Scope and Methods of Political Science  
Political Science 790  
Winter 2010

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Course Description

What difference does, or should, consciousness make to social science? Unlike the objects of the physical sciences, the objects of the social sciences are also subjects, in the sense that they have consciousness and engage in meaningful behavior. This seemingly essential difference in subject matter has underpinned a long debate among and between “positivists” and “interpretivists” about whether social inquiry needs an epistemology and methodology essentially different than that of the physical sciences, and if so what that should look like. This course is an introduction to this debate.

Requirements

There are three requirements for this course.

1) Come to class prepared to discuss the readings in an informed and thoughtful fashion. The success of this class will depend on the quality of student participation, which will accordingly be worth 25% of your grade.

2) Write three 2 page “reaction memos” to class readings (at least one each for Parts II and III below), due the night before the sessions for which they are written. Together they will be worth 25% of your final grade.

3) Write a 10 page final exam, worth 50% of your grade. I am open to substituting a paper for the final in individual cases.

Readings

Unless otherwise noted all readings on this syllabus are required. In addition to various articles and chapters on Carmen, there is one required book:


Part I: INTRODUCTION

Jan 4: Course Overview


Jan 11: Social Ontology

A. On Social Facts


B. Perspectives on the Fact/Value Distinction.


Jan 18: Martin Luther King Day, No Class

Part II: POSITIVISM

Jan 25: Defining the Science in Political Science

A. Political Science and its Progress

KKV, chapter 1, pp. 3-33.


B. Laws and the Unity of Science


Feb 1: Getting Started

A. Descriptive Inference

KKV, chapter 2, pp. 34-74.

Richardson, Glenn (2001) – “Looking for meaning in all the wrong places: Why negative advertising is a suspect category,” Journal of Communication, 51(4), 775-800.


B. Problems of Concept Formation


Feb 8: Building Theory

A. From Concepts to Formal Theory?


B. Perspectives on Causal Explanation

KKV, chapter 3, pp. 75-114.


Feb 15: Testing Theory

A. The Qualitative-Quantitative Debate I

KKV, chapters 4-6, pp. 115-230.


B. The Qualitative-Quantitative Debate II


Part III: INTERPRETIVISM

Feb 22: Introduction

A. The Epistemology of Understanding

Interpretive Turn, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 5-26.


B. Exemplars: Subjectivity, Inter-Subjectivity, and Beyond


Mar 1: The Politics of Interpretation

A. Participatory Epistemology and the Problem of Objectivity


B. Debate


Mar 8: The Productivity of Social Science

A. Power/Knowledge


B. A Phronetic Social Science?


TBA: Quantum Mind and Social Science (Attendance Optional)


Pizza will be provided.