

Fall Semester, 2003

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Class meetings: T-Th 10:30-12:00, BC 212

PAES 370, Phil 370

Philosophy of Social Science

I. What is philosophy?

There is no definition of philosophy which is acceptable to everyone. Many people think of philosophy as a search for "truth," or as the study of a body of truths already arrived at. In popular parlance it suggests wisdom about how to conduct one's life. For centuries "philosophy" referred to truths of a special sort, those which are "eternal" and "universal." While people spoke of "Greek" philosophy, German philosophy, etc., the adjective was generally understood to be subordinated to the noun, the national origin of the thinker to the "universal" (European) notion of how philosophy should be studied and what it is.

The word, "philosophy," derives from the Greek, φιλοσοφία, "to love," and σοφία, "wisdom." The Greeks are credited with inventing philosophy because they self-consciously set about elaborating definitions and methods of arriving at truth which have been used ever since. (Other peoples, however, including some ancient peoples, also produced works can claim to be philosophical depending on what your definition of philosophy is).

During the Dark Ages and the early medieval period Greek philosophy was preserved by the Arabs who also philosophized. The Arab contribution to European medieval philosophy was substantial. Since the Enlightenment there has been a rather strict division between philosophy and theology which as a consequence has made medieval philosophy seem outdated.

Philosophy as an academic discipline originated in Europe during modern times and has had a distinguished history there. Only in the twentieth century have various African, Asian, and Latin American philosophers challenged European hegemony in the field. Women, people of color, and other diverse groups have also rejected what they consider to be an European, male-centered approach to philosophy. Indeed, some of the leaders in the field who are European and male have made mighty efforts to "deconstruct" it, i. e., to show some of the underlying assumptions and biases which make of philosophy (or any other academic field) as much as a prison-house of language as a window on reality.

In the contemporary world the word “theory” sometimes is used instead of philosophy. Thus we have courses on “Marxist” theory, “feminist” theory, “queer” theory, etc.

II. The divisions of philosophy

The Greeks held that there are four branches of philosophy: **ethics** (What should we do?) **metaphysics** (What is?), **epistemology** (How do we know?) and **aesthetics** (What is beautiful?)

At the risks of oversimplifying, I would say that the Greeks were most interested in ethics (in particular, politics). They wanted to know what sort of behavior is appropriate for humans. Medieval thinkers were preoccupied with metaphysics, or what is. Beginning in the 18th century epistemology (How do we know?) predominated and continues to do so. However, when non-Western peoples, minority groups, women, etc., philosophize, they often emphasize ethical and political themes. In some ways they seem to be returning to the questions which preoccupied the Greeks. I would say that aesthetics has never dominated philosophical thought although, of course, various individuals took up the subject.

Current Anglo-American philosophy is centered in the study of language. It is called Analytic Philosophy. Although modern European philosophers are also interested in language, they tend to discuss language in terms of discourse and to analyze whole discourses whereas Analytic philosophy typically tries to “get clear” about various words and phrases. As we shall see in this course, virtually all philosophy nowadays approaches philosophical problems from a consideration of what sort of thought our language makes possible and/or inevitable.

III. What is “social” and “scientific” about the social sciences?

This question forms the subject matter of the course. Therefore I shall not attempt to answer it in this brief course description. It is important to note, however, that this is a philosophical question. We are not seeking the **information** social scientists amass through their researches; nor are we attempting to become skilled in their **methodology**. Content and methodology are important and have bearing on our reflections. In this class, however, we take a critical distance from the projects social scientists initiate as a matter of course and ask questions about the nature of reality, the nature of human institutions and practices, and the nature of science which make the investigations social scientists conduct seem like useful and truth-producing activities.

By now you have had experience with at least one social science. You have had a chance to become familiar with the methodology of So/An, psychology, political science, economics, etc. (If you haven't, you'd better postpone this course until later). Perhaps you have had occasion to think about the philosophy of history or of education. In this class, however, we shall not consider the

Social Sciences one by one; we shall, rather, consider them as constituting together the human sciences, or, in German, the Geisteswissenschaften. The divisions among academic departments, which allocate, for example, one set of research problems to political science and another to sociology will be scrutinized. Against the approach of this course it can be objected that the students get essentially one point of view, a point of view critical of mainstream thinking. This is a valid objection. My response is that rather than changing this course, I should urge all of you to take more courses and read more books. Only so much is possible in one course. In any case, my experience teaches that most of us are already steeped in the dominant metaphors and common assumptions of our culture. They are all around us, and they govern the curriculum. I hope that I am offering you a chance to think new thoughts, re-examine your preconceptions, and dream new dreams. I trust you will have other valuable opportunities in other courses.

IV Purposes of course

- A. To learn to think philosophically
- B. To learn to think critically about what are commonly called the social sciences
- C. To become acquainted with some leading philosophical theories about social reality
- D. To learn to apply social theory to particular problems, for instance, building more just and peaceful institutions
- E. To work on reading and writing skills
- F. To learn to build a common understanding in the class which rests on mutual respect and a commitment to bringing out the best in everyone

V Requirements

Write two papers, one called "Thinking," the other called "Doing."

1. The "Thinking" paper will be due Tuesday, October 8th (i. e., at Midterm). The paper should include reflections on several of the authors we have read in class, and it should include one work not read in this class. It may be a book encountered in another class. Finally, you need to say something about what "thinking" means to you, and how the readings have affected how you think or what you think, about thinking in general or thinking about something in particular. Obviously, this is a flexible assignment. However, it should not merely summarize texts. You need to take a position and argue for it, basing your argument on evidence from the works you cite. Include notes (any type of standard citation will do) and bibliography.

2. The "Doing" paper will be due on the day scheduled for finals for this class. Like the "Thinking" paper, it should include references to authors we have

read in class, and it should include two authors not read in this class. It should be about 10 pages long. Include notes and bibliography in proper form. Although the paper is called "Doing," you will want to discuss the relationship between thinking and doing in the works of our authors and the additional work you choose. You need to argue for a position and cite evidence from the texts to support your point of view. You may, if you wish, discuss thinking and doing with reference to a particular problem or example.

B Oral reports: The class will be asked to divide into groups of approximately four people. Each group should study an agency, club, group of volunteers, school, police, etc., on the topic of violence and retribution in the Richmond community. One purpose of the study is to see how the persons in question philosophize about violence, its manifestations, causes, cures, etc. The other purpose is to provide an opportunity for you to philosophize about other people philosophizing. This assignment departs from Antonio Gramsci's dictum that all people are philosophers even if many, not most, do not think of themselves that way. The challenge of the assignment is to ascertain the philosophy which underlines the discourse of persons engaged in practical activities on a day to day level. Each group will be given an hour in which to give a report to the class beginning November 13th.

C There will be **frequent quizzes**. You will be expected to participate in class discussion.

VI Evaluation

Class participation and quizzes	20%
Midterm paper	20
Oral report	20
Final paper	30

VII Any student with a documented disability (physical, psychiatric, visual, and/or hearing) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact the instructor and Academic Support Services at the beginning of the semester.

VIII Books

Various handouts bound by Office Services
Karl Marx, THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO
David Harvey, SPACES OF HOPE

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

A book of readings, hereafter referred to as BR, has been prepared for this class by Office Services.

(N.B.: A glossary of postmodern terms can be found in the BR)

- 8/28 Th Introduction
- 9/2 T Immanuel Wallerstein, "Call for a Debate about the Paradigm,"
UNTHINKING SOCIAL SCIENCE, 237-256
- 9/4 Th Robert D. Putnam, BOWLING ALONE (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster,
2000), 16-28
Howard Richards, Letter to Doug Bennett, Jan. 11, 2003, about BOWLING
ALONE
- 9/9 T Putnam and Richards, continued
- 9/11 Th Karl Marx, THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO (New York: International
Publishers, 1993), 8-44
- 9/16 T David Harvey, SPACES OF HOPE, 21-52
- 9/18 Th Harvey, 53-94
- 9/23 T Harvey, 97-130

9/25 Th Harvey, 131-156

9/30 T Organization of oral report groups
Open

OCTOBER

10/2 Th Nancy Hartsock, chapter 7, "Gender and Power: Masculinity, Violence, and Domination" and chapter 8, "The Erotic Dimension and the Homeric Ideal," MONEY, SEX, AND POWER (Boston: Northeastern, 1985), 155-209

10/7 T Susan Bordo, "Reading the Slender Body," 185-212 and "Material Girl, The Effacements of Postmodern Culture," 245-275
"Thinking" paper is due.

10/9 Th MIDTERM VACATION

10/14 T Pierre Bourdieu, "Structure, habitus, practices," THE LOGIC OF PRACTICE (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52-65

10/16 Th Bourdieu, "Belief and the Body," 66-79

10/21 T Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," SIGNS (University of Chicago, 1987)

10/23 Th Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology," 198-205, Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds., FEMINISMS (Oxford, 1997), 198-205

10/28 T Antonio Gramsci, "The Intellectuals," (3-23), "The Modern Prince" (169-173), "Problems of Marxism," (378-425), SELECTIONS FROM PRISON NOTEBOOKS (New York: International Publishers, 1987)

10/30 Th Gramsci, "The Study of Philosophy" (323-343)
Roger Simon, "Marx's Concept of Hegemony," MARXISM TODAY, 1977

NOVEMBER

11/4 T Michele Barrett, "Ideology, Politics, Hegemony: From Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe"

11/6 Th Michel Foucault, "The Means of Correct Training," DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH—THE BIRTH OF THE PRISON, 170-228

11/11 T Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations," from Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds., FEMINISTS THEORIZE THE POLITICAL, 213-230

Hazel V. Carby, "On the Threshold of Woman's Era": Lynching, Empire and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory," 301-15

11/13 Th Oral report

11/18 T Oral report

NOVEMBER 25TH AND NOVEMBER 27TH: THANKSGIVING BREAK

- 12/2 T Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?"
Jacques Derrida, "conjuring—marxism," SPECTERS OF MARX, THE
STATE OF THE DEBT, THE WORK OF MOURNING, AND THE
NEW INTERNATIONAL (New York: Routledge, 1994), 49-76
- 12/4 Th Oral report
- 12/9 T Oral report
- 12/11 Th Last day of class