Philosophy of Science and Social Science (106) – Comprehensive Reading List

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General Philosophy of Science

Scientific Explanation

Reading


Essay

Is there more than one kind of explanation? If so, which kinds are relevant to scientific explanations? What are the aims of scientific explanations? What is the proper notion of evaluation for scientific explanations (e.g., truth or usefulness)?
Laws of Nature

Reading


Essay

What are laws of nature? Are there different kinds of laws of nature? What purpose(s) do laws of nature have in theorising?
Theory and Observation

Reading


Essay

Are observations of the sort used in evaluating theories theory-laden? Why is it supposed to matter? Does it?
Falsification

Reading


*Long, but give it a go.
*A shorter, more accessible version of the previous work.

Essay

What is Popper’s account of theory change and scientific progress? What objections to it, if any, do you find most compelling?
Scientific Revolution

Reading


Essay

Does the history of scientific revolution undermine the claim that science is a rational activity?
Realism, Anti-realism, and Internal Realism

Reading


Essay

What is scientific realism? What are the alternatives to realism? How is the inference to the best explanation supposed to establish scientific realism? Does it?
Models

Reading


Essay

What are models? What role do they play in scientific theorizing? How do we evaluate models? Do different views about their role in scientific theorizing require different views about their evaluation?
Causation

Reading


Essay

What is the counterfactual conditional analysis of causal statements? Is such an analysis necessary for science or is a regularity or constant conjunction view adequate?
Probability

Reading


Essay

What is the correct interpretation of probabilistic statements in the natural sciences?
Induction

Reading


Essay

What is the problem of induction? What is the most promising strategy for solving it?
Emergence

Reading


Essay

Can novel properties emerge from more fundamental properties or entities? If so, are the resulting properties metaphysically novel, or are they epistemological novel? If not, can special sciences, such as biology, be reduced to physics?
Topics Specific to Social Science

Interpretation

Reading


*** Introductory textbook.

Essay

Should the social sciences concentrate on understanding rather than explanation?
Facts and Values

Reading


(Note: the selections from Weber, Taylor and Nagel can also be found in Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre, editors. *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994.)

Essay

Can we separate facts from evaluations? How would the answer to the above question affect a quest for ‘objectivity’ in the social sciences?

Does the relation between theory and observation provide a useful model for assessing the relation between facts and values?
Methodological Individuals

Reading


Essay

What is methodological individualism? Is it a good strategy for understanding social, collective, phenomena?
Rationality

Reading


Essay

Does the ‘rational choice theory’ develop and improve the explanatory perspective of methodological individualism?
**Functional Explanation**

**Reading**


**Essay**

Can functional explanations be reduced to causal explanations? If not, is that sufficient reason to reject functional explanations in the social sciences?
Evolutionary Arguments

Reading


• Philip Kitcher. *The Ethical Project*. Harvard, Cambridge, 2011, chs 1–2, or


Essay

What role should evolutionary arguments have in the social sciences?
Social Construction

Reading


- Paul Boghossian. What is social construction.


Essay

To what extent is the social world a construction?
MacIntyre on Tradition

Reading


Essay

Is MacIntyre’s appeal to tradition in explaining the rationality of theory choice in science compelling?
References


Paul Boghossian. What is social construction.


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