Political Science 601
The Philosophy of Social Science
Fall 2001

Th 2–4 p.m., 2010 MLB

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This seminar explores classical questions in the philosophy of social science. General themes include the nature and models of explanation; conceptions of rationality, objectivity and justification. We shall consider how these themes help illustrate (and possibly obscure) contemporary controversies such as the debates about the nature of political science and about role of rational choice and evolutionary psychology in political science.

The seminar presupposes a basic understanding of social-scientific methodologies. Seminar participants are welcome to explore their own research interests from a meta-level perspective, whether their interests are theoretical or empirical.

The only dogma in the seminar is the prima facie value of methodological pluralism: we’ll proceed with the assumption that all standard social scientific approaches are legitimate and have much to contribute. Partisans of particular approaches are welcome to argue for their position but must respect others’ perspectives.

Seminar mechanics will depend on the number of participants, but count on presentations, short response papers (20%) and a term paper (80%).

The following books have been ordered through Shaman Drum:

- Daniel Little, Varieties of Social Explanation (Westview)
- Helen Longino, Science as Social Knowledge (Princeton UP)
- Martin & MacIntyre, eds., Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science (MIT Press)
Course Schedule
The following schedule is open to changes, partly contingent on participant interests. Readings marked with an R will be available for photocopying at the political science department, those marked with JSTOR on www.jstor.org. Articles without additional notations or bibliographic info are in Martin & Macintyre.

Week 1: Introduction—no reading

Week 2: Causal Analysis
J.S. Mill, System of Logic, Bk. VI, chs. ii-iii (R)
Carl Hempel, “The Function of General Laws in History”
Daniel Little, Varieties of Social Explanation, chs. 1-2

Weeks 3–4: Rational Choice Explanations and Models Rationality

Week 3
Little, ch. 3
Milton Friedman, “The Methodology of Positive Economics”
Dagfinn Follesdal, “The Status of Rationality Assumptions in Interpretation and in the Explanation of Action”

Week 4
Little, ch. 7

Week 5: Interpretation Theory
Little, ch. 4
Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”
Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”
Week 6: Functionalism and Structuralism
Little, ch. 5
Jon Elster, “Functional Explanation: In Social Science”
Harold Kincaid, “Assessing Functional Explanations in the Social Sciences”

Weeks 7–8: Individualism, Holism, Reductionism
Little, ch. 9
Richard Miller, “Methodological Individualism and Social Explanation”
Alan J. Nelson, “Social Science and the Mental”
Harold Kincaid, “Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism”
Emile Durkheim “Social Facts”

Week 9: Neutrality, Objectivity and Value-freedom
Max Weber, “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy”
Charles Taylor, “Neutrality in Political Science”
Ernest Nagel, “The Value-Oriented Bias of Social Inquiry”
Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 6. (R)

Week 10: Critiques of Objectivity: Feminist Epistemologies
Naomi Weisstein, “Psychology Constructs the Female”
Alison Wylie, “Reasoning about Ourselves: Feminist Methodology in the Social Sciences”

Week 11: Reconstructing Objectivity
Helen Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge*
Week 12: Thanksgiving—no seminar.

Weeks 13–15: Current Controversies

**Week 13: Evolutionary Psychology**


**Week 14: Evolutionary Psychology continued**


**Week 15: Convergences?**


