Revised 01-22-2015

PLSC 630/332; EP&E 473
Philosophy of Science for the Study of Politics
Spring 2015
Ian Shapiro

Class meetings: Tuesdays 3:30 – 5:20 PM,
102 Rosencrantz Hall, 115 Prospect
Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:30-11:00, 110 Luce Hall
or by appointment with Lourdes.hanes@yale.edu

We will explore debates in the philosophy of science from the perspective of the systematic study of politics. Topics discussed will include causation; deduction, induction, and prediction; description, explanation, and interpretation; and the differences between the natural and human sciences. We will consider contending views about these topics with an eye to their implications for central preoccupations in political science: the role of rational choice and other models of political behavior, observational versus experimental methods, the connections between empirical research and normative concerns; and the relations between science and democracy.

Unless indicated otherwise, required texts on the syllabus will be available at the Yale University Bookstore.

Requirements: Either take-home midterm and in-class final or 20 page paper due May 6. For students opting for the paper, 1-2 page prospectus must be submitted no later than March 1 for approval before spring break. All students are expected to submit reading discussion questions at least three times during the semester.

Course Materials


Bhaskar, Roy. 1998. The Possibility of Naturalism. New York: Routledge. [Not at Yale University Bookstore; used copies available for purchase online]


**Generally Useful Materials**


Course Syllabus and Schedule of Classes

Week 1: Introduction
(January 13)

Week 2: Rationalism, Empiricism, and the Rise of Modern Social Science
(January 20)

Required:
• Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”

Week 3: Three Views of Truth
(January 27)

Required:
• A. J. Ayer, “The Elimination of Metaphysics”
• Karl Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, Part I, “Introduction to the Logic of Science”
  o Chapter 1: “A Survey of Some Fundamental Problems”
• Karl Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, “Science as Falsification”
• W. V. O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”
• John Dewey, The Political Writings
  o “The Problem of Truth”
  o “Philosophy and Democracy”
  o “Science and Free Culture”

Suggested
• Charles E. Lindblom, “The Science of ‘Muddling Through’”
• John Dewey, The Political Writings
  o “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy”
  o “Individuality in Our Day”

Week 4: Three Views of Explanation
(February 3)

Required:
• Friedman, “The Methodology of Positive Economics”
• Carl G. Hempel, “Deductive-Nomological vs. Statistical Explanation”
• Karl Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, chapter 4, “Falsifiability”

Week 5: Paradigm Shifts
(February 10)

Required:
• Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, chapters 2, 3-7, 9-10, 13
• Imre Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs”

Week 6: The Interpretive Tradition
(February 17)

Required:
• Clifford Gertz, Interpretation of Cultures
  o Chapter 1: “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”
  o Chapter 8: “Ideology as a Cultural System”
• Quentin Skinner, Visions of Politics, vol. 1
  ▪ Chapter 4: “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”
• Michael Walzer, Interpretation and Social Criticism, Chapters 1 & 2.

Suggested:
• Clifford Geertz, Interpretive Tradition, Chapter 15, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”
• Quentin Skinner, Visions of Politics, vol. 1
  ▪ Chapter 5: “Motives, Intentions, and Interpretation”
  ▪ Chapter 6: “Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts”
  ▪ Chapter 7: “Social Meaning” and the Explanation of Social Action”
• Quentin Skinner, Visions of Politics, vol. III
  ▪ Chapter 11: “Hobbes and His Disciples in France and England”
• Max Weber, “Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy”
• Ian Shapiro, The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences
  ▪ “Introduction: Fear of Not Flying” (pp. 1-18)

Week 7: Realism
(February 24)

Required:
• Roy Bhaskar, The Possibility of Naturalism, Chapters 1 & 3
• Ian Shapiro and Alexander Wendt, “The Difference that Realism Makes: Social Science and the Politics of Consent”

Suggested:
• Alexander Wendt and Ian Shapiro “The Misunderstood Promise of Realist Social Theory,” in Kristen Monroe, Empirical Political Theory, 166-87
• Rom Harré, The Principles of Scientific Thinking
• Roy Bhaskar, A Realist Theory of Science
• Richard Miller, Fact and Method
Week 8: Rationality I (March 3)

Required
• Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science, chapters 1-5 and 8.
• Jeffrey Friedman, The Rational Choice Controversy Reconsidered
  ▪ Susanne Lohmann, “The Poverty of Green and Shapiro”
  ▪ Norman Schofield, “Rational Choice and Political Economy”
• Dennis C. Mueller, “Has Public Choice Contributed Anything to the Study of Politics?” from Public Choice III.

Suggested

Spring Recess

Week 9: Rationality II (March 24)

Required
• Daniel Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow, pp. 199-300

Week 10: Rationality III (March 31)

Required
• Robert Axelrod, The Evolution of Cooperation, Chapters 1, 2, 4.
• Jianzhong Wu and Robert Axelrod, “How to Cope with Noise in the Iterated Prisoner’s Dilemma”

Suggested
• Robert Axelrod, The Evolution of Cooperation, Chapter 5

Week 11: Field Experiments (April 7)

Required:
• Dawn Teele, Field Experiments and Their Critics, Chps 1, 2, 4, 6

Suggested:
Week 12: Functionalism and Evolution
(April 14)

Required:
• Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, Chapters 2 and 16
• Russel Hardin, “Rationality, Irrationality and Functionalist Explanation”
• Kenneth Shepsle and Barry Weingast, “Structure-induced equilibrium and legislative choice”
• Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber, “Why Do Humans Reason? Arguments for An Argumentative Theory of Reasoning”

Suggested:
• Larry Laudan, “Theory-Ladenness and Underdetermination”

Week 13: Reductionism, For and Against
(April 21)

Required:
• Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, Chapter 2, “Emergence”
• John Ferejohn, “Rationality and Interpretation: Parliamentary Elections in Early Stuart England.” Ch 11 in Monroe, *The Economic Approach to Politics*
• Ian Shapiro, “What’s Wrong with Political Science” *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (pp. 178-203)

Suggested:
• Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Chapters 1, 2, 16, and Conclusion
• Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, Chapter 2
• Peter Hedström and Petri Ylikoski “Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences”