PHI 575: Philosophy of Social Science — Prof. Kenneth Baynes
Spring 2022 — HL 300
krbaynes@syr.edu
Office Hours: Wed 2-3 (online) & by appointment

Course Description

This course offers an advanced survey of current debates about the methodology and aims of the social sciences. It will include discussion of such topics as the relationship between the natural and social sciences; the relationship between explanation and understanding; the relationship between the individual and larger social structures and institutions; the problems of rationality and relativism; and alternative approaches to the study of society, social norms and behavior (e.g. rational choice theory, interpretivism, functionalism, feminist theory and social constructivism). One focus this semester will be on appeals to ideology for the explanation of human action.

Text: (you should order the text yourself through Amazon, etc.)

Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*

*All other course materials are available on Blackboard

Requirements:

Class attendance and participation is encouraged and expected. It will also be assumed that you have completed the class readings prior to the class for which it has been assigned. Grades will be based on four short responses (approx. 3-4 pp, or 800-1000 words) [75%] and several in-class questions and/or homework assignments and class participation [25%]. Missed assignments cannot be made up without a medical or other appropriately documented excuse.

Disability-related accommodations:

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), visit the ODS website– http://disabilityservices.syr.edu, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 or TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Tentative Course Outline and Readings:

Week 1/2 (1/25-27; 2/1-3)

Introduction: Philosophy and the Social Sciences-Explanation as an aim?

Introduction to course
Jon Elster, "Explanation" (from *Explaining Social Behavior*)

Peter Lipton, "What Good is an Explanation?" (from *Explanation*, Hon & Rakover)
Sally Haslanger, "What is a (social) structural explanation?"

Week 3/4 (2/8-10; 2/15-17)

Is Folk Psychology Here to Stay?

Alexander Rosenberg, "The Explanation of Human Action"
Daniel Dennett, "True Believers"

Paul Churchland, "Folk Psychology and the Explanation of Human Behavior"
David Eck and Stephen Turner, "Cognitive Science"

Week 5/6 (2/22-24; 3/1-3)

Rational Choice Theory

L Udehn, "The methodology of rational choice"
A Rosenberg, "Problems with Rational Choice Theory"

**First short response due in class (2/24)

Martin Hollis, "Games with Rational Agents"
Debra Satz and John Ferejohn, "Rational Choice and Social Theory"

Week 7 (3/8-10)

Functionalism and Holistic Explanations

Cohen, "Functional Explanation: In Marxism"
Elster, "Marxism and Methodological Individualism"
&/or Allen Wood, "Historical Materialism & Functional Explanation"

Spring Break (3/13-3/20)

Week 8/9 (3/22-24; 2/29-31)

Interpretive Social Science

Clifford Geertz, “The Balinese Cockfight”
Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”

**Second essay due in class Tuesday (3/22)

Alasdair MacIntyre, “Is Understanding Religion Compatible With Believing? ”
P. Roth, “The Object of Understanding”

Week 10-12 (4/5-7; 4/12-14; 4/19-21)

Feminist theory, critical theory & ideology-critique

Sandra Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology”
Sharon Crasnow, “Feminist Standpoint Theory”

Raymond Geuss (& Rahel Jaeggi)—on ideology critique
Tommie Shelby, “Ideology, Racism, and Critical theory”

Sally Haslanger, “Social structure, narrative & explanation” & “Taking a Stand”
Case study: adaptive preference formation

**Third essay due in class Thursday, 4/21

Week 13/14 (4/26-28; 5/3)

Social Constructivism

Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?, c 1-3*

Hacking, chapter 4 & 5
Espstein & Haslanger

**Fourth essay due by 5pm, Monday, 5/9 (sent as email attachment)