

Syllabus
Philosophy 134: Philosophy of Social Science
Fall 2009-2010

Dr. Brian Epstein
I+MW (Mon. and Wed. 3:00-4:15)

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Office hours: Wednesdays 4:15-5:30; Thursdays 4-5, and by appointment, Miner 114B

The Course:

This course is an introduction to the philosophy of social science. The course will consider central problems in the nature and methods of the social sciences, focusing in particular on how the social sciences (like economics, sociology, psychology, political science, and history) differ from the natural sciences (like physics, chemistry, and biology). We will consider historical debates that accompanied the founding of the social sciences, as well as contemporary questions having to do with explanation, objectivity and values, and the nature of social groups

Required texts:

Philosophy of Social Science, 3rd ed., by Alexander Rosenberg
Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science, edited by Martin and McIntyre

Schedule:

Introduction: Some Varieties of Social Explanation

Week 1: Introduction to the class

Wed., Sep. 9: Introduction

Week 2: Introduction to social explanation

Mon., Sep. 14:

Levitt and Dubner, *Freakonomics* Ch. 5, reader
Becker, "An Economic Analysis of Fertility," reader
Krugman, "How Did Economists Get It So Wrong?" reader

Wed., Sep. 16:

Rosenberg, Ch. 1
Machlup, "Are the Social Sciences Really Inferior?" M&M Ch. 1
Fay and Moon, "What Would an Adequate Philosophy of the Social Sciences Look Like?"
M&M Ch. 2

Weeks 3-4:

Thurs., Sep. 26, 6pm:

Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," M&M Ch. 3

Laws in the social sciences

Sat., Sep. 26, 3pm:

Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy," M&M Ch. 6
 Fay, "General Laws and Explaining Human Behavior," M&M Ch. 7

Wed., Sep. 30:

Kincaid, "Defending Laws in the Social Sciences," M&M Ch. 8
 McIntyre, "Complexity and Social Scientific Laws," M&M Ch. 9

Interpretation and social meaning

Week 5:

Mon., Oct. 5:

Rosenberg, Ch. 4
 Collingwood, "Human Nature and Human History," M&M Ch. 11
 Dray, "The Rationale of Actions," M&M Ch. 12

Wed., Oct. 7:

Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," M&M Ch. 14

Behaviorism and instrumentalism

Week 6:

TUES., Oct. 13:

Rosenberg, Ch. 3
 Skinner, selections from *Science and Human Behavior*, reader
 Chomsky, "Review of B.F. Skinner, Verbal Behavior," reader

Wed., Oct. 14:

Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics," M&M Ch. 41

Functional explanation

Week 7:

Mon., Oct. 19:

Rosenberg, Ch. 5
 Hempel, "The Logic of Functional Analysis," M&M Ch. 22

Wed., Oct. 21:

Elster, "Functional Explanation: In Social Science," M&M Ch. 25
 Kincaid, "Assessing Functional Explanations in the Social Sciences," M&M Ch. 26

Rational choice explanation

Week 8:

Mon., Oct. 26:

Elster, "The Nature and Scope of Rational-Choice Explanation," M&M Ch. 20
 Sugden, Robert. "Rational Choice: A Survey of Contributions from Economics and Philosophy," reader

Wed., Oct. 28:

(continued) Sugden, Robert. "Rational Choice: A Survey of Contributions from Economics and Philosophy"

SHORT PAPER DUE!

Irrationality, culture, and the nature of rationality

Week 9:

Mon., Nov. 2:

Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," reader

Wed., Nov. 4:

Jarvie and Agassi, "The Problem of the Rationality of Magic," reader

Beattie, "On Understanding Ritual," reader

Lukes, "Some Problems about Rationality," M&M Ch. 18

Week 10:

Mon., Nov. 9:

Rysiew, "Rationality in Psychology and Epistemology," reader

Rational choice theory redux

Wed., Nov. 11:

Sen, Amartya. 1977. "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory." reader

Week 11:

Mon., Nov. 16:

Satz and Ferejohn, "Rational Choice and Social Theory," reader

Hausman, Daniel. "Rational Choice and Social Theory: A Comment," reader

Individualism vs. holism

Wed., Nov. 18:

Durkheim, "Social Facts," M&M Ch. 27

Mandelbaum, "Societal Facts," reader

Week 12:

Mon., Nov 23:

Watkins, "Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences," M&M Ch. 28

Agassi, "Methodological Individualism," reader

Nov. 25 HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Week 13:

Mon., Nov. 30:

Lukes, "Methodological Individualism Reconsidered," M&M Ch. 29

Kincaid, "Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism," M&M Ch. 32

Wed., Dec. 2:

Epstein, "Ontological Individualism Reconsidered," reader

Society and biology

Week 14:

Mon., Dec. 7:

Rosenberg, Ch. 6

Selections from E.O. Wilson, *Sociobiology* and Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*

Wed., Dec. 9:

Selections from Kitcher, *Vaulting Ambition*; Boyd and Richardson, *Not by Genes Alone*;

Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*

Wed Dec. 16: LONG PAPER DUE!

Course requirements:*Classes*

Class attendance and participation is pretty much mandatory. But that won't be a problem, since class will be so fun and engaging you'll wish there was even more. Trust me.

Readings

The class will be run as a seminar, with members of class responsible for preparing and leading discussion (in conjunction with me) on the material. I'll describe the structure on the first day of class. On the first day, we will assign responsibilities for the next few weeks.

Reaction papers

On one of the readings for each class, a one page reaction paper. Can be double spaced. Make it longer if you want, but in no case longer than two double spaced pages. The ideal way to write a reaction is to give a one paragraph summary of the point of the author, on which you intend to comment, and one paragraph comment (usually a criticism) on that point.

Bring your reaction papers to class.

If it is your day to present, turn in the notes from which you'll be presenting, in lieu of a reaction paper.

Papers

One 8-10 page paper midway through the semester, and one 13-16 page paper at the end of the semester. For the short paper, you will choose from a list of topics/questions. For the long paper, I will give suggestions as to topics, but you are free to choose your own topic, as long as you discuss it with me first.

Grades:

Short paper: 20%

Long paper: 40%

Reaction papers: 20%

Presentations, preparation, and participation (the 3 P's): 20%

Late and missing papers:

- You must write both papers to pass the class
- Don't turn in your papers late. Don't do it.
- If you do, the grade will be marked down by a third for each day it is late, including weekend days. E.g., A to A- to B+ to B, and so on.
- You will be allowed two skipped reaction papers, without penalty. But absolutely not beyond that. If you absolutely have to miss class, you can email me your reaction papers.

Other policies and details:

- The schedule may change, so check Blackboard for announcements.
- You are expected to abide by the Honor Code.