

Structural Realism meets the Social Sciences

Ioannis Votsis

Heinrich-Heine Universitaet Duesseldorf

votsis@phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de

Structural realism is arguably one of the most influential movements to have emerged in philosophy of science in the last decade or so. Advocates of this movement attempt to answer epistemological and/or ontological questions concerning science by arguing that the key to all such questions is the mathematical formalism of a theory. This is so, according to structural realists, because the mathematical formalism encodes all and only what is important about a theory's target domain, namely its structure. Almost without exception, discussions of structural realism centre on the natural sciences and in particular on modern physics. Given that a number of other sciences are less – indeed in some cases much less – mathematised than modern physics, does structural realism have anything informative to say about them? In this talk, I take up the task of articulating what structural realists ought to say about the social sciences if they are to consider themselves as offering a coherent philosophy for the whole of science.