

Philosophy of social science

M T W T H F 9:45 – 11:15

Bryce Huebner

Office hours: M W 11:15-12:15 or by appointment

Caldwell Hall 210c

"The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term," or so claimed Wilfrid Sellars in his 1962 paper "Philosophy and the scientific image of man". One might say of the (other?) social sciences that they are attempting to discern how things hang together—though the sense of ‘things’ is narrowed from discipline to discipline. Using a wide range of methodologies, social scientists have done their best to make sense of the actions, intentions and beliefs of individuals and groups as well as the normative structures that regulate the behavior of individuals and groups. In this class, our primary task will be to look at some arguments offered by social scientists in the explanation of human behavior, analyze these arguments and in the process, see how the world of human experience hangs together.

I have three goals in this course:

1. I want to introduce you to important issues in the philosophy of social science
2. I want to improve your ability to understand and critically analyze difficult arguments
3. I want to help you to articulate your own positions on important questions about human behavior

Course Grading:

Four argument reconstructions due:

May 26: worth 10% of your final grade, **June 2:** worth 10% of your final grade,

June 9: worth 20% of your final grade, **June 16:** worth 20% of your final grade

A final paper: worth 30% of your final grade

Participation in class: worth 10% of your final grade.

NB: For full credit on your participation grade, you are required to submit (by email prior to the class meeting) a question about each reading.

Much of the material we will cover will be difficult; so, close and careful reading will be expected and required!

The Honor Code is in effect in this class and I'm committed to treating violations of it seriously. I urge all students to become familiar with the terms of the Honor Code by checking out <http://instrument.unc.edu/>; if you have any questions, please ask me.

Note: this does not entail that you shouldn't work together. Philosophy is (often) best done collectively. In this course you are encouraged to work together on understanding the readings and preparing for the exams and papers. However, the work you submit must be your own, and where you have received ideas or quotations from others (both inside and outside of the class), you must make the appropriate citation.

Tentative course reading schedule:

NB: this reading schedule is flexible. Some readings may be dropped (if we get interested in a topic). Some readings may be exchanged (if we decide that we would like to read other things). Please check the syllabus at blackboard.unc.edu often.

T	May 16	Introduction: What is the philosophy of social science?
		Techniques for studying social phenomena?
W	May 17	Geertz, "Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture"
TH	May 18	Logic Workshop
F	May 19	Rosenberg, "Macrosocial science"
M	May 22	Continued
T	May 23	Miller, "Methodological individualism and social explanation"
W	May 24	Continued
TH	May 25	Rosenberg, "Two kinds of invisible hands" (p. 141-154)
F	May 26	Argument Reconstruction Due
M	May 29	Holiday—No Class
T	May 30	Cosmides and Tooby, "Evolutionary psychology: A primer"
W	May 31	Continued
TH	June 1	Ekman, "Basic emotions" and "Facial expressions"
F	June 2	Argument Reconstruction Due
M	June 5	Harre, "An outline of the social constructionist viewpoint" and (optional) Schweder and Haidt, "The cultural psychology of the emotions: ancient and new"
T	June 6	Continued
W	June 7	Buss and Schmidt, "Sexual strategies theory"
TH	June 8	Eagley and Wood, "Origins of sex differences in human behavior"
F	June 9	Argument Reconstruction Due
M	June 12	Wilson and Daly, "An evolutionary psychological perspective on male sexual proprietariness and violence against wives"
T	June 13	Cohen et al., "Insult, aggression, and the southern culture of honor"
W	June 14	Haidt, "Affect, culture, and morality"
TH	June 15	Doris, "Persons, situations, and virtue ethics"
F	June 16	Argument Reconstruction Due
	June 19	Final Exam: 8:00-11:00 AM