Philosophy 295A: Philosophy of the Social Sciences
University of Vermont
Fall 2010
MW 4:05–5:20, 70 South Williams 109

Professor: Randall Harp
Office: 70 South Williams room 203
Office Hours: MW 1–2, and by appointment
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Prerequisites: At least one philosophy course at the 100-level or above, or an appropriate background in social science research
Required Texts: All course readings available on Blackboard

Many of the readings (but not all) can be found in:

Course Description: The main task of the social sciences is to explain social phenomena. What is the characteristic way that the social sciences—economics, sociology, history, psychology—explain phenomena? And what sorts of events count as social phenomena in the first place? In this course, we will investigate the nature of explanation in the social sciences by way of contrasting the social sciences with the natural sciences and by way of comparing the behavior of groups with the behavior of sets of individual rational agents.

Course Goals: Philosophy 295A is an advanced seminar in philosophy. I expect you to come into the class with a good understanding of philosophical analysis. This course aims at two things: from a philosophical standpoint, it aims to instill in you an understanding of how social phenomena are different from natural phenomena, and of the characteristic ways in which statements of social scientific theories are justified. From the side of the social sciences, this course aims to increase your sensitivity to proper social science methodology.
Readings: All readings for this course will be available on Blackboard. Some course materials may need to be accessed through the campus network; if you have difficulties, please ask me or your friendly university librarian. (Librarians are always your friends!)

Evaluation: There will be five components to your grade for this class. The first component is a midterm examination which will be worth 20% of your grade; the midterm will be a take-home exam and will be due on October 20 by 11:59pm, either in my departmental mailbox or in my email inbox.

The second component is a final examination which will also be worth 20% of your grade and will also be a take-home exam, due on December 8 by 11:59pm.

The third component of your grade is your directed questions, which will be worth 20% of your grade. You may work in groups of up to three people for this. You will choose one article of the assigned readings and you will do two things for the article: first, you will summarize the argument of the article as best as you can; and second, you will prepare a set of questions or objections to the argument. (It is possible to do well with one or two penetrating questions, but you are safest with at least three.)

The fourth component of your grade is your final paper, which is worth 30% of your final grade. Your final paper will be due on December 13 by 11:59pm.

The fifth component of your grade is class participation, and is worth 10% of your final grade. If you are shy or otherwise not comfortable contributing to discussions in class, you can satisfy the class participation component of your grade by stopping by my office hours or emailing me your thoughts about the articles.

Attendance: You should show up to class. I dislike taking attendance. To this end, we will jointly set an attendance policy on the first day that we are all comfortable with.

Note on submitting work through email: If you email me any work, I will send an email confirming that I received it. If you have not received a confirmation email and you are worried about whether I got your work, you should re-send it to be safe.

Statement on Academic Honesty: I expect that we are all here to learn from one another. To this end, I ask that all students abide by the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities as well as the Code of Academic Integrity. If you have any questions about whether your work violates the Code of Academic Integrity, please ask.
Schedule of Readings

**Week 1: Introduction; Explanation, Laws, and Interpretation**
- Aug 30: No readings

**Week 2: Explanation, Laws, and Interpretation**
- Sep 6: [no class]
- Sep 8: Fay & Moon, “What Would an Adequate Philosophy of Social Science Look Like?”

**Week 3: Explanation, Laws, and Interpretation**
- Sep 13: Scriven, “A Possible Distinction between Traditional Scientific Disciplines and the Study of Human Behavior”
- Sep 15: Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”

**Week 4: Explanation, Laws, and Interpretation; Rationality and Rational Choice**
- Sep 20: Kincaid, “Defending Laws in the Social Sciences”
- Sep 22: Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes”

**Week 5: Rationality and Rational Choice**
- Sep 27: Føllesdal, “The Status of Rationality Assumptions”
- Sep 29: Hollis, “Rational Preferences”

**Week 6: Rationality and Rational Choice**
- Oct 6: Satz & Ferejohn, “Rational Choice and Social Theory”

**Week 7: Functional Explanations**
- Oct 13: Dore, “Function and Cause”

**Week 8: Economics as Science**
- Oct 18: Friedman, “Methodology of Positive Economics”

**Week 9: Economics as Science; Historical Explanations**

**Week 10: Historical Explanations**
- Nov 1: Roth, “Narrative Explanations: The Case of History”
- Nov 3: Hegel, “Introduction to the Philosophy of History”
Week 11: Feminist Methodology and the Social Sciences
Nov 8 Weisstein, “Psychology Constructs the Female”
Nov 10 Wylie, “Reasoning about Ourselves: Feminist Methodology in the Social Sciences”

Week 12: Values and Political Science; Social Facts
Nov 15 Taylor, “Neutrality in Political Science”
Nov 17 Durkheim, “Social Facts”

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: Social Facts
Nov 29 Searle, The Construction of Social Reality
Dec 1 Gilbert, “On Social Facts”

Week 15: Wrap-up
Dec 6 General issues
Dec 8 Wrap-up

Bibliography