

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

MARK O. HATFIELD SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

PS 493/593 Philosophy of Social Science

Fall 2015

Professor Bruce Gilley

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:00am-9:30am

Room: TBA

Updated: 17 July 2015

Introduction

Social science is the empirical study of individuals and societies. It is the *scientific* study of *social* phenomena. Social scientists accept the possibility that true and useful knowledge about the social world can be gained through careful empirical inquiry based on common standards of justification. This means adhering to standards that pay attention to both the universal scientific criteria of logical rigor *and* to the distinctive additional criteria related to the nature of the social world. That makes the social sciences both challenging and rewarding. The philosophy of the social sciences provides a place where these foundational questions of how to do careful social research are debated. These questions are often divided into two broad areas: ontological questions concerning the nature of the social world; and epistemological or methodological questions concerning the appropriate ways to create knowledge about that social world. This course will consider both of these questions. The course concentrates on the major theoretical debates on the practice of social research.

Readings

There is one textbook for this course: Daniel Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science*. In addition, there are several other course readings that will be posted on the course D2L site. The Little book is available secondhand in its original printed form published by Westview Press in 1991. The complete text of this edition is also available at Professor Little's website. There is also a slightly revised form as a Kindle eBook and iBook. For those buying the hardcopy, the New Introduction from the Kindle/iBook will be posted on our course D2L site. Little is also an avid public intellectual on questions of the philosophy of social science. You will find many useful comments, addendums, postings, and thoughts on the subject at: www.changingsociety.org and <http://understandingsociety.blogspot.com>.

Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation (10%): Please be sure to sign in for each class.
2. Undergraduates: Eight Summaries (11.25% each)
Graduates: Five Review Essays (18% each)

Undergraduate Summaries

Undergraduates must submit eight reading summaries. These are 4-5 page papers (1.5 spacing, 12 point font) that provide concise and detailed summaries of how the readings deals with a major theme in the philosophy of the social sciences covered in the course. They are intended to show a thorough understanding of the arguments of each reading, an ability to cite selectively relevant passages from the readings, and an ability to describe how the readings relate to one another. The main aim of reading reviews is expository and descriptive.

Graduate Review Essays

Graduates must submit five review essays. Review essays are 6-8 page papers (1.5 spacing, 12 point font) that provide an analytic framework within which some major thematic aspect of the philosophy of the social sciences is discussed and explained. Review essays involve a selective use of several readings as the basis for the student's own analysis about the issues at stake. They go beyond an accurate and intelligent summary of the readings and instead make use of the readings to provide a novel analysis of the issues at stake. The main aim of review essays is analytic and exegetical.

Course Expectations

This is a senior/graduate seminar. Students need to be prepared for a high-level of course discussions. Reading in advance of seminar sessions is critical. Quality participation (meaning participation in the discussion of the issues with evidence of advance preparation) and attendance are important. In order to maximize the value of seminars and to minimize disruptions to other students, there will be no use of any electronic devices (netbooks, laptops, etc.) in this class. Please power-down and enjoy!



Weekly Schedule

Week I: September 29 & October I: Overviews

- Daniel Little, "New Introduction", *Varieties of Social Explanation* (Kindle Edition)

- Martin Hollis, "Philosophy of Social Science" in *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* (2002)

Week 2: October 6 & 8: Facts and Concepts

- John Gerring, "Mere Description", *British Journal of Political Science* (2012)
- Walter Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1956).
- Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics", *American Political Science Review* (1970)

Week 3: October 13 & 15: Deductive and Inductive Causality

- Little: Chs. 1, 2 & 8
- Gabriel Almond and Stephen Genco, "Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics", *World Politics* (1977)
- Julian Reiss, "Do We Need Mechanisms in the Social Sciences?" *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (2007)

➤ Undergraduates Week 2 Summary Due on D2L

Week 4: October 20 & 22: Rationality and Norms

- Little: Chs. 3 & 7
- George Kelling and James Wilson, "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety", *The Atlantic* (1982)
- Amartya Sen, "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1977)

➤ Undergraduates Week 3 Summary Due on D2L

Week 5: October 27 & 29: Macro and Micro Explanations

- Little: Chs. 5, 6 & 9
- Jon Elster, "Marxism, Functionalism, and Game Theory: The Case for Methodological Individualism", *Theory & Society* (1982)

➤ Undergraduates Week 4 Summary Due on D2L

Week 6: November 3 & 5: Naturalism, Reductionism, and the Scientific Method

- Little: Ch. 11
- Harold Kincaid, "Defending Laws in the Social Sciences", *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1990)

➤ Undergraduates Week 5 Summary Due on D2L

Week 7: November 11 & 12: Interpretation

- Little, Ch. 4
- Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” and “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)
- Todd Jones, “Interpretive Social Science and the ‘Native’s Point of View’: A Closer Look”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1998)
- Michael Gibbons, “Hermeneutics, Political Inquiry, and Practical Reason: An Evolving Challenge to Political Science”, *American Political Science Review* (2006)

➤ Undergraduates Week 6 Summary Due on D2L

Week 8: November 17 & 19: Grounded Theory

- Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery Of Grounded Theory : Strategies For Qualitative Research* (1967)
- Michelle Redman-MacLaren and Jane Mills, “Transformational Grounded Theory: Theory, Voice, and Action”, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (2015)
- Gary Thomas and David James, “Reinventing Grounded Theory: Some Questions About Theory, Ground, and Discovery”, *British Educational Research Journal* (2006)
- Thomas Greckhamer and Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, “The Erosion of a Method: Examples From Grounded Theory”, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (2005)^a

➤ Undergraduates Week 7 Summary Due on D2L

Week 9: November 28: (No Class)

➤ Undergraduates Week 8 Summary Due on D2L

Week 10: December 1 & 3: Postmodernism

- Little, Ch. 10.
- Thomas Kuhn, “A Role for History”, “The Resolution of Revolutions” and “Progress Through Revolutions” in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).
- Nelson Polsby, “Social Science and Scientific Change: A Note On Thomas S. Kuhn’s Contribution,” *Annual Review of Political Science* (1998).

- Mark Bevir, “Political Science After Foucault”, *History of the Human Sciences* (2011)
- Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out Of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* (2004)

Finals Week: December 8: Methodological Pluralism?

- Brian Fay, “Theory and Metatheory in Social Science — Or, Why the Philosophy of Social Science Is So Hard,” *Metaphilosophy* (1985)
- Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil, “When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research,” *Perspectives on Politics* (2012)

Finals Week: December 10

➤ Undergraduates Week 10 Summary Due on D2L