

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF SOCIAL INQUIRY

Political Science 790
Winter 2012

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Course Description

What difference does, or should, consciousness make to social science? Unlike the objects of physical science, the objects of social science are also subjects, in the sense that they are conscious and engage in meaningful behavior. This seemingly important difference in objects has underpinned a long debate among and between “positivists” and “interpretivists” about whether social inquiry needs an epistemology and methodology essentially different than that of the physical sciences, and if so what that should look like. This course is an introduction to this debate.

Requirements

There are three requirements for this course.

- 1) Come to class prepared to discuss the readings in an informed and thoughtful fashion. The success of this seminar will depend on the quality of student participation, which will accordingly be worth 20% of your grade.
- 2) Write **FOUR** 2-3 page **reaction memos** to class readings (two each from Parts I and II below), which are due the night before the sessions for which they are written. Together they will be worth 40% of your final grade.
- 3) Write a 10 page **final exam**, worth 40% of your grade. I am open to substituting a paper for the final in individual cases.

Readings

All readings listed on this syllabus are required. Everything is on Carmen except one required book:

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba (1994) – Designing Social Inquiry, Princeton University Press (henceforth “KKV”)

CALENDAR

Mar 27: Course Introduction

Apr 3: Social Ontology

A. On Social Facts

Searle, John (1995) – The Construction of Social Reality, Free Press, Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-78

B. Perspectives on the Fact/Value Distinction

Weber, Max (1949/1994) – “Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy” (abridged), in M. Martin and L. McIntyre, eds., Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science, Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 535-545

Taylor, Charles (1969) – “Neutrality in Political Science,” in P. Laslett and W. Runciman, eds., Philosophy, Politics, and Society, Blackwell, pp. 25-57

De Muijnck, Wim (2011) – “Normative Authority for Empirical Science,” Philosophical Explorations, 14(3), 263-275

PART I: POSITIVISMS

Apr 10: Defining the Science in Political Science

A. Political Science and its Progress

KKV, Chapter 1, pp. 3-33

Ball, Terence (1976) – “From Paradigms to Research Programs: Toward a post-Kuhnian Political Science,” American Journal of Political Science, 20, 151-177

Bird, John (2006) – “On the Poverty of Theory,” Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society, 11, 251-264

B. Laws and the Social Sciences

Hempel, Carl (1942) – “The Function of General Laws in History,” Journal of Philosophy, 39, 35-48

Almond, Gabriel with Stephen Genco (1977) – “Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics,” World Politics, 29(4), 489-522

Dobry, Michel (2009) – “Critical Processes and Political Fluidity,” International Political Anthropology, 2(1), 74-90

Apr 17: Getting Started

A. Descriptive Inference

KKV, Chapter 2, pp. 34-74

Wendt, Alexander (1998) – “On Constitution and Causation in International Relations,” Review of International Studies, 24 (special issue), 101-117

Sanders, Lynn (1999) – “Democratic Politics and Survey Research,” Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 29(2), 248-80

B. Problems of Concept Formation

Sartori, Giovanni (1970) – “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” American Political Science Review, 64(4), 1033-1053

Farr, James (1982) – “Historical Concepts in Political Science: The Case of ‘Revolution’,” American Journal of Political Science, 26(4), 688-708

Bevir, Mark and Asaf Kedar (2008) – “Concept Formation in Political Science: An anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology,” Perspectives on Politics, 6(3), 503-517

Apr 24: Building Theory

A. From Concepts to Formal Theory?

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce (1985) – “Toward a Scientific Understanding of International Conflict: A Personal View,” International Studies Quarterly, 29(2), 121-136

Chick, Victoria (1998) – “On Knowing One’s Place: The Role of Formalism in Economics,” The Economic Journal, 108, 1859-1869

MacDonald, Paul (2003) – “Useful Fiction or Miracle Maker? The Competing Epistemological Foundations of Rational Choice Theory,” American Political Science Review, 97(4), 551-565

B. Perspectives on Causal Explanation

KKV, Chapter 3, pp. 75-114

Hedstrom, Peter and Richard Swedberg (1996) – “Social Mechanisms,” Acta Sociologica, 39, 281-308

Glennan, Stuart (2010) – “Ephemeral Mechanisms and Historical Explanation,” Erkenntnis, 72, 251-266

May 1: Testing Theory

A. The Qualitative-Quantitative Debate I

KKV, Chapters 4-6, pp. 115-230

Green, Donald and Alan Gerber (2003) – “The Under-provision of Experiments in Political Science,” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 589, 94-112

B. The Qualitative-Quantitative Debate II

McKeown, Timothy (1999) – “Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview,” International Organization, 53(1), 161-190

Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz (2006) – “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research,” Political Analysis, 14(3), 227-249

Johnson, James (2006) – “Consequences of positivism: A pragmatist assessment,” Comparative Political Studies, 39(2), 224-252.

PART II: INTERPRETIVISMS

May 8: Introduction

A. The Epistemology of Understanding

Yanow, Dvora (2006) – “Thinking Interpretively: Philosophical Presuppositions and the Human Sciences,” in D. Yanow and P. Schwartz-Shea, eds., Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 5-26

Kurzman, Charles (2004) – “Can Understanding Undermine Explanation? The Confused Experience of Revolution,” Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 34(3), 328-351

Bevir, Mark and Karsten Stueber (2011) – “Empathy, Rationality, and Explanation,” Journal of the Philosophy of History, 5, 147-162

B. Subjectivity, Inter-Subjectivity, and Beyond

Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph (2003) – “Engaging Subjective Knowledge: How Amar Singh’s Diary Narratives of and by the Self Explain Identity Formation,” Perspectives on Politics, 1, 681-694

Schwartz, Joel (1984) – “Participation and Multisubjective Understanding: An Interpretivist Approach to the Study of Political Participation,” Journal of Politics, 46, 1117-1141

Geertz, Clifford (1973) – “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, Basic Books, pp. 3-32

May 15: The Politics of Interpretation

A. Participatory Epistemology and the Problem of Objectivity

Heikes, Deborah (2004) – “The Bias Paradox: Why it’s not just for Feminists Anymore,” Synthese, 138, 315-35

Lukes, Steven (2000) – “Different Cultures, Different Rationalities?,” History of the Human Sciences, 13(1), 3-18

Monteiro, Nuno and Keven Ruby (2009) – “IR and the False Promise of Philosophical Foundations,” International Theory, 1(1), 19-XX

B. Debate

Bates, Robert, et al. (1998) – “The Politics of Interpretation: Rationality, Culture, and Transition,” Politics and Society, 26, 603-42

Johnson, James (2002) – “How Conceptual Problems Migrate: Rational Choice, Interpretation, and the Hazards of Pluralism,” Annual Review of Political Science, 5, 223-248

Sil, Rudra and Peter Katzenstein (2010) – “Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics,” Perspectives on Politics, 8(2), 411-431

May 22: The Productivity of Social Science

A. Power/Knowledge

Osborne, Thomas and Nikolas Rose (1999) – “Do the Social Sciences Create Phenomena? The Example of Public Opinion Research,” British Journal of Sociology, 50, 367-396

Santos, Ana and Joao Rodrigues (2009) – “Economics as Social Engineering? Questioning the Performativity Thesis,” Cambridge Journal of Economics, 33, 985-1000

Wendt, Alexander and Raymond Duvall (2008) – “Sovereignty and the UFO,” Political Theory, 36(4), 607-633

B. A Phronetic Social Science?

Laitin, David (2003) – “The Perestroikan Challenge to Social Science,” Politics and Society, 31, 163-184

Flyvbjerg, Bent (2004) – “A Perestroikan Straw Man Answers Back: David Laitin and Phronetic Political Science,” Politics and Society, 32, 389-416

Adcock, Robert (2009) – “Making *Making Social Science Matter* Matter to Us,” Journal of Theoretical Politics, 21(1), 97-112

May 29: New Directions

A. To Be Decided

B. The Idea of a Quantum Social Science

Wendt, Alexander (2010) – “Flatland: Quantum Mind and the International Hologram,” in M. Albert, L-E. Cederman and A. Wendt, eds., *New Systems Theories of World Politics*, London: Palgrave, pp. 279-310