

GVPT 700
SCOPE AND METHODS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Fall 2008

Tydings 1111
Thursdays, 12:30-3:15

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Office hours: Tu, W 4-5:30 and by appointment

The aim of the course is to develop your ability to evaluate work in political science. What are the most important goals of work in political science? What are the best means to achieve those goals? What are the most important questions? What are the best ways to answer those questions? There is no general agreement on these basic issues, so the course will provide an overview of the methodological and theoretical debates relevant to these questions in contemporary political science. Topics will include debates about the nature of science; debates about whether political science is, or ought to be, a science; methodological debates between qualitative and quantitative methods, between natural science and humanities as appropriate models, and theoretical debates about the value of the rational choice approach. Finally, we will consider some key alternatives to the mainstream views of political science: social science as “phronesis,” an interpretive approach, and critical social theory.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. 3 papers

A. An essay that is your contribution to one of the two “great debates,” on methods or on rational choice (around 5-7 pages). Due November 13.

B. An essay for the Perestroika website, or for an anti-Perestroika website (around 5-7 pages). Due December 11

C. A paper in which you evaluate an important work in political science of your own choice. It can be an important empirical claim, or proof of a theorem, a theory (empirical or normative), an article, a group of articles, a book, or a research tradition. What theoretical, logical, aesthetic, normative, or empirical arguments are relevant? (around 10-12 pages). Outline due October 30; paper due December 19.

2. Class participation.

BOOKS TO BUY

(all paperbacks)

Henry Brady and David Collier, Rethinking Social Inquiry. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield (2004)

Bent Flyvbjerg, Making Social Science Matter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2001)

James Finlayson, Habermas. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005)

Jeffrey Friedman, ed., The Rational Choice Controversy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (1996)

Peter Godfrey-Smith, Theory and Reality. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press (2003)

Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (1994)

Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, Designing Social Inquiry. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1994)

Kristen Monroe, ed., Perestroika! New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (2005)

COURSE OUTLINE

1. Organizational Meeting, (September 4)

2. The Present and Future of Political Science, (September 11)

Perestroika!, chapters 1 and 3

“Symposium: Shaking Things Up? Thoughts About the Future of Political Science.” PS, 35 [2] (June 2002): 181-205 [Discussants: Kristen Renwick Monroe, Russell Hardin, Robert Jarvis, Elinor Ostrom, Susanne Rudolph, Marion Smiley, Rogers Smith]

Four recent APSA Presidential Addresses:

2003: Theda Skocpol, “Voice and Inequality.” Perspectives on Politics (March 2004)

2004: Susanne Rudolph, “The Imperialism of Categories.” Perspectives on Politics (March 2005)

2005: Margaret Levi, “Why We Need a New Theory of Government.” Perspectives on Politics (March 2006)

2006: Ira Katznelson, “At the Court of Chaos.” Perspectives on Politics (March 2007)

3. Philosophy of Science, (September 18, 25)

A. History

Peter Godfrey-Smith, Theory and Reality. Chapters 1-9, pp. 1-148.

B. Key Issues

Peter Godfrey-Smith, Theory and Reality. Chapters 10-15, pp.149-231

4. First Central Debate: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods (October 2, 9)

A. The Logic of Research

Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, entire.

Henry Brady and David Collier, Rethinking Social Inquiry. Chapter 2, pp. 21-52.

B. KKV and their Critics

Henry Brady and David Collier, Rethinking Social Inquiry. Chapters 1, 3-13, Appendix; pp. 3-20, 53-271.

5. Second Central Debate: Rational Choice. (October 16, 23, October 30)

A. What Is It?

Irwin Morris and Joe Oppenheimer, "Rational Choice and Politics" in Irwin Morris et al. (eds), Politics from Anarchy to Democracy. ELMS.

B. The Critique

Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory, entire.

C. The Debate

Jeffrey Friedman, ed., The Rational Choice Controversy. Pp. 1-94, 107-26, 155-88, 213-76.

6. The Main Alternatives

A. Perestroika? (November 13)

Kristen Monroe, ed., Perestroika! Chapters 2, 4, 8, 10, 34-37, 39.

Rogers Smith, "Still Blowing in the Wind," Daedalus, 126(1): 253-88 [1997]

B. Phronesis? (November 20)

Bent Flyvbjerg, Making Social Science Matter.

Kristen Monroe, ed., Perestroika! Chapter 9.

Bent Flyvbjerg, "A Perestroikan Straw Man Answers Back," Politics and Society, 32 (2004): 389-416.

C. Interpretation and Social Science? (December 4)

Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." In Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan, eds., Interpretive Social Science, and other edited volumes. ELMS.

Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in The Interpretation of Cultures. ELMS.

Michael Walzer, Interpretation and Social Criticism. Ch. 1, "Three Paths in Moral Philosophy." ELMS.

D. Critical Social Theory? (December 11)

James Finlayson, Habermas, entire.