

## Book Review



Keith Dowding. *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*. 2016. 296 pages.

The question of how to conduct social research has been discussed in extensive literature on research methodologies in the Social Sciences. Likewise, the question of how we can know about social beings and realities has also been dealt with in a number of books on the philosophy of the social sciences. Traditionally, books on research methods on the market will provide readers with several concrete techniques for conducting both qualitative and quantitative research. They aim to offer a practical step-by-step guide to enable readers to achieve their own research output. Similarly, books on the philosophy of the social science, in a more complicated manner, conventionally explain core theories of being (Ontology) and knowledge (Epistemology) in each school of thought—such as Positivism, Realism, Interpretivism—separately. However, a book which combines philosophy and methods is rare.

Amongst a number of books on the study of the philosophy of the social sciences and social research methods, Keith Dowding's *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science* offers a distinct approach to the fields. Dowding's excellent work is not structured around an introduction to 'isms' e.g. Positivism, Constructivism, and so on. Instead, his book invites readers to look back at crucial foundational concepts to pave the way for researchers to construct a solid research argument and sound social/political explanation. Various concepts such as causation, mechanism, narration, and conceptual analysis are discussed throughout the books (10 chapters).

Although the author elects not to discuss the concept of 'isms', he does provide some background on a number of isms, e.g. Realism, Idealism, Postmodernism, Constructivism, in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, what really distinguishes this book is in Chapters 3, 4, and 6 as Dowding offers a complex discussion on the questions of what is an explanation? What is a theory? and the relationship between narration, mechanism, and causation respectively. Chapter 3 (What is an explanation?) examines a core aspect of social research,

which is an explanation. Social scientists always construct social knowledge by explaining something. This chapter makes clear the distinction between a description and an explanation via the capacity to identify a genuine cause and effect relationship. What is really helpful for students in both Political Science and the Social Sciences in general is to learn about the dualism of 'Type and Token' explanations. By explaining something at the Type level, we focus on the genuine essence of social phenomena. In contrast, a Token explanation deals with small details of a big picture. This seems to be a basic concept; however, it helps social scientists to see things clearly and make their own research argument.

Chapter 4 (What is a theory?) deals with various forms of 'theory'. For the Positivist, a theory means a 'model'. Constructing an explanatory theory, in this manner, is similar to creating an abstract model. For the anti-Positivists, in contrast, a theory is viewed as an 'organizing perspective' or way of looking at the world and generating questions. Theory as an organizing perspective helps social scientists to frame a set of dialectical relationships between social factors and rethink their complicated connections. Chapter 6 (Narratives, Mechanisms, and Causation) is another outstanding chapter. Here, the author elaborates on the concept of social explanation by pointing out the importance of narrative in order to categorize cause and effect in a given research argument. Dowding challenges the Positivist's position that recognizes a recurring statement as the only way to recognize a cause and effect relationship. In this work, Dowding argues that the social scientist who undertakes a case study can also identify causation through the notion of 'process tracing', a retrospective approach to reveal cause–effect relationships within a specific 'case study'. This book simply argues that causation has been defended in many different ways. The remaining chapters deal with the importance of hypotheses and theory testing (Chapter 5), the distinctions between institutional structural methods, the behavioral method, and interpretative method (Chapter 7), conceptual analysis (Chapter 8), analytical philosophy (Chapter 9), and Political Science as a vocation (Chapter 10).

In conclusion, even though this book is entitled *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, it does not offer a traditional research technique like books on social research usually do. Instead, this book focuses on philosophical thinking about core ideas of social explanation, which is the basis on which all social scientists construct a sound argument in their own research projects. Furthermore, the reader should ignore the words 'Political Science' in the title as the book is actually useful for everyone in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Although initially the book seems difficult to read, it is highly

recommended for all readers including undergraduates, postgraduates, and experienced researchers.

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### Reference

Dowding, Keith. 2016. *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.