

PHILOSOPHY 955 & SOCIOLOGY 924

Philosophy of (Social) Science

FALL 2012

**5193 Helen C. White Hall
Wednesday, 6:30-9:00**

Erik Olin Wright
8112D Social Science
262-0068
Wright@ssc.wisc.edu

Daniel M. Hausman
5197 Helen C. White Hall
354-6120
dhausman@wisc.edu

Introduction

Like all human activities, the many branches of social inquiry — anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology — have many purposes and show a great diversity of practices and outcomes. A premise of this course is that central to their mission is a search for knowledge that permits explanation and prediction of their subject matter. Social inquiries share these goals with the natural sciences and, at least at an abstract level, they share some methods, too. As in the natural sciences, the results of observations or tests are the ultimate arbiter concerning which claims are to be believed. We broadly reject the views of those who maintain that there is a radical chasm separating the study of nature from the study of society and of those who maintain that the scientific notion of truth is a Eurocentric or androcentric chimera.

Yet we do not deny that the various branches of social inquiry differ enormously among themselves, and that particular social sciences differ from particular natural sciences and from each other in many ways. Furthermore, we believe that there is no good way to address even the most general methodological questions concerning the social sciences without studying the details of the goals, problems, procedures, and results of specific disciplines. We hold that systematic empirical investigation is central not only to the natural and social sciences, but to the study of methodology* as well, which is, in fact, a sort of social inquiry itself. Philosophers of science are, we believe, weird anthropologists, perhaps overly obsessed with normative questions. Like anthropologists, they study human practices. What makes them weird are the questions they ask and the questions they do not ask. Their interests in features of particular disciplines are guided by ultimately normative questions about how such disciplines can best achieve cognitive ends.

Sociologists and other social scientists cannot avoid reflecting on their methods, and philosophers of science cannot avoid questions about human practices. This course aims to bring together the preoccupations of both sociology and philosophy to address methodological/philosophical questions as they arise in the work of social researchers here at the University of Wisconsin. In the last part of the course we will focus on problems that arise when one attempts to use social theories to devise policies that promote normative goals.

Structure of the Course

The centerpiece of this course is a series of videoed philosophy of science interviews which you will conduct with various social science researchers on campus and then present to the seminar at the end of the semester. Here is how it will work: At the first class session we will distribute a list of faculty members in various departments (sociology, educational psychology, social work, anthropology) who have agreed to be guinea pigs in our seminar, along with a sample of their writings. From this list you will choose a scholar whom you wish to interview for your term project. In the second seminar session students will rank order their choices. On the basis of these preferences, we will then form research teams consisting of a minimum of three students with at least one philosophy graduate student and at least one sociology graduate student in each group. During the next couple of weeks, these teams need to meet with their interview subject to

* We are here using “methodology” as philosophers do – that is, as philosophy of science as applied to a particular scientific activity. Among economists and sociologists, “methodology” is often instead taken to be applied statistics or other specific data gathering and analyzing strategies.

get a more extended reading list and make arrangements for the interview later in the semester. On the basis of these readings, the team will then construct an interview dealing with a range of philosophy of science issues. The specific issues for the interview, of course, will depend upon the nature of the work of the scholar being studied. These interviews should be carried out and videoed by the last seminar on November 28 (you will get some training in videography). The seminar members will view the videos on a weekend retreat to be held at Upham Woods on Saturday and Sunday, December 8 and 9th (see below, p.4, for details). During the last regular meeting of the seminar, on November 28, group members should assign some essay to the entire seminar by the social scientist they interview. This could be the same as the sample essay but it need not be.

Seminar papers, which should focus on philosophy of science issues raised by the work of the person you interview, are due at the end of classes (Friday, December 14). These can be individual essays or they can be co-authored by some subset of your research group or by the whole group.

Your grade in the seminar will depend (in descending order of importance) on the seminar paper, on the quality of the interview, and on your participation in the seminar (especially completion of the weekly postings – see below). Late papers may not receive detailed comments.

Organization of the seminar sessions

This is a seminar, not a lecture class, and thus the core activity of each session will be intensive discussion. We anticipate that because of the unfamiliarity of the material we will have to give occasional mini-lectures to clarify murky matters, but still the emphasis will be on dialogue. The agenda for each session will be primarily structured around issues you identify as salient while you read the required readings. Here is the routine:

Each week all students in the class have to prepare short written “interrogations”, 150-300 words long, engaging some theme or problem in the reading. These interrogations should **NOT** be summaries or exegeses of the texts; nor should they be mini-essays with extended commentaries on the readings. The point is to pose focused questions that will serve as the basis for the seminar discussion. As you do the readings each week, think about an issue that you really want discussed and clarified, and then formulate an interrogation to set up that discussion. While you will need to explicate each question you pose – that is, lay out what you see are the issues in play in the question, explain what you mean by it, etc. – you do not need to stake out a position with respect to the issues you raise (although you can if you want to). The important thing is to pose a clear question that you want to discuss. It is entirely appropriate for questions to focus on ideas, arguments, or passages which you do not understand. It often turns out that questions mainly concerned with asking for clarification of some obscure formulation in the reading provoke especially good discussions in the class. What you should avoid is a list of unelaborated questions.

These interrogations must be emailed to both Hausman and Wright by 3.p.m. each Monday. Late interrogations will not be accepted.

Hausman and Wright will combine the interrogations into a single document and circulate them via email to all students by Monday evening. All students should carefully read all of the interrogations before the class on Wednesday evening. For the seminar, the issues raised in the interrogations will be grouped under general thematic rubrics which will constitute the discussion agenda for the seminar. The students whose interrogations fall under any given rubric will be asked to speak first on the topic in the seminar discussion.

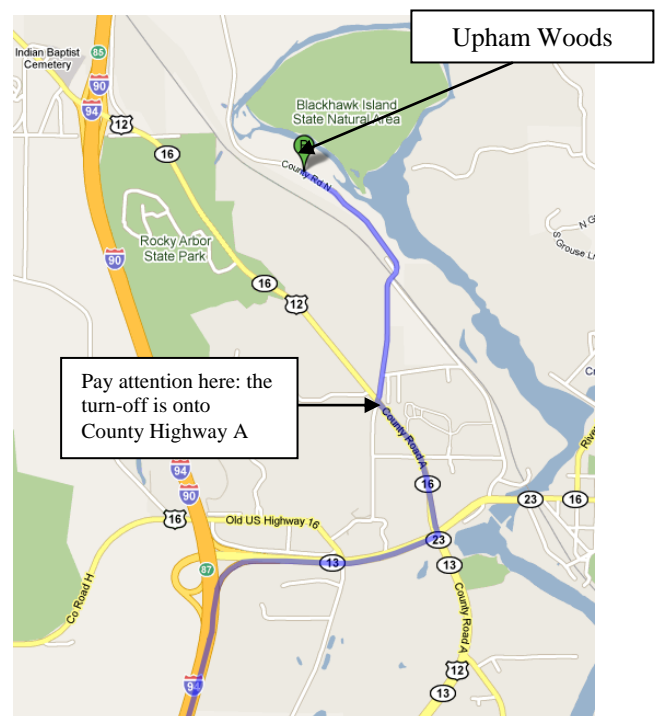
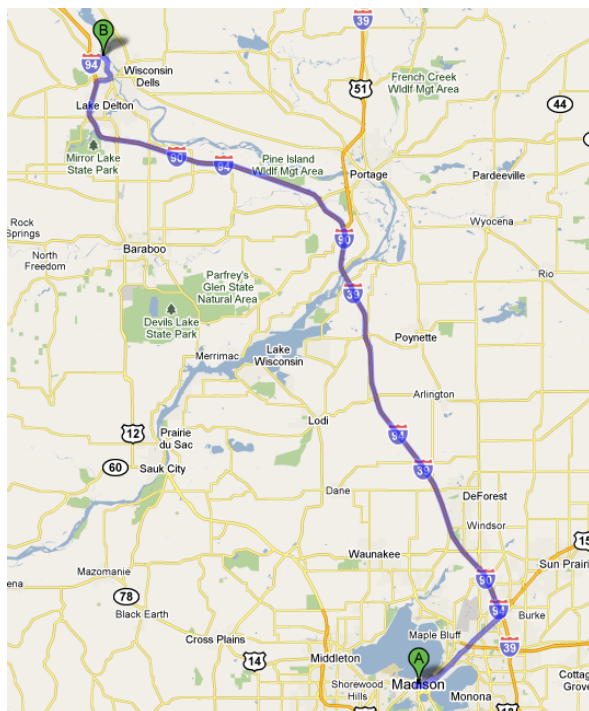
Two times during the semester Wright and Hausman will write detailed, nit-picking comments on each student's interrogation, focusing on the details of the writing.

SPECIAL EVENT, DECEMBER 8-9: WEEKEND RETREAT TO WATCH SEMINAR VIDEO INTERVIEWS

On the last weekend of the semester – December 8-9 – we will have a two-day retreat at which we will watch the video interviews and the students in each research team will present their analysis of the work of the social scientist they studied. The retreat will be held at Upham Woods, a beautiful University of Wisconsin facility on the Wisconsin River about an hour north of Madison. In addition to the academic discussion, the retreat will also include a gourmet potluck and party Saturday evening – with music, dancing, singing, general carousing – and, if we have snow, a couple of hours of tobogganing on a wonderful toboggan run at the conference center.

Spouses/partners, friends and children are also welcome to come for the weekend – there are nice activities in the area for children while the workshop is in session (including indoor water Parks in Wisconsin Dells). We will cover part of the costs of the retreat, so the out-of-pocket expenses should be about \$35/person for room and board.

Directions to Upham Woods



Seminar Readings

All of the course readings will be available under the “contents” tab on the Learn@UW web site for philosophy 955. Seminar members should print out the readings for each meeting and bring them along so that during the discussion we can refer to the texts.

The following readings for Session 1, available under Philosophy 955 at Learn@UW, should be read over the summer, before the first class:

Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: a very short introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002)
 Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Palgrave, 2001). pp. 1-49

Brief Outline of Seminar Sessions and Required Readings

1 September 5: Introduction: philosophy of science and methodology of the social sciences

Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: a very short introduction*, (after chapter 5 optional)
 Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Chapter 1.

2 September 12: Concept Formation

Erik Olin Wright, “The Biography of a Concept”
 Hilary Putnam, “The Analytic and the Synthetic,” pp. 42-54.

3 September 19: Methodological individualism

James Coleman, “Metatheory: Explanation in Social Science” (Ch. 1 of his *Foundations of Social Theory*)
 Steven Lukes, “Methodological Individualism Reconsidered”
 List & McLean “Irreducibly Social Risks”
 Andrew Levine, Elliott Sober, and Erik Wright, “Marxism and Methodological Individualism”

4 September 26: Rational choice theory

Dan Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice and Welfare*, chapters 1 and 4 (pp. 1-9, 34-45)
 Debra Satz and Ferejohn, “Rational Choice and Social Theory”
 Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, ch. 1-3.

5 October 3: Functionalism and functional explanation

Jon Elster, “The Case for Methodological Individualism,”
 G.A. Cohen, “Reply to Elster on Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory”
 Marvin Harris, “Mother Cow”
 Arthur Stinchcombe, “Functional Causal Imagery,”
 Johannes Berger and Claus Offe, “Functionalism vs. Rational Choice?”

6 October 10: Causal explanation, mechanism, and causal inference

Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Chapter 8.
 James Woodward, “Explanation and Invariance in the Social Sciences,”

7 October 17: Qualitative research, statistical inquiry, randomized controlled testing

Julian Reiss, "Evidence-Based Policy"

Gordon C S Smith, Jill P Pell, 'Parachute use to prevent death and major trauma related to gravitational challenge: systematic review of randomised controlled trials.'

John Worrall, "Causality in Medicine: Getting Back to the Hill Top,"

Angus Deaton, "Instruments, Randomization, and Learning about Development."

8 October 24: Assessments of Causal Importance

Andrew Levine, Elliott Sober and Erik Olin Wright, "Causal Asymmetries"

Ann Orloff and Theda Skocpol, "Why Not Equal Protection?"

9 October 31: Social constructivism and the critique of positivist or modernist social science

Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Chapter 10

Steven Woolgar, *Science: the Very Idea*, pp. 53-69.

D. Wade Hands, "Constructivism: The Social Construction of Scientific Knowledge."

Bruce Robbins. "Anatomy of a Hoax"

10 November 7: Social values and social policy

Hausman and McPherson, *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy*, Appendix.

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (excerpts)

Robert Nozick, "Distributive Justice"

G.A. Cohen, "Equality of What?"

11 November 14: Welfare, consequentialism, and utilitarianism

Dan Hausman and McPherson, *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy*, chs. 7, 8

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Amartya Sen, "Capability and Well-Being"

November 21: Thanksgiving -- No seminar meeting

12 November 28: Rational policy making

Dan Hausman, "Evaluating Social Policy,"

Dan Hausman, "How Can Irregular Causal Generalizations Guide Practice,"

Nancy Cartwright, "Predicting What Will Happen When We Act: What Counts for Warrant?"

Saturday and Sunday, December 8-9: Viewing of videos and methodological discussion

DETAILED SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

1. September 5: Introduction: philosophy of science and methodology of the social sciences

Auguste Comte coined the word, “positivism” as a name for his optimistic philosophy that looked forward to a replacement of superstition by science and to the rational organization of society. What came to be known as “Logical positivism” shared Comte's enthusiasm for the sciences, but it kept its distance from any substantive sociology, and it more strongly emphasized empiricism. The movement adopted the name “logical positivism” because it was also inspired by developments in 20th century logic and mathematics. The goal was to develop abstract, content-independent characterizations of features of science such as theory, explanation, or confirmation and to contribute to the conceptual clarification and eventual formalization of the sciences. Although the movement ran into increasingly serious philosophical difficulties beginning in the 1930s, a “positivistic attitude” became increasingly influential among scientists, including social scientists until the 1960s, when more popular critiques were written and word of the difficulties with positivism began to spread. Although Karl Popper considered himself a critic of the logical positivists and does indeed have some deep disagreements with them, there are many affinities between his views and those of the positivists.

Beginning in the 1960s, and intensifying from the 1970s, within critical circles in sociology the term “positivism” became a kind of term of abuse of all sorts of “scientific” practices of then “mainstream.” While indeed there are significant problems within the philosophical schools that self-consciously called themselves “positivist”, many of the attacks against positivism by critical sociologists were off the mark.

Required Readings:

Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: a very short introduction*, Chapter 1-5

Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Chapter 1.

Optional readings:

Karl Popper, “Conjectures and Refutations” in *Conjectures and Refutations; The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. 3rd. ed. London: Routledge & Kegan-Paul, 1969 is simple reading, misleading, but extremely influential.

Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science* (Prentice-Hall, 1966), ch. 1-5 provides a good, readable overview.

The decisive English-language formulation of logical positivism is A.J. Ayer's 1936 *Language, Truth and Logic*. See also O. Hanfling, *Logical Positivism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981. See also the collections, *Logical Positivism* (edited by A.J. Ayer). New York: Free Press, 1959 and Hanfling's *Essential Readings in Logical Positivism*, also Oxford, Blackwell, 1981.

The introduction to Frederick Suppe's, *The Structure of Scientific Theories*. 2nd. ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977 provides a simplified sketch of positivism and of reactions to it.

The most important critiques of positivism are W.V.O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," pp. 20-46 of *From a Logical Point of View*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953, Thomas Kuhn's, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," pp. 91-196 of Lakatos and Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, and Paul Feyerabend, "Problems of Empiricism" in R. Coldney, ed. *Beyond the Edge of Certainty* (Prentice-Hall, 1965) and "Problems of Empiricism, Part II" in R. Coldney, ed. *The Nature and Function of Scientific Theories*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970, pp. 275-353.

For statements of Erik Wright's methodological/philosophical approach, see:

Erik Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis, and the State* (Verso, 1978), chapter 1
Classes (Verso, 1985), chapters 1 and 2
The Debate On Classes (Verso, 1989), chapter 2
Reconstructing Marxism (with Elliott Sober and Andrew Levine) (Verso, 1992)
Interrogating Inequality (Verso, 1994), Part III

Work which has been especially influential in Erik Wright's views on philosophy of science:

Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968)
G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory Of History: A Defense* (Princeton University Press, 1978)
Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory Of Science* (Harvester Press, 1978) and *The Possibility Of Naturalism* (Harvester Press, 1979)
Alan Garfinkle, *Forms Of Explanation: Rethinking Questions In Social Theory* (Yale University Press, 1981)

For an overview of Hausman's views on philosophy of science as applied to mainstream microeconomics, see his *Inexact and Separate Science of Economics* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

2. September 12: Concept Formation

One of the inadequacies of logical positivists is that they regarded the conceptual side of science as a matter either of formal logic or of purely analytical definition. Apart from insisting on empiricist constraints on what terms are scientifically legitimate, the positivists had little interest in the conceptual explorations that characterize science. One of the decisive critiques of positivism (developed by Morton White, W.V.O. Quine, and then in a slightly different way by Hilary Putnam) was that one cannot separate the sentences in a science into analytical claims whose truth depends on definitions and logic and is independent of experience and synthetic claims that are confirmed or disconfirmed by experience. Although an abstract philosophical issue, this matter of concept formation also arises pointedly in day-to-day practice, and the

chapter from Wright's book, *Classes*, shows how he had to grapple with these issues in his work on class. The central problem here is the ways in which in some explanatory settings, definitions of concepts constitute a special kind of hypothesis about the world, rather than simply a convention about how we will use words.

Required Reading:

Erik Olin Wright, "The Biography of a Concept," Chapter 2 in *Classes* (Verso, 1985) pp. 19-63.

Hilary Putnam, "The Analytic and the Synthetic," esp. pp. 42-54, reprinted in Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 33-75)

Optional Reading:

Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science* (Prentice-Hall, 1966), ch. 7, pp. 85-100.

Ray Pawson, *A Measure for Measures* (Routledge, 1989), pp. 225-254

Arthur Stinchcombe, "Scientific Concepts", in *Constructing Social Theories* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 38-45

Max Weber, "Objectivity and Understanding in Economics," in D. Hausman, ed. *The Philosophy of Economics: An Anthology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 69-82.

An illustration: three different strategies for defining the concept "market":

Richard Swedberg, "Markets as Social Structures," *Handbook of Economic Sociology* (Princeton University Press, 1994) pp.255-82

Wolfgang Streeck and Philippe Schmitter, "Community, market, state -- and associations?: the prospective contribution of interest governance to social order," in Streeck & Schmitter (eds) *Private Interest Government* (Sage, 1985), pp. 1-29

Polanyi, K., 1957 (1944): *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston: Beacon Press, esp. Part Two, "Rise and Fall of Market Economy, I: Satanic Mill", pp. 33-134

3. September 19: Methodological individualism

The works of Hayek and of Popper at the time of World War II initiated a controversy concerning methodological individualism, although discussions about individualism versus holism go back to the 19th century and are particularly prominent in the works of Durkheim. Both Popper and Hayek saw the enemies of liberalism -- especially fascism and communism -- as committing a methodological mistake, as offering theories in which collective entities possess causal efficacy unmediated by the actions of individuals. This is alleged to be a methodological mistake because entities such as societies do not exist (Margaret Thatcher's view) or, more moderately, cannot act independently of the people who constitute them. Fully satisfactory

explanations in the social sciences must supposedly be entirely in individualistic terms. Although individualism is supposed to be a methodological doctrine, it has thus been intertwined with political struggles and with ontological disputes (disputes about what exists or is real).

In this session we will not focus on the political and ideological issues in play in discussions of methodological individualism, but instead concentrate on the problem of how to think about the connection between micro-level and macro-levels of analysis. Almost no one seriously disputes the relevance of explanations or predictions of individual behavior for understanding social phenomenon. The question is whether, ultimately, all social phenomena can be explained in such individual-level terms (or “reduced” to micro-level explanations), and, if not, precisely what is meant by a more macro-level explanation.

Required Reading:

James Coleman, “Metatheory: Explanation in Social Science” (Ch. 1 of his *Foundations of Social Theory*)

Steven Lukes, “Methodological Individualism Reconsidered,” *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19. No. 2. June 1968, pp. 119-129

Christian List and Douglas McLean “Irreducibly Social Risks?” *Ethics*, forthcoming

Erik Olin Wright, Andrew Levine, and Elliott Sober, “Marxism and Methodological Individualism,” in *Reconstructing Marxism* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 107-127

Jon Elster, “Methodological Individualism”, pp. 5-8 in *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Optional Reading

George Homans, “Bringing Men Back In” in Alan Ryan's *Philosophy of Social Explanation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 50-64.

Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts*, pp. 373-405.

Julius Sensat, “Methodological Individualism and Marxism,” *Economics and Philosophy*, 4 (1988): 189-220.

Emile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*. 8th ed. tr. Sarah A.Solovay and John H.Mueller and edited by George E.G.Catlin. New York: Free Press, 1964.

Many of the classic contributions to the modern debate concerning methodological individualism are collected in J. O'Neill. *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism*. London: Heineman, 1973.

David Ruben's, *The Metaphysics of the Social World* (London: Routledge, 1985) is an extended argument for ontological holism by an analytical philosopher.

Harold Kincaid, *Individualism and the Unity of Science* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), pp. 31-48.

4. September 26: Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory is the approach to explanation and prediction that economists employ, though its reach is far wider. It is a development of “folk psychology” – that is, the simple way that people explain and predict behavior in terms of beliefs and desires. For example, we explain why people rush out of burning buildings by citing their belief that they are in danger of being burnt to death and their desire to avoid this outcome. Economists and their fellow-travelers among political scientists and even sociologists suppose that people have complete and transitive preferences among outcomes and that, given their beliefs and constraints, they choose whatever they most prefer. Rational choice is choice that is determined by rational belief and rational preference. Rational preferences are, minimally, complete and transitive. By adding additional conditions on preferences and beliefs, it is possible to construct formal models of rational choice, of which expected utility theory and game theory are the most important examples.

Rational choice theory is controversial in a number of regards: 1. Is its construal of rationality acceptable? 2. Are rational choice explanations too individualistic or not individualistic enough? 3. Do rational choice models depict individuals as selfish? 4. Are rational choice explanations empty or deceptive? Do they emphasize the wrong things and hide the influence of social factors?

Required Reading

Dan Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice and Welfare*, chapters 1 and 4 (pp. 1-9, 34-45)

Debra Satz and John Ferejohn, “Rational Choice and Social Theory,” *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994): 71-87.

Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (Yale University Press, 1994), ch. 1-3.

Optional Readings:

Debra Satz and John Ferejohn, “Unification, Universalism, and Rational Choice Theory,” *Critical Review* 9(1-2) (1995): pp. 71-84.

Debra Satz and John Ferejohn, “Rational Choice and Social Theory,” *J. Phil.* 91 (1994): 71-87.

Dan Hausman, “Rational Choice and Social Theory: A Comment,” *Journal of Philosophy* 92(1995): 473-90.

Martin Hollis and Robert Sugden, “Rationality in Action,” *Mind* 102(1993): 1-35.

Dan Hausman and Michael McPherson, *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy and Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 4 “Rationality”.

Jeffrey Friedman, “Economic Approaches to Politics,” *Critical Review* 9(1-2) (1995): pp. 1-24

5. October 3: Functionalism and functional explanation

There are different strategies of explanation in social science, and it is important to be able to recognize their differences and characteristic strengths and weaknesses. One type of explanation that is quite controversial within social theory is “functional explanation.” This used to be a quite standard way of explaining things in sociology, but has come into considerable disrepute, especially because of its association with Parsonsian structural-functionalism.

In the 1980s there was a renewed and quite lively discussion of functional explanation which attempted to give this form of explanation greater precision and legitimacy. The discussion revolved around an elaboration of the distinction between *intentional* and *functional* explanations. The former explain human behavior by reference to the intended consequences of actions, the latter by reference to actual consequences, or, put otherwise, by apparently arguing from consequence to cause. However, a number of philosophers (represented here by G.A. Cohen) developed interpretations of functional explanation as a special kind of causal explanation. In the readings for this session we will examine precisely what is entailed by a functional explanation and the potential relevance of such explanations for social science questions.

Required Readings:

Jon Elster, “Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory: the case for methodological individualism”, *Theory and Society*, 11:4, July 1982, pp. 453-482

Cohen, “Reply to Elster on Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory”

Marvin Harris, “Mother Cow”, from *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: the riddles of culture* (Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 10-32

Arthur Stinchcombe, “Functional Causal Imagery,” in *Constructing Social Theories*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp.80-101.

Johannes Berger and Claus Offe, “Functionalism vs. Rational Choice?: some questions concerning the rationality of choosing one or the other,” *Theory & Society*, 11:4, pp.521-526

Optional readings:

Philippe van Parijs, “Functionalist Marxism Rehabilitated: a comment on Elster”, *Theory and Society*, 11:4, pp.497-512

Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, “Explanation and Dialectics”, pp.3-36

Jon Elster, “Cohen on Marx's Theory of History,” *Political Studies*, XXVIII:1,(March, 1980), pp.121-128.

G.A. Cohen, “Functional Explanation: a reply to Elster,” *Political Studies*, XXVIII:1 (March 1980), pp. 129-135.

G.A. Cohen, *KMTH*, chapter IX. “Functional Explanations: in general”

Jon Elster, *Ulysses and the Sirens*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), chapter 1. "Perfect Rationality", pp.1-35.

Philippe Van Parijs, "Marxism's Central Puzzle" in Terrance Ball and James Farr (eds) *After Marx* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 88-104

James Noble, "Marxian Functionalism", in Ball and Farr, *ibid.*, pp. 105-120

6. October 10: Causal explanation, mechanism, and causal inference

Scientific Realism is a general term for a family of alternatives to positivist/empiricist understandings of science. "Critical" realism, which Benton and Craig discuss in Chapter 8, is one variety of realism that has been especially influential among some sociologists. The central idea is that the observations we make of phenomena in world are jointly determined by underlying mechanisms that exist *independently of the observer* and mechanisms *internal to the process of observation itself*. The task of science is to give accounts of these mechanisms and thereby generate explanations of the phenomena. Most philosophers would regard the ontological conclusions that critical realists have drawn concerning "levels" of existence (including especially the view that science is concerned with mechanisms that are only exposed in experimental investigation) as unfounded, but, as Woodward's essay shows, they agree that science is concerned with more than mere regularity.

Even if one does not buy into the whole philosophical structure of critical realism, the idea that an explanation consists of specifying a set of causal mechanisms has become prominent in both philosophy and the social sciences. The basic idea is simple: in order to distinguish mere correlation from a valid explanation, one must make an argument about counterfactuals or how something comes about. This means in effect specifying an underlying mechanism that generates the postulated effect. In the absence of such a specification we have at best a "black box" in which something happens, but we know not what, and at worst a vague and ungrounded theory in which real explanations are absent. One of the criticisms often raised against the most abstract kinds of sociological theory, in these terms, is that they lack plausible mechanisms.

Required Reading:

Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Chapter 8.

James Woodward, "Explanation and Invariance in the Social Sciences," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 51(2000): 197-254.

Optional Reading:

Ray Pawson, *A Measure for Measures* (London: Routledge, 1989), ch.5.

Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: an introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), pp.3-63

Roy Bhaskkar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Verso, 1975, 1997) and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Harvester: 1979, 1990).

Berth Danermark, Mats Ekstrom, Liselotte Jakobsen and Jan Ch. Karlsson, *Explaining Society: critical realism in the social sciences*. (Routledge: 2002).

Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg, *Social Mechanisms: an analytical approach to social theory* (Cambridge, 1998)

Jon Elster, "A Plea for Mechanisms", in *Alchemies of the Mind* (Cambridge University Press 1999) pp.1-47

7. October 17: Qualitative research, statistical inquiry, randomized controlled testing

While not minimizing the difficulties of testing or the resources for clinging to theories regardless of the findings of experiment and observation, we believe that the results of testing should be the final arbiter concerning what we should believe. Within such a perspective, testing is obviously one of the central topics in the methodology of the sciences, including the social sciences. It is also an immense topic ranging from complicated details concerning statistical and experimental techniques to general epistemological queries concerning the very notion of evidence. So we cannot go very deeply into the subject.

These days randomized controlled trials are all the rage. Many regard them as the "gold standard," and in some cases they ignore their limits and fallibility and unreasonably deny that observational studies have any evidential value.

Required Reading

Julian Reiss, "Evidence-Based Policy," *The Philosophy of Economics* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming, 2013), chapter 11

Gordon C S Smith, Jill P Pell, "Parachute use to prevent death and major trauma related to gravitational challenge: systematic review of randomised controlled trials." *British Medical Journal* 327 (2003): 1459-1461.

John Worrall, "Causality in Medicine: Getting Back to the Hill Top," *Preventive Medicine* 53(2011): 235-38.

Angus Deaton, "Instruments, Randomization, and Learning about Development." *Journal of Economic Literature* 48(2010): 424-55.

Optional Readings:

D. Hausman, *The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics*, pp. 302-314.

Ray Pawson "Against Variable Analysis," and "Choosing class concepts: from indicator selection to adjudicating theories," in *A Measure for Measures*, pp. 35-73 and 255-86.

Arthur Stinchcombe, "The Logic of Scientific Inference" in *Constructing Social Theories*, (New

York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 15-27

Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of the Natural Sciences*, ch. 4, pp. 33-46.

Karl Popper, "Conjectures and Refutations"

8. October 24: Assessments of Causal Importance

In both nature and society, events usually depend on a multiplicity of causal factors. If the sun had exploded in 1916, the Bolshevik revolution would never have happened. But the continued existence of the sun does little to explain the revolution. Among factors that we take to be explanatory, some seem stronger than others, and some seem to explain the revolution in a qualitatively different way than others. How can we discriminate among causal factors such as the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Serbia in 1914, the terrible human costs in Russia of the First World War, the autocratic structure of the Russian government, and the return of Lenin? This is both a practical problem for historians and social theorists and a theoretical problem. In particular, how can a theory of causal explanation permit one to distinguish among kinds and strengths of causes?

Required Reading:

Erik Olin Wright, Andrew Levine, and Elliot Sober, "Causal Asymmetries". In *Reconstructing Marxism*, pp. 129-177

Ann Orloff and Theda Skocpol, "Why Not Equal Protection? Explaining Politics of Public Social Spending in Britain, 1900-1911, and the United States, 1180s-1920", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 49. No 6 (Dec., 1984), 726-750.

9. October 31: Social constructivism and the critique of positivist/modernist social science

Currently there are a variety of different intellectual currents that challenge the pretensions of "science." Some sociologists and historians of science maintain that evidence and rational argument has little or even no role in science. Some social constructivists argue that the sciences construct the world they purport to describe and that a change in science is ipso facto a change in the world. Deconstructionist views of science are extensions of a perspective in literary theory that emphasizes the role of the reader in the construction of the literary text. If one assimilates not only the words of scientific theories but their objects to texts, then deconstructions challenge the reality of the objects of science or argue that that reality results from the collaboration between the author and reader of scientific texts. Post-modernists challenge the privileged status of cognitive genre. In place of arbitrarily and unjustifiably privileged cognitive criteria, they maintain that we must reply on performative criteria, so that the success (or "truth") of a discourse is simply the degree to which it achieves agreement and support from members of the relevant community of experts. Rather than aiming at consensus, inquiry should aim at maximizing variety so as to keep science open to new ideas. Some leftists and some feminists

discern a natural alliance between deconstructionism or postmodernism and a political challenge to the status quo. According to all of these positions, the view that science aims at discovering the truth about an independently existing world is hopelessly naive and politically repressive. (We don't agree!)

Required Reading:

Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Chapter 10

Steven Woolgar, *Science: the Very Idea* (London: Tavistock, 1988) pp. 53-69.

D. Wade Hands, "Constructivism: The Social Construction of Scientific Knowledge." pp. 197-212 of *The Elgar Companion to Economics and Philosophy*, ed. John Davis, Alain Marciano, and Jochen Runde. Northampton: Elgar, 2004.

Robbins, Bruce. "Anatomy of a Hoax," *Tikkun* Sept-Oct., 1996, pp. 58-59.

Optional readings:

Jean Bricmont and Alan Sokal, *Impostures Intellectuelles*, ch.4.

Alan Sokal "A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies" and "Transgressing the Boundaries: An Afterword."

Stanley Aronowitz, "Alan Sokal's 'Transgression'" with Sokal's reply.

Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester University Press, 1984, esp. sections 5, 7, 11, 13.

Joan Scott "Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: or the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism", in *Theorizing Feminism* ed by Ann Hermann and Abigail Steward (Westview Press: 1994)

Stanley Fish, "Professor Sokal's Bad Joke,"

<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~jwalsh/sokal/articles/fish-oped.html>

Alan Sokal's response to Fish is at:

<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~jwalsh/sokal/articles/sk12fish.html>

Barbara Epstein, "Postmodernism and the Left", by Barbara Epstein (New Politics, Winter 1997) at: <http://www.wilpaterson.edu/~newpol/issue22/epstei22.htm>

Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton University Press, 1980), ch. VII, pp. 315-56.

10. November 7: Social values and social policy

To decide among social policies, knowledge of their costs and consequences is not enough. In

addition one needs some normative standard or standards. For example, the fact that some policy will result in mass starvation is not a reason to reject the policy if one is indifferent to whether millions of people starve to death. A standard way to describe this conundrum is to maintain that policy depends on both facts and values. But the distinction between facts and values and between so-called “positive” and “normative” inquiries is complicated and controversial. The normative basis for policy is also controversial and raises fundamental questions of political theory. In addition to discussing the relations between facts and values, this week provides a glimpse into three normative views that (together with utilitarianism, which will be discussed in the next seminar) ground most contemporary policy debates. They are Rawls’ theory of justice, libertarianism, and egalitarianism – all of which could be (and have been) the subjects of whole seminars rather than a portion of just one meeting.

Required Reading:

Dan Hausman and Michael McPherson, *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy*, Appendix.

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (excerpts)

Robert Nozick, “Distributive Justice”, from *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, (New York: Basic Books, 1974) pp. 149-182 (with omissions)

G.A. Cohen, “Equality of What?” in A. Sen and M. Nussbaum, *The Quality of Life* (Oxford, 1993) pp. 9-29

11. November 14: Welfare, consequentialism, and utilitarianism

Social policy choices are very often driven by an informal and unsystematic utilitarianism: whichever policy most enhances welfare is the best policy. But what is welfare? Can it be measured and aggregated, as it must be, if we are to compare to what extent alternative policies “enhance” welfare? Can our social theories reliably predict the welfare consequences of alternative policies? Should the focus of public policy be on welfare, or should it be concerned about a wider range of consequences of alternative policies? Can policies that harm some people be justified by the benefits they provide to other people? Is it inevitable that something like utilitarianism will govern choices among alternative policies?

Required Reading:

Hausman and McPherson, *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, chapters 7 and 8.

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1 (spring 1972) pp. 229-243 (revised edition)

Sen, “Capability and Well-Being” (2007)

12. November 28: Rational policy making

Once one gets past the platitudes that good policy making requires knowledge of the consequences of policies and a normative standard to assess those consequences, a great many additional difficulties arise. Suppose, for example, one is concerned to improve the educational system. How should one measure the value of its outputs to determine which policies produce the best outputs. Suppose, for example, one runs a randomized controlled experiment among impoverished children in some schools and discovers that those who are in smaller classes show larger improvements in reading scores. That suggests that their schooling has improved, but there might be other unmeasured outcomes of the change that have gotten worse. And can one conclude that making courses smaller in other schools will have the same effects? Amid all these uncertainties, how is rational policy making possible? How is it possible to work toward “real utopias” or, more modestly, improvements in society?

Required Reading:

Hausman, “Evaluating Social Policy,” in Harold Kincaid, ed. *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Economics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Dan Hausman, “How Can Irregular Causal Generalizations Guide Practice,” *Preventive Medicine* 53 (2011): 229-31.

Nancy Cartwright, “Predicting What Will Happen When We Act: What Counts for Warrant?” *Preventive Medicine* 53(2011): 221-24.

Optional Reading:

Adler and Posner, *New Foundations of Cost-Benefit Analysis* (first couple of chapters)

Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice and Welfare*, chapter 8.

Supplementary Topics (from earlier versions of the course)

1. Narrative methods and Methodological pluralism

There is a strong current in sociology that draws a very sharp distinction between the social sciences and natural sciences. Typically such claims revolve in one way or another around arguments about the distinctive character of knowledge that is bound up with *agency*, with the fact that people are actors within the social processes studied by sociologists. The problem of agency, in turn, is sometimes seen as radically subverting the possibility of causal explanation and prediction, the hallmarks of natural sciences.

Recently one of the rubrics under which these issues have been discussed is the importance of “narrative” methods in the social sciences, where “narrative” is taken to be a family of methods centering on the lived experiences, stories, temporal trajectories of the concrete actors in social settings. An *understanding* of such narratives, it is argued, yields a distinctive kind of knowledge. In a provocative recent book, Bent Flyvberg argues that this kind of knowledge is distinct from the *episteme* of the natural sciences and should be identified with the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* which (as I understand it) is roughly translated as practical wisdom and judgment. David Laitin strongly criticizes this view, arguing that empathy and understanding of the narratives of actors can lead to serious errors in analysis if these are not combined with more conventional forms of social science method, especially statistical studies and formal models. He thus argues for what he calls a “tri-partite method” that combines these three ways of advancing knowledge of human affairs: narrative, statistical analysis, and formal modeling.

Readings:

Bent Flyvbjerg. *Making Social Science Matter* (Cambridge 2001)

David Laitin. “The Perestroikan Challenge to Social Science”, *Politics & Society* vol.31:1, March 2003, pp. 163-184

David Laitin. “Comparative Politics: the state of the subdiscipline” in Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, eds. *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* (New York: Norton, 2002).

2. Structure and Agency

Discussions concerning methodological individualism and concerning rational choice models concern the relationship between structure and agency. Those who see individual innovation and choice as relatively unimportant to the reproduction and dynamics of societies will not be methodological individualists and will find that rational choice theories hide what really matters. But the general issue of the importance, nature, and role of agency and of the character and weight of social structure extends more widely. This is also an arena of meta-theory in which there is an almost constant “reinventing the wheel”. Every few years someone introduces some new rhetoric to try to grapple with the problem of understanding how to conceptualize the fact

that human beings, as social actors exist within social constraints/relations not of their choosing and yet they act and make choices which in one way or another affect those constraints/relations. It sometimes seems that these discussions never really go anywhere, and yet the problems persist because they are somehow central to the very idea of social science and social theory.

Core readings

Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, “What is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology* 103:4, January 1998, pp.962-1023.

William H Sewell, Jr. “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 89:1 (July 1992): 1-29

Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (University of California Press, 1984), chapter 1, “Elements of the Theory of Structuration”, pp. 1-34, especially pp.5-38

Margaret Archer, “Human Agency and Social Structure: A Critique of Giddens”, in Jon Clark, Celia Modgil and Sohan Modgil (eds) *Anthony Giddens: Consensus and Controversy* (London: The Falmer Press, 1990).

Marx: Preface to a Critique of Political Economy, Theses on Feuerbach

John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, Book VI, chapters 9 – 12.

Optional readings:

Perry Anderson, “Agency”, chapter 2, in *Arguments within English Marxism* (Verso, 1980), esp pp.16-25

Hans Joas, *On the Creativity of Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Introduction and Chapter 3, “Situation, Corporeality, Sociality: The fundamentals of a theory of the creativity of action”, pp. 1-6, 145-195.

3. Formal models

Social scientific theories often seem remote from the reality of every-day life. Complexities are ignored, oversimplified falsehoods are affirmed, and theories seem to live in worlds of their own, whose relevance to the real world seems questionable. One of the most frequently heard objections to a specific explanations in social science is “but things are much more complicated than that!” Many sociologists become especially skeptical when theoretical arguments are formalized in mathematical terms. The question, then, is how can such gross “simplifications” be justified? Is there a distinction between justified and unjustified simplifications? Is the central issue here simply one of pragmatics — the limitations of the human mind to grasp the full complexity of things, or is there a real principle at work that guides the simplifications inherent in abstractions?

Core readings:

Steven Rappaport, *Models and Reality in Economics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998, pp. 102-110.

Max Weber, "Objectivity and Understanding in Economics," in D. Hausman, ed. *The Philosophy of Economics: An Anthology*. Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 69-82.

Milton Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics," pp. 3-43 of *Essays in Positive Economics* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953; rpt. in D. Hausman, ed. *The Philosophy of Economics: An Anthology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 180-213.

Optional readings:

D. Hausman, *The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics*. Cambridge University Press, 1992, ch. 12.

E. McMullin, "Galilean Idealization," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 16 (1985).

Leszek Nowak, *The Structure of Idealization: Towards a Systematic Interpretation of the Maxian Idea of Science*. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980.

Nancy Cartwright, *Nature's Capacities and their Measurement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, ch. 5.

4. Testing theories, adjudicating theories, reconstructing theories

While not minimizing the difficulties of testing or the resources for clinging to theories regardless of the findings of experiment and observation, we believe that the results of testing should be the final arbiter concerning what we should believe. Within such a perspective, testing is obviously one of the central topics in the methodology of the social sciences. It is also an immense topic ranging from complicated details concerning statistical and experimental techniques to general epistemological queries concerning the very notion of evidence. So we cannot go very deeply into the subject in a single class.

Readings:

D. Hausman, *The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics*, pp. 302-314.

Ray Pawson "Against Variable Analysis," and chapter 9, "Choosing class concepts: from indicator selection to adjudicating theories," In *A Measure for Measures*, pp. 35-73 and 255-286.

Arthur Stinchcombe, "The Logic of Scientific Inference" in *Constructing Social Theories*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 15-27

Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of the Natural Sciences*, ch. 4, pp. 33-46.

Karl Popper, "Conjectures and Refutations"

5. Logics of theory construction in ethnography: grounded theory versus the extended case method

It is perhaps not surprising that ethnographic research (broadly understood) has become the site for especially vigorous debate over the problem of the relationship between theory and method, especially on the ways in which ethnographic data can contribute to the advancement of sociological theory. While these issues are equally relevant for other types of qualitative research as well as quantitative research, they have a particularly pressing character in ethnographic research because of a range of issues that make “positivist” sociologists sometimes skeptical of the “scientific” aspirations of ethnographic methods. In particular, large-N quantitative sociologists are often skeptical about the reliability and validity of the observations of ethnographers, since it is often nearly impossible to “check up” on many of their observations, and they are skeptical of the possibility of data from ethnography to be used to “test” hypotheses and advance theoretical understandings in significant ways. For these and other reasons, supporters of ethnographic methods have often been particularly concerned with defending the methods they use and elaborating the logic of the relationship between theoretical knowledge and the practical activities of observation.

Two different approaches on these issues seem especially interesting: grounded theory associated with the work of Glaser and Strauss, and the extended case method, associated especially with Burawoy. While there is no reason why a given researcher cannot mix these two together in the practical work of research, they have tended to be seen as alternatives. As a first approximation, the grounded theory approach stresses the way in which theory is constructed *inductively* through fine-grained observation in ethnographic field sites, whereas the extended case method stresses the ways in which field work is a continual process of testing and reconstructing theories which are brought to the site.

Readings:

Michael Burawoy, “The Extended Case method”, *Sociological Theory* 16:1 March 1998

Jack Katz, “A Theory of Qualitative Methodology: the social system of analytic fieldwork,” in Robert Emerson (ed), *Contemporary Field Research* (Little, Brown and Company, 1983)

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research* (Aldine, 1967), excerpts TBA

Michael Burawoy, et. al. *Ethnography Unbound* (University of California Press, 1991), pp. 1-27, 271-287

Michael Burawoy, *Global Ethnography* (University of California Press, 2000), pp.1-40

PRINCIPLES FOR SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS

Erik Olin Wright

The following guidelines are intended to facilitate seminar discussions. Some of them may sound obvious, but from past experience it is still important to make them explicit.

1. **READINGS.** There is a strong tendency in seminars, particularly among articulate graduate students, to turn every seminar into a general “bull session” in which participation need not be informed by the reading material in the course. The injunction to discuss the readings does not mean, of course, that other material is excluded from the discussion, but it does mean that the issues raised and problems analyzed should focus on around the actual texts assigned for the week.

2. **LISTEN.** In a good seminar, interventions by different participants are linked one to another. A given point is followed up and the discussion therefore has some continuity. In many seminar discussions, however, each intervention is unconnected to what has been said before. Participants are more concerned with figuring out what brilliant comment they can make rather than listening to each other and reflecting on what is actually being said. In general, therefore, participants should add to what has just been said rather than launch a new train of thought, unless a particular line of discussion has reached some sort of closure.

3. **TYPES ON INTERVENTIONS.** Not every seminar intervention has to be an earth-shattering comment or brilliant insight. One of the reasons why some students feel intimidated in seminars is that it seems that the stakes are so high, that the only legitimate comment is one that reveals complete mastery of the material. There are several general rules about comments that should facilitate broader participation:

- No intervention should be regarded as “naive” or “stupid” as long as it reflects an attempt at seriously engaging the material. It is often the case that what seems at first glance to be a simple or superficial question turns out to be among the most intractable.
- It is as appropriate to ask for clarification of readings or previous comments as it is to make a substantive point on the subject matter.
- If the pace of the seminar discussion seems too fast to get a word in edgewise it is legitimate to ask for a brief pause to slow things down. It is fine for there actually to be moments of silence in a discussion!

4. **BREVITY.** Everyone has been in seminars in which someone consistently gives long, overblown speeches. Sometimes these speeches may make some substantively interesting points, but frequently they meander without focus or direction. It is important to keep interventions short and to the point. One can always add elaborations if they are needed. This is not an absolute prohibition on long statements, but it does suggest that longer statements are generally too long.

5. **EQUITY.** While acknowledging that different personalities and different prior exposures to the material will necessarily lead to different levels of active participation in the seminar discussion, it should be our collective self-conscious goal to have as equitable participation as

possible. This means that the chair of the discussion has the right to curtail the speeches by people who have dominated the discussion, if this seems necessary.

6. SPONTANEITY vs. ORDER. One of the traps of trying to have guidelines, rules, etc. in a discussion is that it can squelch the spontaneous flow of debate and interchange in a seminar. Sustained debate, sharpening of differences, etc., is desirable and it is important that the chair not prevent such debate from developing.

7. ARGUMENTS, COMPETITIVENESS, CONSENSUS. A perennial problem in seminars revolves around styles of discussion. Feminists have often criticized discussions dominated by men as being aggressive, argumentative, competitive. Men, on the other hand, have at times been critical of what they see as the “feminist” model of discussion: searching for consensus and common positions rather highlighting differences, too much emphasis on process and not enough on content, and so on. Whether or not one regards such differences in approaches to discussion as gender-based (after all, many women are competitive, and many men are reticent in high intensity discussions), the differences are real and they can cause problems in seminars. My own view is the following: I think that it is important in seminar discussions to try to sharpen differences, to understand where the real disagreements lie, and to accomplish this it is generally necessary that participants “argue” with each other, in the sense of voicing disagreements and not always seeking consensus. On the other hand, there is no reason why argument, even heated argument, need be marked by aggressiveness, competitiveness, put-downs and the other tricks in the repertoire of verbal domination. What I hope we can pursue is “cooperative conflict”: theoretical advance comes out of conflict, but hopefully our conflicts can avoid being antagonistic.

8. CHAIRING DISCUSSIONS. In order for the discussions to have the kind of continuity, equity and dynamics mentioned above, it is necessary that the discussion be led by a “strong chair.” That is, the chair has to have the capacity to tell someone to hold off on a point if it seems unrelated to what is being discussed, to tell someone to cut a comment short if an intervention is rambling on and on, and so on. The difficulty, of course, is that such a chair may become heavy-handed and authoritarian, and therefore it is important that seminar participants take responsibility of letting the chair know when too much monitoring is going on.

9. REFLEXIVITY. The success of a seminar is a collective responsibility of all participants. Professors cannot waive magic wands to promote intellectually productive settings. It is essential, therefore, that we treat the process of the seminar itself as something under our collective control, as something which can be challenged and transformed. Issues of competitiveness, male domination, elitism, bullshit, diffuseness, and other problems should be dealt with through open discussion and not left to the end of the seminar. Please let me know if you have concerns of any sort, and it is always appropriate to raise issues with our collective process.