PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
Spring Term, 2011

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE

PROFESSOR: Chris Latiolais
Philosophy Department
Kalamazoo College
Humphrey House #202
Telephone # 337-7076
Offices Hours:
  ·  Monday: 1:00 – 3:00
  ·  Tuesday: 10:30 – 11:30
  ·  Thursday: 10:30 – 11:30
  ·  By Appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

By surveying classical and contemporary debates on the logic of the social sciences, this course introduces students to the philosophical examination of basic epistemological and normative presuppositions that underwrite contemporary empirical social scientific inquiry. Case studies of classical debates raise the following questions: What distinguishes the social sciences from both the Humanities and the sciences of nature? In studying human beings, do social researchers look at the micro-level -- for the causes, reasons, motives, meanings, or rules of individual actions -- or, at the macro-level -- for social functions, institutions, structures, practices and fields? How do micro-individual and macro-social levels of explanation connect up? Do social scientists explain or interpret human affairs? Are the social sciences "descriptive," "prescriptive" or both? Contemporary case studies raise the following questions: How has the critique of Western Logocentrism altered traditional conceptions of individual and social development? Do the Western social sciences offer universal standards of rationality or merely one -- among many — ethical value systems? Are radical ethnomethodology and multiculturalism alternatives to, or merely critical realignments of, the Western social sciences. By addressing such questions, the course offers an historical and critical introduction to contemporary debates about the social scientific study of difference. The last portion of the course is devoted to an emerging approach to social research called praxeology, the study of the social as networks of bodily-centered social practices.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

·   Martin, Michael & McIntyre, Lee (eds.): Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993 [Handouts].

READING SCHEDULE

FALL TERM:

Part One: Habermas’s Critique of Positivism in the Social Sciences: the Interpretive Turn and its Aftermath in Social Scientific Theory:
Week One
  · Tuesday:
    o Introductory Lecture:
  · Thursday:
    o On the Logic of the Social Sciences, Introduction.
    o On the Logic of the Social Sciences, The Dualism of the Natural and Cultural Sciences.

Week Two
  · Tuesday:
    o On the Logic of the Social Sciences, On the Methodology of General Theories of Social Action.
  · Thursday:

Week Three
  · Tuesday:
    o On the Logic of the Social Sciences, Sociology as Theory of the Present.
  · Thursday:
    o On the Logic of the Social Sciences: Review

On the New Logic of the Social Sciences and Classical Impasses:

Week Four
  · Tuesday:
    o New Philosophy of Social Science, Introduction.
  · Thursday:
    o New Philosophy of Social Science, The New Logic of Social Science: Rules, Rationality, and Explanation.

Week Five
  · Tuesday:
    o New Philosophy of Social Science, Interpretation and Indeterminacy.
  · Thursday:

Week Six
  · Tuesday:
    o New Philosophy of Social Science, Criticism and Explanation
  · Thursday:
    o Review

The Praxeological Turn, Embodiment, and Critical Geography:

Week Seven
  · Tuesday:
  · Thursday:

Week Eight
  · Tuesday:
  · Thursday:

Week Nine
  · Tuesday:
  · Thursday:
TBA [Handouts]

Week Ten

- Tuesday:
  - Review.
- Thursday:
  - Review
  - Student Evaluations

Finals Week