of doubts. They cannot be laid to rest completely, putting solutions and findings out of the reach of all future attempts to discredit them. If they did not run risks in these respects, they would not be doing the job that empirical science assigns them. Only statements that risk being falsified can fix upon the features that make our world what it is rather than what it might possibly otherwise be.

Nevertheless, we should try to preserve the gains of earlier stages as we move on to more advanced and refined ones. We may also properly ask that anything offered as a solution to a problem about phenomena be defensible in ways appropriate to the stage of refinement that inquiry about the problem has reached. Only then will we have a good case for preserving the solution by introducing qualifications at the next stage. In the present case such qualifications might restrict the general causal law implied by Epstein's finding to a class of societies that were prepared to have, not just the form of the British parliamentary system, but also vigorous party competition.

Epstein can and does successfully defend his work by the standard of being defensible at the stage of refinement reached when he carried it out. The respects in which he compares the three countries are all respects that students of politics regard as important ones. Hence, the list is not an arbitrary one, even if, as we must recognize, those students are fallible. Epstein considers respects that I have not mentioned, such as the prevalence of single-member, simple-plurality elections, which, he points out, holds for all three countries. As such, this would be ruled out as an eligible cause by Mill's methods. Epstein has several answers to the doubt about causal priority. One of them is the historical fact that the practice of having the cabinet retain office only so long as a majority in the legislature supports it preceded the development of cohesive parties.

### INTERPRETATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE

Sharply contrasting in methods with the overall cast of Epstein's study are studies in social science that manifestly answer to the interpretative view. Such studies characteristically contrast with Epstein's also in the sorts of facts that they make most prominent. A good deal of social science—and it may be so far the most successful part of social science—is preoccupied with the actions of individual people. It asks of these actions, What do they signify for the people who do them and at the same time for the people who react to them in appropriate ways? When we are dealing with

actions within our own culture, we already know, before any professional students of society come onto the scene, a lot of the answers to this question. However, we had to learn those answers in the course of becoming full participants in the culture. When we were just staring out as infants we did not know them.

When we turn to a different culture, most of the answers have to be discovered. The answers that work in our culture will not do. Moreover, even in our own culture, there are many specialized fields where actions are intelligible only to people initiated in them. Consider the procedures of the courts, for example. There are subcultures that even more strikingly fall into pockets of variation from the main culture: Mennonites, other religious communities, circus and carnival people. There are aspects even of familiar actions intelligible throughout the main culture that we impart to them or react to without being able to identify or explain in the absence of systematic inquiry. Just what is conveyed by a person's folding his arms? It is only a beginning to recognize that it is not something we do when we are asking a friend for a favor.

In *Tally's Corner*, a book about unemployed and intermittently employed black men in Washington, D.C., Elliott Liebow, an anthropologist, undertakes to show how those men make sense of their situation and accordingly act as they do.<sup>6</sup> Why do they feel less commitment to their jobs, and even to having jobs at all, than people elsewhere in American society? Liebow's answer, abundantly illustrated from what these black men say, is, in part, that the jobs pay too little for them to support their families. The jobs are, to boot, menial jobs which neither the men themselves nor other people much respect. Why do they fail to make prudent provisions for the future, blowing a week's pay in a weekend binge? Liebow says that it is not because they are less future-oriented than people who do make prudent provisions. It is because—with good reason—when they look to the future they find it hopeless. Why are their relations with women so difficult, most troubled when the women's children are their own and the men are living with the women and children in more or less formally constituted households? It is, Liebow asserts, because then their inadequacy as family providers, hence as heads of families, is most inescapably evident and most painful.

Prominent—I think justifiably prominent—in accounts of interpretative social science is the notion of rules and rule following. I am going to interpret the patterns of behavior that Liebow describes in terms of rules. Let us recognize at the outset, however, that the interpretative view is as much interested in intention, choice, and meaning as in rules. For many—perhaps most—champions of interpretative social science, rules are interesting less for their own sake than for the light that they throw upon

<sup>6</sup>Elliott Liebow, *Tally's Corner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

these other matters. Champions of interpretative social science incline also to be specially interested in the personal and idiosyncratic—in what sets off one person and one choice from other cases. Here, perhaps unwittingly, they tend to move outside social science, which even on the interpretative side is interested in repeated phenomena—the typical—to join up with the interests that people take in biography, the novel, and poetry. An important motivation at work in the interpretative view, in fact, may be a concern that social science should not develop in such a way as to frustrate those interests.

I wholeheartedly share this concern. Yet the typical has its own interest. Attention to the typical, on the interpretative side of social science, leads us to rules. It does not lead us to rules alone. Not everything about the repeated patterns of behavior that Liebow describes is a matter of conforming to rules. The men on Tally's Corner are, in part, reacting to what Liebow calls "objective factors," like the scarcity of jobs or the discrepancy between their income and the demands on it. Their reactions may fall under rules (though they may not). But the objective factors mentioned are not themselves rules, even if they are to some extent effects of rule following. Moreover, much of what the men do is best represented not as conforming to but as failing to conform to rules. The men on Tally's Corner, like the bystanders climbing onto the bus, do not act according to rules that other people conform to. Their actions demonstrate what is as true of rules as is typical conformity—that people, even under rules, retain a personal capacity to deviate from them, even, like the bystanders, to abuse them. They also retain, as we shall see in due course, a collective capacity to rescind the rules or simply to allow them to fall into disuse.

The men on Tally's Corner depart from certain rules. Their actions might be understood as such departures, with rules cited to explain what they were departures from, if the actions were idiosyncratic. In this case, the actions are not idiosyncratic. They are, on Liebow's account, typical of what the men on Tally's Corner do. Alternative rules creep in to take the place of the rules that are flouted. The flouted rules, together with standing rules that the men do not flout, continually make their presence felt, however. They contribute essentially to defining the possibilities of action and to giving actions their significance. Accordingly, Liebow's study of what the men do is continually concerned with what rules they are conforming to or flouting. In this it is typical of the interpretative side of social science.

The contribution that rules make to defining the possibilities of action is equally a contribution to explaining the actions actually taken. In the simplest case, the actions conform to prevailing rules: A man seeks a job and makes every effort to keep it. Having a steady job is the only respectable way for him to gain the income required to support a family. He marries and undertakes thereby not only to abide by the rules of marriage, including

the rule that he should support his wife and children. By marrying, he also conforms to rules according to which a man signifies that he has the capacity to provide this support—to be a regular provider. He will cite some of these rules in giving reasons for what he does. Other rules will be cited by observers as making explicit in one way or another how the actions are understood by the agents who do them and by other people in their milieu. These rules, too, as soon as they are recognized as such, are logically suited to being invoked as reasons for doing the actions.

Three points need to be made right away about explanations that deal in reasons and conformity to rules.

First, they are solutions to problems, just as naturalistic explanations are. One has a problem about why, at the outset of their working lives, the men on Tally's Corner go to such lengths to find and keep jobs, when later their commitment to having jobs is so loose and fitful. The solution includes the point that in the beginning the men are trying hard to conform to the rules by which they can establish themselves as regular providers. I do not mean to say that the problem to which this is a solution is not in important ways different from problems that get naturalistic solutions. Problems that get naturalistic solutions do not, for instance, focus attention on what people are trying to do. Nor do the solutions anticipated or actually brought forward. To put this difference in the standard terms, the naturalistic side is concerned with "behavior" rather than with "action."

Nevertheless the sorts of solutions also have a number of things in common. Among them—and this is the second point that I wish to make at this juncture—is the fact that the solution in the interpretive case as well as in the naturalistic one can function as an explanation, represented in a more or less tight argument. In the simplest case, the rule under which an action falls can be cited as the major premise of the argument, with the minor premise asserting that the conditions or circumstances envisaged in the rule obtain. Thus there is a rule according to which a husband and father must seek a job to provide regularly for his family. Such and such a man is a husband and father. Therefore, he must seek a job. Will he actually seek it? The argument just given is, at least when cast in the first person, an instance of a practical syllogism. It concludes with a prescription that may or may not be followed. However, if the man in question does not in fact seek a job, his failure to act is at least inapposite. It is not, like seeking a job, what one would expect from knowing that he accepted the premises.

My third present point is that, solution or explanation, Liebow's findings are empirical ones, which stand or fall with observation. This is as characteristic of interpretive social science as anything else about it. Liebow could not have said what rules the men on Tally's Corner lived by if he had not observed them closely for quite a long time. Furthermore, anything that he does say about such rules is subject to upset by further observations. So what he says, like what Epstein says, runs the risk of falsification.

The story about rules on Tally's Corner is more complicated than the story in the simplest case. The men would conform to the rules about marriage and providing for their families, if they could, but they cannot. They begin by trying, but they discover that steady jobs, which pay them enough for them to be regular providers, are not available to them. So they fall into a habit of deceiving marriage as a trap, which men enter only under coercion. They go further: They set up alternative rules. Professing adherence to those rules, they claim that the only right way to treat women is to exploit them for all they've got. It turns out—because the men are human beings, who are susceptible to forming attachments—that they can no more live up to this counterideal than they can realize the ideal of respectable family life.

Clearly this is not a simple story about conformity to rules. It is not even a simple story about flouting them, another possibility of action defined by the rules that otherwise would have been conformed to. Besides rules, "objective factors," like the scarcity of decent jobs, enter. So do the reactions and attitudes of the people involved, as they try to adapt to their difficulties and interpret them consistently with carrying on their lives on the lines open to them. Yet rules are in the picture throughout. The men on Tally's Corner act the way they do in order to retain as much self-respect as possible. The grounds on which they can get respect, and thus have self-respect, are supplied by rules. One rule is if you cannot have respect as a regular provider, then you must at least get it as someone who ruthlessly makes as much as possible of his opportunities. That rule figures importantly in the interpretation that the men on Tally's Corner give to their relations with women. It would not be difficult to represent all their reactions and attitudes as involving rules of interpretation.

### CRITICAL SOCIAL SCIENCE

Will we find rules and interpretation or regularities and causal explanations in specimens of critical social science? I shall argue, in due course, that we find both. This advance notice is enough to suggest what is in fact true, that the claim of critical social science to occupy a third, different side of social science has a different footing from the claim to distinctiveness of the other two sides. Before we compare these claims, however, we need to have an illustrative specimen of critical social science before us. I shall not, however, as I have for naturalistic and interpretive social science, bring forward a specific, widely acclaimed study that it has produced.

Such specimens can be found. In a later chapter I shall produce one from a French writer. None that I have come across, unfortunately, including that one, quite makes the contribution to the unity of this book and its argument that we need. We need a specimen that is general enough in its concerns to stand for a broad range of the varied and disputatious

literature that I mean to cover under the head of "critical social science." It should also be a specimen that links up directly with the examples from Epstein and Liebow by treating themes that are prominent, some with the one author, some with the other. It should treat, in particular, the proceedings of national legislatures (Congress or Parliament) and unemployment or underemployment. To get such a specimen I shall construct one, guided by the German philosopher Juergen Habermas's discussion of the two themes in his book *The Legitimation Crisis*.<sup>7</sup> The specimen thus constructed will show at once what critical social science makes of topics treated on the other sides of social science and in particular how it would treat—criticize—the treatments given those topics by Epstein and Liebow.

My specimen and my account of critical social science in this chapter will be simplified as well as constructed for my specific purpose. The two themes in the specimen have been prominent in the Marxist critique of ideology, which is a prototype of critical social science and in particular of the critical social theory put forward by the Frankfurt School new (a group of German thinkers of which Habermas is the most prominent figure) and old (an earlier German group of which Herbert Marcuse [1898–1979] was the member who became best known in the English-speaking world).<sup>8</sup> Contrary to some deliverances of critical social theory, I hold that the critique with these themes is topical still.

On the theme of proceedings in national legislatures, the blunt and unqualified assertion of the critique is that the opposition of liberal and conservative parties (in the United States, of Democrats and Republicans) in the national legislatures of bourgeois states is a sham so far as issues go. None of these parties is going to take any position on issues that threatens the interests of the property-owning social classes. At most, the parties disagree about what policies will currently be most effective in serving those interests. (Of course, they also disagree on who should hold the jobs, in the legislature and elsewhere in the government, that invent such policies and carry them out.) Consequently, the agenda of national policies, in the legislature and in the elections through which the legislature is composed, is everywhere, under capitalism, strictly limited. Fundamental issues about class structure and the distribution of income are not seriously discussed, much less resolved.

In particular, the agenda is limited in respect to unemployment, which brings us to the second theme to which I apply the Marxist critique of ideology. Unemployment is not, of course, something that the property-owning classes suffer from directly. It is something that falls directly upon

Juergen Habermas, *The Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas A. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), a representative work, will be drawn on in chapter 4. Other prominent figures in the old Frankfurt School, which began its work at the beginning of the 1930s, were Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969).

those who have no property in the means of production—the working class, or proletariat. It is, however, something of an embarrassment for the property-owning classes and bourgeois political parties. They have, however, a way of laying the embarrassment to rest, which satisfies them and indeed misleads many or most of the victims of unemployment, even for generations on end. The way is this: Something presenting itself as social science argues that extraordinarily high unemployment occurs from time to time because wages are not flexible enough and workers are not mobile enough to allow the market to work out perfectly in allocating them to jobs. Sometimes high unemployment has to be accepted as an inevitable incident of policies combating inflation. It is held that the inflation that has to be combated came about in the first place because wages pushed up beyond the level that a perfect market would have arrived at.

The Marxist critique of ideology holds that this so-called social science is in fact an ideological mystification. The scientists concerned share with the general population, and in particular with the privileged classes, the assumption that the current system is basically the best that can be conceived. Anything, for example, that is lost with unemployment will be more than offset by what everybody gains during periods of general prosperity. Similarly, any jobs lost from instituting free international trade will be more than made up for. The market makes the most of the resources and technology currently available—a better most the freer it is to operate. The market also offers an optimum procedure for digesting changes in technology. For those who believe these things, no force or threats are required to keep the agenda of politics limited. It would seem idle to almost everybody concerned to ask whether unemployment, for example, could be eliminated under some other sort of social system. On this point and on other important ones, the agenda is limited by general consent, resting on an ideological consensus.

With these themes in hand, the critique of ideology would comment on Epstein's work that at best his finding was trivial. Disciplined or undisciplined, the parties in the Canadian Parliament would do nothing, except perhaps by mistake, that would not serve the capitalist class. At worst, the finding distracts people from inquiring into matters that are not on the agenda, including the question how various features of the system operate to limit the agenda short of dealing fully with unemployment. The critique of ideology would be inclined to say of other works on party competition and party discipline that they assist in rationalizing the current system by intimating that the form that parties take and what they do is of fundamental importance. Sometimes critique should resist this inclination. Epstein himself specifically disavows any implication that the cohesiveness of Canadian political parties, as contrasted with the indiscipline of the American ones, makes any great difference to the issues taken up in Canada or the adequacy with which the issues are treated.

Marxist critique might take a somewhat more favorable view of Liebow's

study. In the eyes of the critique, Liebow has several methodological virtues. One consists of showing how under the pressure of economic circumstances people shift from one set of rules to another and with the shift change from one subjective conception of their lives to another. Liebow also has the virtue, both theoretical and practical, of relating his finding about the difficulty that the men on Tally's Corner have in living up to the rules of respectable society to the fundamental structural weakness of the system in which they live—that is, its incapacity to provide satisfactory steady employment for everybody. However, the critique of ideology would condemn Liebow for not going on to make the crucial point that this weakness is not something that has to be put up with as an incident of an imperfect, but generally beneficial, market. Nor is it something that practical measures remedying the imperfections of the market can be expected to eliminate.

In the eyes of the Marxist critique, it is crucial that everybody concerned—social scientists as well as the people under study—be brought to understand that alternative social arrangements are available that would assure everybody of a decent job. Those arrangements would achieve other good things too, including a more defensible distribution of income. Understanding this prepares people to choose things that they did not realize were available for choice. As rational agents, given the chance, they would choose other arrangements because they would thereby improve their lives. They are thus, subjectively at least, in the way in which they are brought to understand their present situation, emancipated from the limits previously imposed on their conception of society and politics.

The thought of being emancipated by bringing things—ideas, conceptions—out into the open that are not only hidden but that strongly resist discovery suggests that something like the techniques of Freudian psychoanalysis would be apposite. Some inheritors of the Marxist tradition—the Frankfurt School in particular—have been more than willing to make use of Freud's ideas, especially since Marx's straightforward program of dissolving ideology by revolutionary advances in social science has seemed to them too simple. Yet the basic notions of hidden truths and of resistance to their discovery are already present in Marx's theories of ideology and alienation. Alienated in different ways from the real process of production, both workers and intellectuals are subject to ideological delusions. Intellectuals in particular live by elaborating, in the name of science, ideological constructions that disguise uncomfortable, embarrassing, and removable features of current institutions. The constructions reinforce the self-deception to which the workers, like other inhabitants of the system, are prone anyway by giving it the backing of spurious scientific authority.

The critique of ideology is perfectly ready to acknowledge its concern with emancipation. Indeed, it advances the concern as the chief of its virtues in making social science relevant to fundamental social issues. It has little use for the notion of "value-free" social science. If the values are the

right ones, like the concern with emancipation, their presence is nothing to be embarrassed about. When they are the wrong ones—assisting in the ideological defense of an oppressive social system—the claim to be "value-free" turns out to be, characteristically, a device for mystifying people, hiding the presence and operation of values that should be questioned.