

PS210: Philosophy of Social Science

Professor Mark Bevir
Professor Jason Wittenberg

Spring Semester 2013
University of California, Berkeley
Department of Political Science

Seminars: Wednesdays 4-6pm, 791 Barrows

Office hours: Mark, Fri 10.15am-12pm, 718 Barrows
Jason, Wed 10am-12pm, 732 Barrows

Course Outline

This course offers an introduction to the philosophical underpinnings of contemporary social and political science. Our goal is to reflect on the epistemological and ontological assumptions inherent in methodological approaches such as rational choice, interpretivism, behavioralism, institutionalism, and post-modernism. For example, what counts as knowledge in each approach, and how is such knowledge ascertained? To what extent does each consider social reality "out there" to be discovered rather than constructed by us and "in here" (our heads)? Are there universal criteria by which one can compare the usefulness or validity of different approaches? Should there be? We will begin by reviewing some of the dualisms that currently preoccupy Western philosophy: naturalism/anti-naturalism, realism/constructivism, and objectivity/relativism. We then examine our approaches and methods in light of these conceptions of knowledge.

Course Requirements

Students must attend every seminar prepared to participate constructively. Course evaluation will be based on this participation as well as a research paper. You may write the research paper on any aspect of the course. There is no prescribed length for the paper. Make sure you have something of interest to say, and say it in as many words as it takes you to do so.

Readings and Topics

Many of the readings come from the course texts, while others are available online through the UC Berkeley library website (we identify these on the syllabus). For those readings not otherwise available, there is a course reader, which can be purchased at University Copy, 2425 Channing Way (549-2335).

The syllabus lists a couple of topics for each seminar. Although discussion will not be restricted to these topics, they are possible focuses of discussion, and also things for you to think about in preparation for the seminar.

Course Texts

The following texts are REQUIRED.

* Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

* Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)

* David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, eds, *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

* Jonathon W. Moses and Torbjørn L. Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

* John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

Week 1, Jan. 23: Organizational Meeting

Week 2, Jan. 30: What is Political Science?

Seminar topics

(a) What does political science owe the world?

(b) Can we define political science by reference to an empirical domain?

Reading

* J. Hayward, "British Approaches to Politics: The Dawn of a Self-deprecating Discipline", in J. Hayward, B. Barry, and A. Brown, eds., *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

* M. Bevir, "Prisoners of Professionalism: On the Construction and Responsibility of Political Studies", *Public Administration* 79 (2001), 469-489.

* G. King, R. Keohane, and S. Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. chap. 1.

* M. Bevir, "Meta-methodology: Clearing the Underbrush", in *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*.

* I. Shapiro, "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics; or What's Wrong with Political Science and what to do about it", *Political Theory* 30 (2002), 588-611.

Part 1: Antinomies of Philosophical Inquiry

Week 3, Feb. 6: On Explanation: Naturalism/anti-Naturalism

Seminar topics

(a) In what respects (if any) does social science differ from the natural sciences?

(b) What difference does human intentionality make?

Reading

* Moses and Knutsen “Philosophy of Naturalist Science”, “Sowing Doubts about Naturalist Methodology”, and “A Constructivist Philosophy of Science”, in *Ways of Knowing*.

* Fay, “Must We Comprehend Others in Their Own Terms?” and “Is Our Understanding of Others Essentially Historical?” in *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*.

Week 4, Feb. 13: On Ontology: Realism/Constructivism

Seminar Topics

(a) What are we investigating when we investigate politics?

(b) Is what is real that which is observable?

Reading

* Searle, “The Building Blocks of Social Reality” and “Language and Social Reality,” in *The Construction of Social Reality*.

* Fay, “Is the Meaning of Others’ Behavior What They Mean by It?” and “Do we Live Stories of Just tell Them” in *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*.

* M. Bevir, “Rethinking Governmentality”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 13 (2010), 423-41.

Week 5, Feb. 20: On Epistemology: Objectivity/Relativism

Seminar Topics

(a) Are there limits to what can be known about politics?

(b) Is “timeless” knowledge of politics possible?

Reading

* Godfrey Smith, “Induction and Confirmation”, “Popper: Conjecture and Refutation”, and “Lakatos, Laudan, Feyerabend, and Frameworks”, in *Theory and Reality*.

* Fay, “Do People in Different Cultures Live in Different Worlds?” and “Can We Understand Others Objectively?” in *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*.

Part II: Approaches to Political Inquiry

Week 6, Feb. 27: Behavioralism

Seminar topics

(a) What (if anything) is at stake in focusing on behavior rather than action?

(b) Is behavioralism a necessary let alone sufficient approach?

(c) Do any working social scientists actually practice logical positivism?

Reading

* D. Sanders, “Behavioural Analysis”, in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*.

* R. Adcock, “Interpreting Behavioralism”, in R. Adcock, M. Bevir, and S. Stimson, eds., *Modern Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

* P. Godfrey-Smith, “Bayesianism and Modern Theories of Evidence,” in *Theory and Reality*.

* K. Schlozman, H. Brady, S. Verba, "Participation's not a Paradox: The View from American Activists", *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (1995), 1-36.

Week 7, Mar. 6: Institutionalism

Seminar topics

- (a) What is an institution? (If you want to refer to rules or norms in answer to this question, you should be prepared to answer the next question – what is a rule or norm?)
- (b) What is at stake in referring to institutions rather than practices?
- (c) Should institutionalism even be considered a distinct approach?

Reading

- * V. Lowndes, "The Institutional Approach", in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*
- * R. Adcock, M. Bevir, and S. Stimson, "Historicizing the New Institutionalism(s)", in R. Adcock, M. Bevir, and S. Stimson, eds., *Modern Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- * Searle, "The General Theory of Institutional Facts: Iteration, Interaction, Logical Structure," and "The General Theory of Institutional Facts: Creation, Maintenance, and Hierarchy," in *The Construction of Social Reality*.
- * P. Pierson, "Three Worlds of Welfare State Research", *Comparative Political Studies* 33 (2000), 791-821.

Week 8, Mar. 13: Rational Choice

Seminar topics

- (a) How necessary or helpful is it to assume that people are rational?
- (b) Is it possible to defend a role for rational choice theory even if one does not believe such an assumption is either necessary or helpful?

Reading

- * A. Hindmoor, "Rational Choice", in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*.
- * Brian Fay, "Must We Assume Others are Rational?" in *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*.
- * Barbara Geddes, "How the Approach You Choose Affects the Answers You Get," in *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).
- * Paul K. MacDonald, "Fiction or Miracle Maker: The Competing Epistemological Foundations of Rational Choice Theory," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 4, November 2003, pp. 551-565.
- * R. Powell, "Bargaining Theory and International Conflict," *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (2002), 1-30.

Week 9, Mar. 20: Interpretivism

Seminar topics

- (a) Do interpretive studies help us to understand actions, explain them, or both?
- (b) Can an interpretive approach come to terms with the materiality of power?
- (c) To what degree is interpretivism antithetical to a scientific approach?

Reading

- * C. Parsons, "Constructivism and Interpretive Theory", in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*.
- * C. Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man", in *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2: *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.
- * M. Gibbons, "Hermeneutics, Political Inquiry, and Practical Reason: An Evolving Challenge to Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 100 (2006), 563-571.
- * M. Bevir and R. Rhodes, "Interpretation and its Others", *Australian Journal of Political Science* 40 (2005), 169-87.
- * K. O'Brien, "Rightful Resistance", *World Politics* 49 (1996) 31-55.

Week 10. Mar. 27: Spring Break

Part III: Reconstructing Methodologies

Week 11, Apr. 3: Modelling

Seminar topics

- (a) What is a model? (Remember that models need not always be "formal.")
- (b) Should modelling be considered a separate method, or merely a different means of executing other methods?

Reading

- * S.M. Amadae and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "The Rochester School: The Origins of Positive Political Theory," in *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 1999. 2: 269-95
- * Milton Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics," in *Essays in Positive Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, pp. 3-16; 30-43.
- * Jim Granato and Frank Scioli, "Puzzle, Proverbs, and Omega Matrices: The Scientific and Social Significance of Empirical Implications of Theoretical Models (EITM)," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 2004, pp. 313-323.

Week 12, Apr. 10: Observation: Quantitative Studies

Seminar topics

- (a) What assumptions do we make in describing ("enumerating") regularities in the social world?
- (b) What do statistical regularities actually tell us about the world?

Reading

- * P. John, "Quantitative Methods", in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*.
- * "The Statistical Method" and "Contextualizing Statistics", in Moses and Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing*.
- * Philip A. Schrodt, "Seven Deadly Sins of Contemporary Quantitative Political Analysis," Unpublished manuscript, version 1.0, August 23, 2010.
- * David A. Freedman, "Statistical Models and Show Leather," *Sociological Methodology*, Vol. 21, 1991, pp. 291-313.

Week 13, Apr. 17: Observation: Qualitative and Comparative Studies

Seminar topics

(a) Is the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods one of degree or of kind?

(b) What, if anything, do qualitative methods offer that quantitative methods cannot?

Reading

* A. Vromen, “Debating Methods: Rediscovering Qualitative Approaches”, in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*.

* J. Hopkin, “The Comparative Method”, in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*.

* “The Comparative Method”, “History and Case Studies”, “From Story Telling to Telling Histories”, and “Comparing Interpretations”, in Moses and Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing*.

Week 14, Apr. 24: Experiment

Seminar topics

(a) Which methodological problems do experiments resolve? Which remain?

(b) Do experimental and non-experimental results produce different kinds of knowledge? Why?

Reading

* H. Margetts and G. Stoker, “The Experimental Method: Prospects for Laboratory and Field Studies”, in Marsh and Stoker, *Theory and Methods*.

* “The Experimental Method” and “Interpretive Experiments” in Moses and Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing*.

* R. Morton and K. Williams, “Experimentation in Political Science”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*.

* A. Gerber and D. Green, “Field Experiments and Natural Experiments”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*.

Week 15: May 1: Wrap-up