
PHIL 4420/6420 – Philosophy of Social Science

University of Georgia
Spring Semester 2008

Instructor: Dr. Bryan Baird

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Required Texts:

Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science, Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre, MIT Press, 1994. (“MM” in Course Schedule below)

A Realist Philosophy of Social Science, Peter T. Manicas, Cambridge University Press, 2006. (“M” in Course Schedule below)

Course Description

This course will center around the question of the degree to which the social sciences can, or should, be termed sciences. In treating this question, we will explore two fundamental approaches to the study of social phenomena: naturalism and antinaturalism. According to the naturalist approach, the study of the social sciences as sciences has been informed by an analogy between the natural and social sciences, indicating that in order for the social sciences to be “real” sciences, they must share the same methodology, structure, and goals as the natural sciences despite differences in subject matter between them. The antinaturalist, on the other hand, claims that the difference in subject matter between the natural and social sciences indicates that the latter need not—and, indeed, should not—approach social phenomena in the same way.

As we consider these two approaches, we will treat such issues as the place and presence of laws in the social sciences, the level and type of explanation appropriate to the social sciences, the goal(s) that the social sciences do or should have, reductionism and holism in the social sciences (e.g., Must social phenomena be reduced to description in terms of the individual? Are social phenomena more than the sum of their parts?), and the nature of both individuals and social phenomena studied by the social sciences. As we work through these issues in the *Readings*, we will also consider the particular philosophy of social science put forth by Peter Manicas.

Course Requirements: Exams, presentations, and a final paper.

Exams (2x25%=50%). There will be two in-class exams, each exam covering material since the previous exam. Each exam will be a combination of short answer and essay.

Presentation (10%) and Abstract (15%). Near the end of the semester, you will give a brief presentation on your paper topic and will field questions about your topic from your fellow students and the instructor. Before your presentation, you will turn in

an abstract of your paper (100-300 words) detailing the topic, your thesis for the paper, and how you plan on demonstrating your thesis.

Final Paper (25%). You will write a final paper on a topic of your choosing. The length of the paper for those enrolled in 4420 will be 10-15 pages (excluding the bibliography); you may use secondary sources from outside the course texts, but you are not required to go beyond the course texts for your bibliography. The length of the paper for those enrolled in 6420 will be 15-20 pages (excluding the bibliography), with the additional requirement that you use at least two secondary sources from the literature.

Grading: Your final grade will be determined by averaging together the grades according to the proportions above. Consideration will be taken for improvement in the course: in borderline grade cases, higher grades earned later in the course, signs of real progress, and active participation may bump you up to the next higher letter grade.

For final letter grades submitted to the university, **I will be using the plus-minus system.** I will use the scale below to determine final letter grades. I will not normally round up for the final letter grades. For example, if you earn a number grade of 88.5 in the course, you will get a final letter grade of B+, a 95 will earn you an A, a 76.5 will earn you a C, etc.

Plus-Minus Letter Grade Scale

A	94+	C+	77 - 79
A-	90 - 93	C	74 - 76
B+	87 - 89	C-	70 - 72
B	83 - 86	D	60 - 69
B-	80 - 82	F	< 59

Course Schedule: Below is a schedule of the readings that will be covered and the order in which we will cover them, along with some key dates to remember.

Dates to remember:

1/29	Class cancelled
2/21	EXAM 1
4/10	EXAM 2
4/15-4/24	Student presentations
5/6	Final Paper due – see WebCT

Order of Readings

Introduction to the issues

- MM Introduction and Introduction to Part I
- MM Ch.1 – “Are the Social Sciences Really Inferior?”
- MM Ch. 2 – “What Would an Adequate Philosophy of Social Science Look Like?”

Naturalism

- MM Introduction to Part II
- MM Ch. 3 – “The Function of General Laws in History”

- Issue: The laws of the social sciences reflect the laws of the natural sciences
- MM Ch. 4 – “The Theory of Complex Phenomena”
 - Issue: Phenomena of the social sciences are too complex to be contained or described by laws
- MM Ch. 6 – “Psychology as Philosophy”
 - Issue: There are no laws of the social sciences
- MM Ch. 8 – “Defending Laws in the Social Sciences”
 - Issue: A defense of laws in the social sciences
- M Introduction
- M Ch. 1 – “Explanation and understanding”
- M Ch. 2 – “Theory, experiment, and the metaphysics of Laplace”

Antinaturalism

- MM Introduction to Part III
- MM Ch. 12 – “The Rationale of Actions”
 - Issue: Understand human action in terms of rational explanation, the agent’s point of view
- MM Ch. 13 – “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”
 - Issues: The purpose of the social sciences is not explanation and prediction, lack of objectivity
- MM Ch. 17 – “Taylor on Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”
 - Issues: Possibility of objective interpretation, relevance of causality
- M Ch. 3 – “Explanation and understanding in the social sciences”
- M Ch. 5 – “Social science and history”

Reductionism and Holism

- MM Introduction to Part VI
- MM Ch. 28 – “Historical Explanation and the Social Sciences”
 - Issue: Defense of methodological individualism
- MM Ch. 29 – “Methodological Individualism Reconsidered”
 - Issue: More focused account of methodological individualism
- MM Ch. 30 – “Methodological Individualism and Social Explanation”
 - Issue: Critique of methodological individualism
- MM Ch. 32 – “Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism”
 - Issues: Problems with methodological individualism, importance of the individual
- M Ch. 4 – “Agents and generative social mechanisms”

* The information included in this syllabus is meant as a general guideline and is subject to change at any time during the semester.