

YVONNE SHERRATT

CONTINENTAL  
PHILOSOPHY *of*  
SOCIAL SCIENCE

*Hermeneutics, Genealogy,  
Critical Theory*

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## Continental Philosophy of Social Science

### *Hermeneutics, Genealogy and Critical Theory from Ancient Greece to the Twenty-First Century*

This is the first English-language book dedicated to the Continental tradition in the philosophy of social science. It seeks to demonstrate the unique nature of the continental approach to the philosophy of social science and contrast this with the Anglo-American rubric. The subject matter spans the traditions of hermeneutics, genealogy and critical theory, examining the key texts and theories of thinkers like Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida, Nietzsche, Foucault, the Early Frankfurt School and Habermas. The approach is highly original in that it shows the historical depth of these mainstays of twentieth-century thought by tracing their ideas back to origins in Ancient Greece and Rome, medieval Christian thought, the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Throughout, Yvonne Sherratt argues for the importance of historical understanding in order to appreciate the distinct, humanist character of Continental philosophy of social science. This book will form the essential bedrock of any course in the philosophy of the social or human sciences. It is also an essential counterpoint to extant texts in the field and has widespread inter-disciplinary appeal.

Yvonne Sherratt is British Academy Researcher in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Oxford. She has taught at the Universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh and Wales, and she is the author of *Adorno's Positive Dialectic*.



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*Hermeneutics, Genealogy and Critical Theory  
from Ancient Greece to the Twenty-First Century*

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and  
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*For Clara.*





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## Preface

I would like to thank Raymond Geuss for initial inspiration for many of the topics in this book. I owe a debt to Mark Peacock Lambert Zuidervart and Nigel Pleasants for their insightful comments on various parts of this book. My great thanks go to Robert Mayhew for reading the entire script. I would also like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the National Library of Wales for the use of its resources, to Beatrice Rehl and Laura Lawrie at Cambridge University Press and to the late Terence Moore for helping initiate this project, although he was sadly unable to see it to completion. This book was written during an extended period of maternity leave and is dedicated to my new baby daughter Clara.



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## Introduction

Astonishingly there exists no single English language book dedicated to the continental tradition in the philosophy of social science. Juxtapose this surprising position with the abundance of continental works on all other aspects of European thought from the vast array of tracts on political philosophy, aesthetics and the history of European ideas to the plethora of studies of individual thinkers and schools of thought. Contrast, too, this lack of a treatment of continental philosophy of social science with the abundance of expositions of the same subject matter in the Anglo-American tradition.

In fact, the entire mainstream corpus of philosophy of social science is dominated by Anglo-American literature. Consequently these transatlantic schools set the agenda for pretty much all philosophy of social science with their own particular approach to the subject matter – a distinct canon of thinkers, set of questions and debates. The continental domain is simply marginalized by this rubric: either through sheer exclusion or, indeed, by a reductive mode of inclusion.

On the one hand, in so far as continental issues veer from the Anglo-American agenda, the continental tradition is simply ostracised. On the other hand, in so far as continental questions address this ‘mainstream’ rubric the tradition is included. However this means that in so far as the continental philosophy of social science exists at all, it is merely treated as a strand of influence in the supposedly much larger world of Anglo-American approaches. That is to say, European ideas are subsumed as influences upon and contributions to the greater project of Anglo-American philosophy of social science.

Continental philosophy of social science however is more than just a part of a larger Anglo-American corpus. It is a distinguished and autonomous strand of thought in its own right. Continental schools have their own canon of thinkers, pose their own questions, set their own agendas and have a rich, deep history stemming back to Ancient Greece, Rome and early Christendom. In fact, it is this connection to its Ancient past, let us say, its *humanism*, that defines the continental tradition.

This link with humanism is what sets the continental schools of thought apart from Anglo-American philosophy of social science. Moreover, it is the maintenance of a *living* connection with the humanist past that creates a problem for the Anglo-Americans, for this latter rubric has discarded many humanist concerns in favour of the issues of science. In so far as it pursues any philosophical rebellion against science at all, the Anglo-American agenda does so from a 'post-scientific' perspective in which earlier humanism is still completely forgotten.

My contention is that continental philosophy of social science is best understood as emergent from humanism. The aim of this book is twofold; first, to offer an account of philosophy of social science dedicated to the continental tradition. Second, we wish to depict the autonomous nature of the continental field of enquiry by exploring its special humanist history, and highlight the distinct approach to philosophy of social science that has arisen as a consequence of this.

Before going on to explore continental philosophy of social science, let us first undertake to clarify a few key terms. A preliminary and fairly self-evident point to note is that the term 'continental' is defined in contrast to Anglo-American philosophy. The distinction between these traditions is very marked. Whilst the latter is often an analytical, concept-based style of analysis with little regard for historical factors, continental philosophy is usually a text-centred, historically sensitive tradition. These approaches also embrace different canons and address diverse philosophical questions. The specificities of the distinctions between the continental and Anglo-American approaches when it comes to the particular area of philosophy of *social science* will be discussed in more detail throughout this study.

A further minor point is that we use the notion 'continental' in contrast with the word 'European'. Our reason for this is really that continental tends to be more frequently used to refer to concerns that stem from *Continental* Europe as opposed to Britain. Strictly speaking 'European' embraces British philosophy, too, although the term is most often used to capture the distinct continental traditions and exclude British ones which are usually analytical.



Our final term seems an obvious one, namely, what we mean by philosophy of social science. However, the definition of this notion becomes central in that it is perhaps the main reason why no specialist study in continental philosophy of social science exists. Philosophy of social science as we have said is defined in its mainstream rubric to marginalize many of the main concerns of the continental tradition. It is conceptualised to centre around the kind of questions dear to Anglo-American philosophers. Mainly it is concerned with the relationship between the natural and the social sciences and the sorts of complexities that arise from studying society as a possible object of scientific enquiry. Furthermore, it is a comparatively recent discipline with little historic focus. If we take this Anglo-American view of the discipline, our Continental study is barely a philosophy of social science at all. However, if we embrace a broader notion of social science as pertaining to all the traditions engaged in the study of human society, both recent and much older, then the philosophy of social science becomes the tradition of philosophy that addresses the problems and techniques involved in studying human society. Within this broader, more *humanist* conception, the continental tradition occupies a pivotal place.<sup>1</sup>

Let us now contextualise our own specifically continental study within the other literature on philosophy of social science. There exists a wealth of primary and secondary literature delimiting a well-researched, often sophisticatedly analysed and hotly debated domain. The literature is strongly skewed towards the Anglo-American traditions – although this is not to underestimate the diversity of the Anglo-American canon. Within this diversity certain patterns of analysis emerge. The majority of treatments are ‘modern’ and almost all accounts of philosophy of social science fall within two main strands. They encapsulate either what we can describe as a ‘social sciences led approach’ or what we can demarcate as a ‘philosophically animated’ one. Less than a handful of the overall philosophy of social science literature presents any historical depth and none explores the continental tradition as its main focus.

First, let us consider in more detail the first group of studies, namely the Anglo-American social sciences led approach to philosophy of social science. We perceive studies derived from disciplines concerned with empirical issues and often conducted by those with empirical training. Indeed, these tracts often emanate from those educated within the social sciences – usually sociologists – although some studies emerge from those with a natural sciences backgrounds. These works are ubiquitously

<sup>1</sup> We define what we mean by humanism later in this introduction.

modern and preoccupied with questions of the relationship between the social and natural sciences.

These social sciences-derived approaches can further be categorised as broadly empiricist or post-empiricist according to when they were written. To those studies conducted prior to the 1950s and 1960s we can attribute a firmly empiricist mentality. As we all know, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the empiricist and rationalist traditions were at their peak. This was the era of the dawning of modern science and philosophy of social science never looks beyond this era for its basic philosophical assumptions. Often, however, these scholars look to the much more historically recent nineteenth-century empiricist traditions,<sup>2</sup> positivism being an obvious source of inspiration,<sup>3</sup> and many indeed are concerned only with issues rising subsequent to the first half of the twentieth century.

These empiricist philosophers of social science are writing during an era in which the authority of science is fairly absolute. Given the youth of the *social* sciences, they are concerned with establishing the legitimacy of their discipline and of formulating foundational methodologies. Thus these empiricist philosophers were seeking to mesh the successful methodologies from natural science onto social science. Their works seek to establish a clear rubric for their field and demonstrate a clear methodology. Philosophy of social science, therefore, embraces many of the concerns of the natural sciences, for instance, issues of experimentation, causality, prediction, explanation, how particularities can be subsumed under general laws. This Anglo-American empiricist philosophy of social science seeks to show how objectivity can be attained over the subjectivity of observers and how to address the fact/value distinction in relation to society as the object of enquiry. Moreover it analyses society through concepts of individuals and the whole, structure and function, action and development and it debates the importance of the economic or psychological, the macro or the micro as the main determining factor. These concerns, whilst representative of the whole tradition of early and mid-twentieth century philosophy of social science have also been carried forwards as forming much of the rubric of the contemporary discipline.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Turner 1986; and Runciman's 1969 and 1972 excellent accounts.

<sup>3</sup> See Bryant 1985, Halfpenny 1982.

<sup>4</sup> See Azevedo 1997, Benton and Craib 2001, Craib 1992 and 1997, Doyal 1986, Galvotti 2003, Glassner and Moreno 1989, Hollis 1994, 1996; Hookway and Pettit 1978, Rosenberg 1988, Shoemaker, Tankard and Lasorsa 2004, Stretton 1969 and Tudor 1982, for earlier and later twentieth century discussions of this rubric of philosophy of social science.

The second group of social sciences led approaches to philosophy of social science can be described as 'post-empiricist'.<sup>5</sup> These studies written during the latter part of the twentieth century occur against a different 'ideological' background. Science no longer reigns unchallenged. Various constructivist, relativist and post-modernist developments challenge the philosophical authority of the natural sciences. The social sciences, still emulating their giant cousin, need to take on board these challenges, too. They respond in various ways. First certain studies aim for impartiality in the empiricist/post-empiricist debate and simply continue to discuss the complexities of the relationship between the social and natural sciences.<sup>6</sup> Whilst these studies include discussions of the new complexities of practising any science, they are still primarily concerned with the relationship between natural and social science so the empiricist rubric is fairly unchanged.

A further group of studies from the post-empiricist era jettison impartiality and firmly attempt to restore empiricist values. Within this group of social science-led studies, there are those who bravely try to defend the positivism of the earlier era.<sup>7</sup> More common are those who attempt to redefine science itself and abandon positivism for a new form of science, which they elaborate as critical realism.<sup>8</sup> Others attempt to bolster scientific approaches to the study of society by drawing upon arguments from biology, most notably Darwinism.<sup>9</sup> Many other studies attempt to accommodate the natural and social sciences by revising either the former or the latter.<sup>10</sup>

A final high-profile group of social science-led philosophers of social science are post-empiricist in mentality as well as era. They seek to reject the natural sciences as the model for the social sciences.<sup>11</sup> These studies often look to a strand of continental thought as providing the ammunition to break new post-empiricist approaches. Some turn to the influence of thinkers like Foucault and incorporate social constructivist arguments.<sup>12</sup> Others borrow from post-modernism.<sup>13</sup> A further group

<sup>5</sup> See Agassi et al. 1995; Bohman 1991; Cohen and Wartofsky eds. 1983; Keat and Urry 1982; Kukla 2000; Phillips 1987; Potter 2000; Thomas 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Some of these studies form a continuum with earlier works mentioned. Galvotti 2003, Hollis 1994, 1996; Phillips 1987, Rudner 1966, Wisdom 1993.

<sup>7</sup> See Agassi, ed 1995; Cohen 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Bhaskar 1978; Keat and Urry 1982; Outhwaite 1987.

<sup>9</sup> See Dupre 2003; Rosenberg 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Azevedo 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Hindess 1977 is a good example.

<sup>12</sup> Kukla 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Hindess 1977; Potter 2000.

turn to the omnipresent influence of Marxism,<sup>14</sup> phenomenology<sup>15</sup> or indeed hermeneutics.<sup>16</sup> Many look to a more Anglo-American canon of thinkers who incorporate European style concerns with issues of meaning, interpretation or social construction<sup>17</sup> and examine authors like Winch,<sup>18</sup> Kuhn,<sup>19</sup> Feyerband<sup>20</sup> or Lakatos.<sup>21</sup>

Within Anglo-American philosophy of social science there is a second overall approach to the subject matter, namely, what we have previously described as a 'philosophically animated' one. This philosophical approach stems, as one might expect, from those practicing from within the discipline of philosophy itself. This approach is, therefore, more conceptual and concerned with broad questions derived from those with 'rational', theoretical rather than empirical concerns. The style of these philosophical accounts is analytic so analysis proceeds through concepts and analytical categories. This is in contrast to any historical or textual based mode of enquiry that we might find in continental approaches. Moreover, these analytic accounts debate from within their own canon and rubric, which embraces a distinct set of concerns. We can perhaps usefully divide this literature into four separate categories.

First there are general philosophical studies in which debates from empiricism and rationalism abound. Issues about the nature of the real, debates about fact and idea, the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity and the nature of knowledge preoccupy much of this analysis. Indeed many of the concerns overlap with those from epistemology or metaphysics.<sup>22</sup>

Second, a body of philosophically led philosophy of social science shares the same concerns and language as philosophy of natural science (including the philosophy of biology and psychology).<sup>23</sup> Themes like the nature of explanation, the relevance of natural law, issues of determinism

<sup>14</sup> Anderson Hughes and Sharrock 1986; Bottomore 1974; Root 1993; Sayer 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson in Glynn, S., ed. 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson in Glynn, S., ed. 1986.

<sup>17</sup> See Phillips 1987, Bloor 1974, 1976, and Barnes 1974.

<sup>18</sup> Winch 1958.

<sup>19</sup> Kuhn 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Feyerband 1962.

<sup>21</sup> Lakatos and Musgrave 1970.

<sup>22</sup> See Benn and Mortimore 1976; Glynn 1986; Hollis and Lukes, ed. 1982; Martin and Macyntyre 1994; Pratt 1978.

<sup>23</sup> For example of this approach see Bohman 1991; Doyal and Harris 1986; Flew 1985, Hookway and Pettit ed. 1978; Ryan 1970. See also Agassi, Jarvie and Laor, ed. 1995; Cohen, ed. 1983; James's interesting account is perhaps closer to social philosophy but raises some important issues here, see James 1984; or Trigg 2001.

and prediction, questions of objectivity and normativity thus form the mainstay of much of this analysis. Further topics like realism, relativism, absolutism and indeed holism are also pivotal to these works. Uppermost is the question of the appropriateness of natural science for the social sciences and the canon of authors herein bears many similarities to that of the social sciences derived theoretical approach, although the style of analysis here is much more conceptual.<sup>24</sup>

Third, philosophically led philosophy of social science can be founded upon Anglo-American sub-disciplines like philosophy of mind, metaphysics and epistemology.<sup>25</sup> Further fields like political philosophy inform a vast tract of social science works, employing liberal<sup>26</sup> or Marxist arguments and perspectives.<sup>27</sup> Economic philosophy has also made inroads into philosophy of social science with Hayek's work being highly influential.<sup>28</sup> So, too, has philosophy of biology with arguments from Darwinism and ideas from thinkers like Malthus.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, in contrast to these two main strands of philosophy of social science, that is, both the social sciences and philosophically led treatments, there are only a couple of historical studies.<sup>30</sup> One excellent account looks to the origins of a philosophy of social science along with a philosophy of science in Ancient Greece. This impressive scholarly monograph, however, focuses only upon the analytic tradition of philosophy of social science, closely following a philosophy of natural sciences rubric, as do any other similar historical studies.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, inside the mainstream Anglo-American rubric some continental ideas have been acknowledged and addressed, often in the form of Marxism, as seen above, or at other times the traditions of hermeneutics, phenomenology or post-modernism might form a chapter in a survey, or a line of influence in an Anglo-American centred debate.<sup>32</sup> Many

<sup>24</sup> For instance, these studies include Popper, Kuhn, Winch, Lakatos, Feyerband and so on. For more sociological perspective on these scientific issues, Barnes 1974 and Bloor 1974, 1976 can usefully be consulted.

<sup>25</sup> See Goldman 1992, Harrison, ed. 1979.

<sup>26</sup> Root 1993.

<sup>27</sup> Cohen 1972; Bottomore 1974; Sayer 1979; Gavroglu, Stachel and Wartofsky ed. 1995.

<sup>28</sup> Hayek 1948, 1952, 1967, 1978; Hollis and Nell 1975.

<sup>29</sup> Rosenberg 2000, Dupré 2003; Malthus 1970.

<sup>30</sup> Compare this lack of a historical treatments in philosophy of social science with the abundance of accounts of the history of the natural sciences, the history of social and political thought and indeed the history of sociology itself.

<sup>31</sup> See especially the excellent, scholarly treatment by Scott 1991; also Rosenberg 1988 and a comprehensive account by Manicas 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Bohman 1991; Glynn, ed. 1986; Anderson Hughes and Sharrock 1986.

Anglo-American philosophers of social science, however, simply ignore the tradition altogether.<sup>33</sup>

What of the continental tradition itself then? Almost any specifically *continental* treatment of philosophy of social science occurs only as an aspect within a more general continental philosophy text, for instance, a tract on continental philosophy or a themed book on Romanticism and so on.<sup>34</sup> Any further treatments in so far as they occur at all do so as part of a single author study.<sup>35</sup> There exist, however, only two works that actually claim to be dedicated to the continental tradition of philosophy of social science itself. One of these is an edited collection of selective, specialised essays rather than an overall study.<sup>36</sup> The second deploys recent continental developments in order to make a critical realist argument and thus subsumes continental ideas within Anglo-American style concerns.<sup>37</sup> There is no study that either examines the continental tradition or explores its humanist past.

Having contextualised a continental account within the mainstream of current philosophy of social sciences literature it now remains for us to elaborate further the scope and nature of our own study. First, we wish to address the lacuna in current philosophy of social science and pursue a specialist treatment of the continental tradition. Our book, we hope, represents a dedicated tract on this neglected area of continental philosophy of social science. Second, we aim to explore the distinctiveness of the European mainland's corpus in contradistinction to its Anglo-American counterpart. We propose to do this by outlining continental philosophy of social science's indebtedness to humanism.

The influence of humanism on continental philosophy of social science impacts on its nature in a variety of ways, all of which make it distinct from the Anglo-American tradition. Let us, therefore, now pursue this overall contention that this corpus is best understood as emanating from and holding many central characteristics of humanism. Having made such a claim, it would be helpful to first pause and briefly explain what we mean by humanism. This is no easy task. Humanism is a fairly broad and descriptive term and one that is not readily condensed into a precise definition. However, I would propose three central points to any definition

<sup>33</sup> Flew 1985; Hollis, M. 1994; Trigg 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Critchley 2001 or McNiece 1992.

<sup>35</sup> See for instance Gordon 1995 on Fanon; or any good, comprehensive account of Dilthey, Heidegger or Gadamer.

<sup>36</sup> Babich et al. 1995.

<sup>37</sup> Outhwaite 1987.

of humanism. Moreover I would contrast each of these points with any broadly scientific mentality.

First humanism entails being in touch with the ideas and texts of our *Ancient* ancestors, the Greeks and the Romans. Whether we call ourselves Christians, Romantics or Marxists, if we base our understanding upon a reading of Plato, Aristotle or Cicero and its transmission through the ages, we can rightly lay claim to a humanist stance. This link to our Ancient ancestry contrasts sharply to scientific understanding, which requires no familiarity with the Ancients.

Secondly, humanists hold that knowledge works through *transmission*. Understanding and knowledge are composed by the accumulation of voices handed down from the centuries. This contrasts with science's 'creative destruction' approach where voices from the past are seen as holding false meanings, which need to be destroyed in order to allow new, objective knowledge to flourish. Humanists hold that knowledge comes from the past, which is to say that the past is a source of understanding relevant to the present. This notion includes two distinct but closely related points. On the one hand, progress for humanists would be the accumulation of the knowledge from the past, not the transcendence or destruction of it. Science meanwhile holds the idea that the past contains undeveloped, primitive and indeed often false forms of knowledge. Hence, progress is the replacement of the old by the new. On the other hand, humanism is committed to the idea that it is our prior conceptions that help us build knowledge and understanding. In contrast, science pursues the goal of objectivity, which entails the removal of prior conceptions that are believed to cloud or distort the issue.

Third, humanism I would suggest holds a distinct notion of *meaning* from science. The human world is substantively meaningful for humanists and this *includes* the idea of ethical, aesthetic and even spiritual meanings. Moreover, meaning itself often encompasses the notions of both value and purpose. Society thus for humanists would be an intrinsically purpose-laden, ethically, aesthetically and spiritually valuable entity. This contrasts with a scientific notion of meaning, which is purely technical and pertains only to bare empirical facts. All other forms of human meaning are external, and maybe 'tacked' on as an ethical, aesthetic or indeed subjective addition. Society would be approached as an object of knowledge like any other physical object in the natural world. Humanists also, if you like, hold an ontological assumption about the nature of meaning. The creation of meaning in our world is through human beings. Society,

therefore is not only a meaningful entity but one indeed whose meaning is generated through generations of human creativity.<sup>38</sup>

Let us now see just how humanism shapes continental philosophy of social science and generates a distinct tradition for Anglo-American schools of thought. As we have intimated, the continental traditions have their own vivid history stemming back some two thousand years to Ancient Greece and early Christianity. Although Anglo-American philosophy of social science is also justified in looking to humanism for its deeper historical roots, its trajectory differs from its continental counterpart in that it has been subject to a much greater historical *rupture*. The development of the sciences, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the philosophical arguments that accompanied them, entailed a rejection of many former humanist assumptions and indeed approaches to study of the 'human sciences'. In fact, Anglo-American philosophy of social science looks no further than to the empiricist and rationalist philosophies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for its historical roots. The continental tradition on the other hand, whilst incorporating these developments within its trajectory, does so in such a way that entails no rupture with the earlier, pre-Enlightenment past. It conserves and carries forth an awareness of deeper humanist ideas and scholarship.

This special humanist legacy generates three features to continental philosophy of social science, namely a distinct style of analysis, a particular canon of thinkers and an autonomous set of concerns. First, continental philosophy of social science's distinct history, its living connection with humanism entails a distinct *style of analysis*. It shapes both its style of knowledge acquisition and its assumptions about the nature of the 'object' it wishes to gain knowledge of (society). In contrast to its Anglo-American cousin, continental modes of knowledge acquisition are rooted in the historical, textual and theoretical modes of analysis so dear to earlier humanist scholars. To begin with, history is important and meaningful to continental philosophy of social science. In contrast to Anglo-American styles which revolve around universal concepts which are a-historical, continental thinkers often centre their ideas within historical context. Moreover, whereas Anglo-American philosophies develop arguments around themes generated from concepts, continental approaches pivot around historical traditions and the works of individual thinkers

<sup>38</sup> Note that this position also contrasts with certain Christian views wherein meaning is created through God. However, Christian humanism would hold a more complex fusion of these views.



situated within each historical tradition. Furthermore, continental styles of analysis are more textual than their analytic counterparts. They follow closely a canon of authoritative texts and are sensitive to language and expression. Issues of authorship can play a role and figurative language can be deployed for the purposes of understanding in a way, which mitigates against the more austere analytic tradition. It should be borne in mind, however, that continental styles include philosophical modes of thought deploying concepts. However, this theorising always retains a link to textual or historical issues to a far greater degree than Anglo-American analysis.

Secondly, continental philosophy of social science is shaped by humanism in that it has its own *canon*. Although many of the contemporary thinkers from this, like Gadamer, Habermas or Foucault, have made their way into Anglo-American consciousness and thus into mainstream philosophy of social science, many of their ancestors have not. Greek, Roman and Christian traditions of interpretation are virtually unknown to contemporary philosophers of social science, although they may espouse a deep interest in issues of interpretation.<sup>39</sup> Earlier Enlightenment and Romantic names like Chladenius, Droysen or Humboldt, for example, also rarely figure. Furthermore, critical theory's tentacles into Ancient and Christian ideas have little presence in any Anglo-American philosophical study. Likewise, although Foucault's presence proliferates among many mainstream rubric's of philosophy of social science, students and scholars often show little awareness of Foucault's debt to Nietzsche's classical training and moreover, that Foucault's entire philosophy of social science is built upon Nietzsche's critical engagement with Christianity. Yet all these ideas were crucial to the developing twists and turns of the continental tradition.

Thirdly, this humanist inheritance entails that continental philosophy of social science not only has a distinct style of analysis and a distinct canon of thinkers, but it incorporates its own *intellectual concerns*. This rubric of concerns is vast and varied, but three features perhaps stand out. Ancient thinkers and humanist scholars have always assumed that the object of inquiry, 'society', is meaningful, often linguistic and historical.

The preoccupation with the notion of meaning for continental philosophy of social science is arguably the most important feature derived from humanism and debates rage as to the nature and location of meaning

<sup>39</sup> For example, Outhwaite, in a tone of invoking great historical depth, refers to 'hermeneutic theory as being at least 150 years old' 1987: 1.

in human society. Arguments through the ages vary from stating that meaning resides in society's language, its law, its individuals (whether as authors or readers), its humanly constructed gods, a single God, or indeed society's history albeit construed as historical events, ideas, a single moment or the entirety of human history). Further discussions inquire as to exactly how meaning is created and transmitted, whether, for example, it is transmitted through the precision of language, through creative expression or through the mind of the reader or observer. Philosophers enquire if meaning is distorted by human understanding, human relations, power, authority or if indeed meaning resides within such things.

Furthermore, the continental tradition often implicitly takes a notion of society as a historical phenomenon. Therefore, issues about the nature of history are the cornerstone of many debates. Views differ about whether history is changing rapidly, developing slowly, progressing forwards, regressing or merely static. Further questions have been asked if history's change is linear or circular. How is society historical? Is it composed by material or ideal elements; does the way we produce our food impact upon history and shape society or the way we speak and think? Are we internal or external to history, that is, is it something we are part of or are we simply external observers? These and other similar questions form the backbone of many continental questions about the nature of society.

These assumptions of the study of society being about meaning, language and history contrast starkly with Anglo-American approaches, which because of their foundations in philosophy of science, take as their starting point a comparison between the natural and social sciences. Even when not, like positivism or forms of realism, literal attempts to apply science to society, Anglo-American approaches are still formed by the rubric and assumptions of science.

Epistemological questions for the Anglo-American rubric centre upon issues of fact and questions about objectivity of knowledge in contrast to the continental focus upon meaning. For them, issues about proof, prediction and causality replace questions about interpretation and understanding. Debates about whether our knowledge is external to society contrast with the usual continental assumption that understanding is always internal to it.

Ontological topics in the Anglo-American tradition question how like or unlike an object of scientific enquiry society is. Aspects of society are deemed to differ problematically from a concept of pure objectivity – aspects like ethics, the subjectivity of individuals, and so