

**CONF 810: PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
SPRING 2005**

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**Course Description**

Social scientific research presumably deepens our knowledge of social phenomena. But the goals and methods of such research have come under increasing scrutiny, especially from comparisons to the “objectivity” of the natural sciences. Some investigators argue that social science research is always suspect because of the inescapable human influences that threaten the validity of the results. So, how can researchers overcome potentially contaminating influences in their efforts to produce a greater understanding and explanation of social phenomena?

This course centers on epistemological controversies associated with knowledge of social phenomena, with particular attention given to understanding international conflicts. We explore fundamental assumptions of the social sciences and conflict theory, the validity of research methodologies, the link between a researcher’s worldview and testing methodologies, the need for researchers to explore multiple perspectives from other disciplines, and the importance of alternative methods for acquiring knowledge.

These controversies are addressed in this course through the following questions:

1. Are the standards for social scientific knowledge relativized to the local standards of a community of researchers?
2. What exactly are the criteria for explaining and understanding social conflicts?
3. Is social science driven by commitment to basic paradigms of thought?
4. On what reasonable basis can research judge conflicts to be rational or irrational?
5. What are the prominent metaphors, such as actors as agents, for a social scientific understanding of human behavior?
6. What are the new paradigms for conflict analysis and resolution?

*Format:* Weekly Seminar.

*Prerequisites:* CONF 501 (or 801) and acceptance into the doctoral program of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, or alternatively permission of instructor.

**Course Requirements**

*Class Participation (20%)* -- Discussion and critique of readings; class presentation.

(A) By 10 am on the day of each week's meeting, all students will be expected to submit one discussion question on that week's readings, preferably by email. My email address is listed above. The questions will often, though not always, be used to stimulate class discussion on the assigned readings for the week.

(B) Students will each sign up to be part of a group presentation on one of the course topics.

*Mid-Term Paper* (40%) You can select any topic from Unit A, concerning relativism and rationalism, or from Unit B, concerning the metaphors for explaining social conflicts. You must submit a one-page abstract of your paper by February 28 (Week 6). This paper is due on March 6 (Week 7).

*Final Paper* (40%) For this paper, you can select any topic from Unit B, assuming this is different from your mid-term paper, or any topic from Unit C on the metaphors of understanding social conflicts. You must submit a one page abstract by April 18 (Week 12). This paper is due May 2 (Week 14).

NOTE: Both papers will be judged with respect to standards that are appropriate for possible publication, based primarily on the paper's persuasive merits, clarity of writing, and a sound interpretation of the material. Only the final version of your paper will be graded.

### **Required Texts:**

Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1990. (paperback) ISBN: 0-19-827589-7

Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham, and Tom Woodhouse, Contemporary Conflict Resolution: the prevention, management sand Transformation of Deadly Conflicts, Oxford: Polity Press, 1999. (paperback) ISBN: 0-7456-2035-3 (paperback)

Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove, eds. Positioning Theory. Blackwell Publishers. 1999. (paperback). ISBN: 0-631-21139-X

John Shotter, Conversational Realities: Constructing Life through Language. SAGE Publications, 1993. ISBN: 0-8039-8933-4 (paperback)

### **Electronic Reserve**

1. J. Gerring, "A Criterial Framework," Social Science Methodology, Chapter 2, pp. 19-34.
2. D. Rothbart, "Theory and Observation," Science, Reason, and Reality, pp. 1-5.
3. D. Rothbart, "The Relativism of Science," Science, Reason, and Reality, pp. 321-323.
4. Hollis and Lukes, "Introduction," in Hollis and Lukes, eds, Rationality and Relativism, pp. 1-20.
5. T. Kuhn, "Selections from THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REAOLUSTIONS," in Science, Reason and Reality, Chapter 15, pp. 237-259.
6. B. Barnes and D. Bloor, "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociological of Knowledge," in Science, Reason and Reality, Chapter 19, pp. 325-343.
7. V. Jabri, "Legitimation and the discursive structuration of war," Discourses on Violence, Chapter four, pp. 90-118.
8. V. Jabri, "The construction of identity and the discourse of violence," Discourses on Violence, Chapter five, pp. 119-144.

9. G. Allison, and P. Zelikow, "Conclusion," Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, Second Edition, Chapter 7, pp. 379-407.

## **Outline of Topics and Reading Assignments**

### UNIT A: THE RATIONALITY/RELATIVISM DEBATES

Week 1 (January 24) Topics: Controversies in Philosophy of Social Science

Week 2: (January 31) Topic: What is Conflict Theory?

Readings:

Miall, *et. al.*, "Introduction" in Contemporary Conflict, pp. 1-38

Miall, *et. al.* "Conflict Resolution: Foundations, Constructions and Reconstructions," in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 2.

Miall, *et. al.* "Understanding Contemporary Conflict," in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 3

Week 3 (February 7) Topic: Conflict Theory as a Social Science

J. Gerring, "A Criterial Framework," Social Science Methodology, Chapter 2, pp. 19-34.

D. Rothbart, "Theory and Observation," Science, Reason, and Reality, pp. 1-5.

D. Rothbart, "The Relativism of Science," Science, Reason, and Reality, pp. 321-323.

M. Hollis and S. Lukes, "Introduction," Rationality and Relativism, pp. 1-20.

Week 4 (February 14) Topic: Paradigms of Social Science

T. Kuhn, "Selections from THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REAOLUSTIONS," in Science, Reason and Reality, Chapter 15, pp. 237-259.

B. Barnes and D. Bloor, "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociological of Knowledge," in Hollis and Lukes, eds, Rationality and Relativism, pp. 21-47.

### UNIT B: METAPHORS FOR EXPLAINING SOCIAL CONFLICTS

Week 5 (February 21) Topic: Explaining International Relations

Hollis and Smith, "Introduction: Two Traditions," Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Chapter 1.

Hollis and Smith, "The Growth of a Discipline," Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Chapter 2.

Hollis and Smith, "Explaining," Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Chapter 3

Week 6 (February 28) Topic: Agent-Modeling of International Conflicts

Miall, *et. al.* "Preventing Violent Conflict," in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 4

Hollis and Smith, "Roles and Reasons," Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Chapter 7

Hollis and Smith, "Games Nations Play (2)," Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Chapter 8

Week 7 (March 7) Topic: Discourses on Violence

V. Jabri, "Legitimation and the discursive structuration of war," Discourses on Violence , Chapter four, pp. 90-118.

V. Jabri, "The construction of identity and the discourse of violence," Discourses on Violence , Chapter five, pp. 119-144.

(Spring Break)

#### UNIT C: METAPHORS FOR UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL CONFLICTS

Week 8 (March 21) Topics: Understanding "Rational" Behavior

Hollis and Smith, "Understanding," Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Chapter 4, pp. 68-91.

9. G. Allison, and P. Zelikow, "Conclusion," Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, Second Edition, Chapter 7, pp. 379-407.

Week 9 (March 28) Topic: Social Positioning

R. Harré and L. van Langenhove, "The Dynamics of Social Episodes," in Harré and van Langenhove, eds. Positioning Theory, Chapter 1, pp. 1-13.

Harré and van Langenhove, "Introducing Positioning Theory," in Positioning Theory, Chapter 2, pp. 14-31.

B. Davis and R. Harré, "Positioning and Personhood," Positioning Theory, Chapter 3, pp. 32-51.

Week 10 (April 4) Topic: Positioning and Conflictual Relationships

Harré and van Langenhove, "Reflexive Positioning: Autobiography," in Positioning Theory, Chapter 5, pp. 60-73.

van Langenhove and Harré, "Positioning as the Production and Use of Stereotypes," in Positioning Theory, Chapter 10, pp. 127-137.

D. Carbaugh, "Positioning as Display of Cultural Identity," in Positioning Theory, Chapter 12, pp. 160-177.

Sui-Lan Tan and F. M. Moghaddam, "Positioning in Intergroup Relations," in Positioning Theory, Chapter 13, pp. 178-194.

UNIT D: Identity Through Discursive Practice

Week 11 (April 11) Topic: The Symbolism of Action

John Shotter, Conversational Realities: Constructing Life through Language, Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, and 3, pp. 1-64.

Week 12 (April 18) Topic: Constructing Social “Realities”

John Shotter, Conversational Realities: Constructing Life through Language, Chapters 6, 7, and 9, pp. 99-131, and 148-159.

Week 13 (April 25) Presentation of Papers  
Topic: Conversational Realities

John Shotter, Conversational Realities: Constructing Life through Language, Chapter 10 and Epilogue, pp. 160-184.

Week 14 (May 2)  
Presentations of Papers and Summation