

Philosophy 521: Philosophy of the Social Sciences

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Fall 2012

M/W 2:30-3:45pm, Helen C. White Hall 4281

Instructor: Trevor Pearce Office Hours: Tue 10-11am; Wed 1-2pm
Department of Philosophy Phone: 608-263-3725
Helen C. White Hall 5123 E-mail: trpearce@wisc.edu

Description

What are the social sciences? Do they have different methods and aims than the natural sciences? In this class, starting with these questions, we will explore a series of philosophical and methodological issues in the social sciences. The course begins with a short overview of some classic work in philosophy and social theory by Mill, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. Next, we tackle one of the central questions in more recent philosophy of social science: what counts as an explanation of a social phenomenon, and is there some privileged level at which such explanations should be given? The second half of the course consists of two disciplinary case studies. In the first of these we examine the concept of culture, its influence on communication, and how this influence affects one of the central methods in social science—the interview. In the second, we analyze some central notions of modern economics and their relation to policy and human welfare.

Required Texts

Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation: Rethinking the Questions in Social Theory* (Yale UP, 1981)
Briggs, *Learning How to Ask* (Cambridge UP, 1986)
Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice, and Welfare* (Cambridge UP, 2012)

These three texts will be available for purchase at the university bookstore. All other texts will be available online at Learn@UW.

Evaluation

20%: Attendance / Participation / Discussion Questions
35%: First paper (1500 words) – **DUE NOVEMBER 2**
45%: Second paper (2000 words) – **DUE DECEMBER 21**

Schedule

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

September 5 (no reading)
Introduction

September 10 – **Logic of the “Moral Sciences” I** (42 pp.)
Mill, *System of Logic* (1843), Book 6, Chapters 1-5

September 12 – **Logic of the “Moral Sciences” II** (36 pp.)
Mill, *System of Logic* (1843), Book 6, Chapters 6-9

September 17 – **Logic of the “Moral Sciences” III** (32 pp.)
Mill, *System of Logic* (1843), Book 6, Chapters 10-11

September 19 – **Social Facts & Social Causes** (25 pp.)
Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), Chapter 1
Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Preface
Durkheim, “Marxism and Sociology” (1897)

September 24 – **Objectivity in Social Science** (39 pp.)
Weber, “The ‘Objectivity’ of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy” (1904)

EXPLANATION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

September 26 – **Scientific Explanation** (20 pp.)
Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation*, Introduction

October 1 – **Explanatory Relativity** (28 pp.)
Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation*, Chapter 1

October 3 – **Reductionism** (26 pp.)
Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation*, Chapter 2

October 8 – **Individualism in Social Thought** (30 pp.)
Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation*, Chapter 3

October 10 – **Biology & Society** (29 pp.)
Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation*, Chapter 4

October 15 – **The Ethics of Explanation** (22 pp.)
Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation*, Chapter 5

October 17 – **Beyond Relativism** (29 pp.)
Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation*, Chapter 6

October 22 – **Interests & Evidence** (21 pp.)
Wylie, “The Interplay of Evidential Constraints and Political Interests” (1992)

October 24 – **Explanation in Psychology** (40 pp.)
Goldin-Meadow et al., “Solving Psychological Problems in Four Dimensions” (2006)

October 29 – **Theoretical Pluralism** (20 pp.)
Longino, “What Do We Measure When We Measure Aggression?” (2001)

METHODOLOGY I: CULTURE & COMMUNICATION

October 31 – **Culture & Meaning** (28 pp.)
Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” (1973)

November 2 – FIRST PAPER DUE [submit to Learn@UW Dropbox]

November 5 – **Cultural Evolution** (34 pp.)
Gerson, “Some Problems of Analyzing Cultural Evolution” (2010)

November 7 – **Interviewing & Metacommunication** (30 pp.)
Briggs, *Learning How to Ask*, Chapter 1

November 12 – **Communicative Blunders** (30 pp.)
Briggs, *Learning How to Ask*, Chapters 2-3

November 14 – **Metacommunicative Competence** (32 pp.)
Briggs, *Learning How to Ask*, Chapter 4

November 19 – **Methodological Reflections** (33 pp.)
Briggs, *Learning How to Ask*, Chapters 5-6

METHODOLOGY II: ECONOMICS & WELFARE

November 21 – **Evidence-Based Policy** (21 pp.)
Cartwright, “Will this Policy Work for You?” (2010)

November 26 – **Standards of Significance** (35 pp.)
McCloskey & Ziliak, “Brief of Amici Curiae Statistics Experts” (2010)
Ziliak & McCloskey, *The Cult of Statistical Significance* (2008), Chapters 5-6

November 28 – **What Are Preferences?** (33 pp.)
Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice, and Welfare*, Chapters 1-3

December 3 – **Games, Decisions, Constraints** (40 pp.)
Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice, and Welfare*, Chapters 4-6

December 5 – **Preferences & Welfare** (29 pp.)
Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice, and Welfare*, Chapters 7-8

December 10 – **Preferences & Psychology** (33 pp.)
Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice, and Welfare*, Chapters 9-11

December 12 – **Well-Being & Morality** (25 pp.)
Alexandrova, “Well-Being as an Object of Science” (2012)
Douglas, “The Moral Responsibilities of Scientists” (2003)

December 21 – SECOND PAPER DUE [submit to Learn@UW Dropbox]