

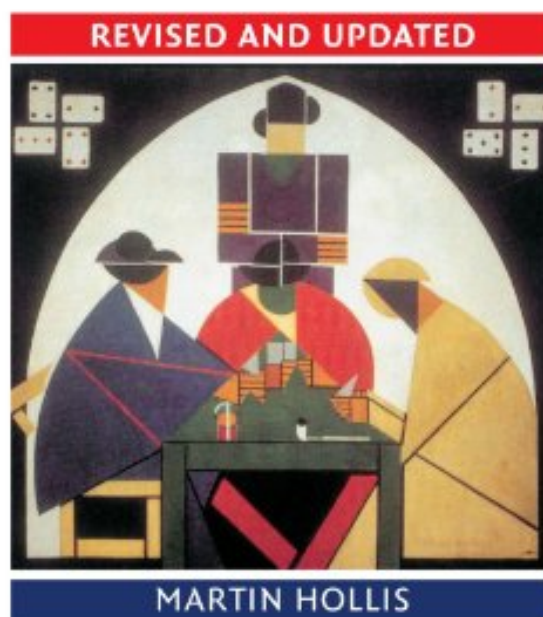
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## The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction (Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy)

*Martin Hollis*

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### The philosophy of social science an introduction



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**Martin Hollis : The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction (Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction (Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. These are no doubt ideal types and surely social scientists can make free reference to any or all of these to aid in their interBy Billie PritchettMartin Hollis's *Philosophy of Social Science* examines four different modes in which human thought and behavior has been interpreted in the social sciences and examines the strengths and weaknesses of these four different modes. Two of the four modes assume that human thought and behavior can be understood in the same way that the natural sciences can, that is, consistent with other naturalistic inquiry, and two other modes assume that human thought and behavior are so radically distinct that they are not amenable to the kinds of explanations offered through naturalistic inquiry. These are no doubt ideal types and surely social scientists can make free reference to any or all of these to aid in their interpretations of human thought and behavior but the idealized types are useful nonetheless in understanding the practices of the social sciences. The first mode that the book examines assumes that human beings can be understood using naturalistic inquiry and can be understood at the individual level. The apotheosis of this kind of interpretation of human thought and behavior so far has been Rational Choice theory. Rational Choice theory assumes that human beings have something akin to a perfect internal computer for processes their preferences, that they have a complete and well-ordered set of preferences, and that human beings will act in such a way as to satisfy these preferences. So, for example, to understand why Joe voted for Obama last election, one need only make reference to his preference for Obama over Romney, or perhaps more specifically his preferences for certain policies that better align with Obama's platform than Romney's platform, and his intention on acting on those preferences, in this case in the form of voting. Although the above is a relatively simple example, naturalistic, individualistic inquiry works roughly the same way in interpreting thought and behavior that might be considered to apply more generally to the scope of all human beings. Take, say, language as a case. The naturalist inquirer who is also an individualist (in this technical sense) will assume that a given individual, barring physical or mental disabilities, is like enough to other individuals to examine the cognitive states of this person so as to arrive at conclusions about how language operates in other similar individuals. Therefore, if at a certain level of analysis one could identify changes in the development of this person's acquisition of English, it could be generally assumed that other people will acquire English in a similar way and in a natural setting as he does. The question of differences arises only when enough individuals have been aggregated to note the variation. The second mode of analysis for the social sciences is naturalistic and holistic, that is, the social scientist working in this mode assumes that humans can be studied in a way akin to how the natural sciences are studied (hence, naturalism) and that to study humans the social scientist need not look at the individual but rather the political, social, cultural milieu in which an individual operates. Consider Joe's vote for Obama again. The naturalist-individualist can assume that Joe voted for Obama because of a certain preferences for certain kinds of policies or traits he liked about Obama and his campaign, but the naturalist-holist on the other hand would be more interested in systemic reasons for why Joe voted for Obama. For example, the systems analyst might acknowledge the fact that Joe is a registered Democrat and registered Democrats on average vote for whomever the Democratic Party puts forth as the candidate, in this case, Obama. If that is less interesting, the system analyst could also acknowledge that Joe, for example, is a teacher who really cares about teachers unions and it could be the case that members of teachers unions overwhelmingly support the Obama because he supports teachers unions. If this is so, then it could have been deduced from certain facts about Joe that he too would likely vote for Obama. The third mode of analysis assumes that human beings are distinct enough from objects and animals in the natural world so as not to be understood by naturalistic methods but, furthermore, they should be understood at the level of individuals. This kind of analysis typically assumes that human beings are very much like actors, with diverse social roles and all kinds of normative expectations that go with whatever social roles they have. So, taking Joe again and asking why he voted for Obama, it could be acknowledged that Joe is a husband, father, and teacher who read Obama's *Audacity of Hope* and identifies with the social roles of Obama. According to the nonnaturalist-individualist interpretation of Joe's reason for voting for Obama, then, could be that Joe sees himself and Obama as actors of certain social roles that Joe deems significant, and so he wants a candidate who can meaningfully embody these social roles in the greater culture. The fourth mode of analysis is nonnaturalistic and holistic, meaning that in this mode social scientists assume that human beings make meaning in significant ways not like in the natural world and that human beings must be studied at the collective level. Usually this kind of analysis assumes that people are acting in certain ways just as players do in games, by following certain pre-established roles in various social games that allow them to make and sustain their social world. So along this line of analysis, Joe is an American who understands that in order to even attempt to get the candidate he wants to become president he must cast a vote, because casting a vote is what people do in the American social world if they want someone to be president. He is playing the 'political game,' acting according to the conventions of his social world. I have a preference for which mode(s) of analysis I think is(/are) most amenable to doing social science but I will not trouble you with my preferences. I will however note that human thought and behavior are so complex and human beings such simple creatures designed to think and behave in certain ways such that they cannot actually do certain kinds of science to understand human thought and behavior. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Great readBy Kindle CustomerHaving surveyed 3 major introductions to the philosophy of social science, I found this to be the most focused and interesting. It also leaves you with some choices about what to do with what has been introduced an

argued. While I like Rosenberg a lot, I feel like his is less concerned with the practical side of this philosophy. Hollis has just the right balance, has great humor, uses great charts, and has a very good introduction overall. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By gkampriella tran Excellent condition

This new interdisciplinary textbook by Martin Hollis offers an exceptionally clear and concise introduction to the philosophy of social science. It unearths central philosophical problems underlying the standard ways of thinking about social institutions and social actions, leading the reader to reflect upon the nature of scientific method itself. Is the aim to explain the social world after the manner of the natural world, or to understand it from within? Writing in his characteristically clear and incisive prose, Martin Hollis reveals the crucial role to be played by philosophy in the study of the social sciences.

From the Back Cover This textbook by Martin Hollis offers an exceptionally clear and concise introduction to the philosophy of social science. It examines questions which give rise to fundamental philosophical issues. Are social structures better conceived of as systems of laws and forces, or as webs of meanings and practices? Is social action better viewed as rational behavior, or as self-expression? By exploring such questions, the reader is led to reflect upon the nature of scientific method in social science. Is the aim to explain the social world after a manner worked out for the natural world, or understand the social world from within?