

## Bentley Doctoral Program

### PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES (PHD 1501)

Fall 2015

### SYLLABUS

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Office Hours: by appointment

Day/Time Tue 2 – 5 pm

Class location Adamian 242

**Prerequisites:** Students are expected to be familiar with the following work:

- Martin Hollis, The Philosophy of Social Science: an Introduction, revised edition. CUP: Cambridge 1994/2002

*There will be a qualifying entry examination at the first meeting.*

**Description:** The aim of this course is to enable students to reflect critically on the concepts and practices of research in the social sciences. We will explore various ways of thinking about the nature of research in the social sciences and will investigate the value and problems of potential research methods.

**Objectives:** Students should be able to identify a variety of problems that arise in the context of scientific investigations in the social domain. They should be familiar with the relevant strands of literature and be able to evaluate them critically. This background should help students to make informed choices with regard to their research topics and methods.

**Readings:** Apart from the prerequisite readings (see above), most material is collected in

- Michael Martin/Lee McIntyre (eds.), Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science, MIT Press: Cambridge (Mass.) 1994

Supplementary material will be made available as photocopies or desk copies in the library.

**Method:** This is a seminar course in which students will be responsible for leading the discussion. Each week one or more students will present a summary of the week's readings and will, with the advice and assistance of the instructor, initiate a discussion of the relevant issues. The presenter of the week should distribute, to the instructor and the class, a two-page summary of key points in the readings. This summary should be submitted at the beginning of the week in which the presentation is due. The presentation ought to be accompanied by a summary of a search of references to the week's author in the business literature.

This exercise will be complemented by three substantial term papers and a final exam.

**Evaluation:** Three term papers, eight/twelve/twenty pages (consecutively), 20% of final grade each. **The overall result of these three grades has to be a pass.** Final examination, 20% of final grade. Class presentations and participation, 20% of final grade.

**Papers:** The topic of the papers is to be determined by the student in discussion with the instructor. The idea is to pursue one subject throughout the semester, so that the three papers reflect an ongoing intellectual development. This process is meant to simulate the actual procedure of writing a research paper, with all the various stages this involves (from formulating the question through researching the literature to defending a well-developed thesis). The topic of the paper should pick up on the student's own research interests and relate it to one of the issues discussed in this course. In most cases, this will mean an investigation into the conceptual (philosophical) underpinnings of a topic in applied social science, such as strategy or accounting. To get a first overview of the issues discussed in this course, see the course summary.

**Academic  
Honesty:**

The Bentley Honor Code applies.  
[http://www.bentley.edu/ugcatalogue/honesty/student\\_responsibilities\\_and\\_the\\_honor\\_code.cfm](http://www.bentley.edu/ugcatalogue/honesty/student_responsibilities_and_the_honor_code.cfm)

**Topics** (N.B.:Works whose source is not mentioned can be found in Martin/McIntyre):

*Week of 7 September:* Entry examination and introduction

## **I THE SOCIAL DOMAIN AND THE CONCEPT OF A SOCIAL SCIENCE**

*Weeks of 14/21 September:* ONTOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL WORLD

1. John Searle, The Construction of Social Reality, Penguin: London 1995, selections
2. Margaret Gilbert, Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon, Midwest Studies in Philosophy 1990, Vol. XV: 1 – 15
3. Margaret Gilbert, Concerning ‘individualism’ versus ‘holism’, in: On Social Facts, Routledge: London 1989, 427 – 431
4. Philip Pettit, For individualism, against collectivism, in: The Common Mind, OUP: Oxford 1994

*Week of 28 September:* OBJECTIVITY AND VALUES

1. Max Weber, ‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy
2. Charles Taylor, Neutrality in Political Science
3. Ernest Nagel, The Value-Oriented Bias of Social Inquiry
4. Michael Martin, The Philosophical Importance of the Rosenthal Effect

*Weeks of 5/12 Oct*

## REDUCTIONISM, INDIVIDUALISM, HOLISM

1. Emile Durkheim, Social Facts
2. J. W. N. Watkins, Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences
3. Steven Lukes, Methodological Individualism Reconsidered
4. Harold Kincaid, Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism
5. Alan J. Nelson, Social Science and the Mental

**Paper #1 due on 6 October**

## II METHODS OF INQUIRY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

*Weeks of 19/26 Oct*

### EXPLANATION, PREDICTION, AND LAWS

1. Carl G. Hempel, The Function of General Laws in History
2. F. A. Hayek, The Theory of Complex Phenomena
3. Karl Popper, Science: Conjectures and Refutations, in: Conjectures and Refutations, Routledge: London 2002, 43 – 78
4. Milton Friedman, The Methodology of Positive Economics, in: Essays in Positive Economics. Part I - The Methodology of Positive Economics, University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1970, 3-43
5. Harold Kincaid, Defending Laws in the Social Sciences

*Week of 2 November*

### INTERPRETATION AND MEANING

1. R. G. Collingwood, Human Nature and Human History
2. Charles Taylor, Interpretation and the Sciences of Man

3. Clifford Geertz, Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture

4. Dagfinn Føllesdal, Hermeneutics and the Hypothetico-Deductive Method

**Paper #2 due on 3 November**

*Week of 9 November*

Student Project Presentations

*Week of 16 November*

FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATION

1. Carl G. Hempel, The Logic of Functional Analysis

2. Jon Elster, Functional Explanation: In Social Science

3. Harold Kincaid, Assessing Functional Explanations in the Social Sciences

*Week of 23 November*

CAUSAL REASONING

1. Harold Kincaid, Causes, Confirmation and Explanation, in: Philosophical Foundations of the Social Sciences, CUP: Cambridge 1996, Chapter 3

2. Nancy Cartwright, From Causation to Explanation and Back, in: Brian Leiter (ed.), The Future of Philosophy, Clarendon Press: Oxford 2006, 230 – 245

3. John Gerring, Causation: A Unified Framework for the Social Sciences, Journal of Theoretical Politics, Vol. 17, No. 2, 163-198 (2005)

4. Donald Davidson, Actions, Reasons, and Causes

**Paper #3 due on 24 November**

*Week of 30 November*

RATIONALITY

1. Steven Lukes, Some Problems about Rationality

2. Dagfinn Føllesdal, The Status of Rationality Assumptions in Interpretation and in the Explanation of Action

3. Jon Elster, The Nature and Scope of Rational-Choice Explanation

*Week of 7 December*

Review

*Week of 14 December*

**Final Exam**