

Spring 2015

Instructor: Jon Elster

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PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
W4628

The class will offer a “tool-box” approach or “mechanism” approach to social-science explanations. We will discuss basic issues in the philosophy of explanation as well as selected tools or mechanisms. The requirement for a quality grade in the course is a 15-20 page term paper, on some topic approved by the instructor. Students can write about a purely theoretical issue or they can choose an empirical problem to illustrate methodological controversies.

Required reading for the course is the instructor’s book *Explaining Social Behavior* (ESB). This book is now being extensively revised and updated. Revised versions of the assigned chapters will be available on Courseworks.

Classes meet at Thursdays, 2.10-4.

Statement regarding academic integrity

The course endorses the faculty statement on academic integrity, found here: <https://www.college.columbia.edu/faculty/resourcesforinstructors/academicintegrity/statement> and reprinted here:

Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars’ work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others’ ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always

submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

Course plan and reading assignments

January 22. Introduction and overview.

January 29. Methodological individualism. **Readings:** Arrow; List and Spiekerman.

February 5. Explanation and mechanisms. **Readings:** ESB, Chs. 1-2.

February 12. Functional explanation. **Readings:** Elster (1982); Kincaid.

February 19. Invisible-hand explanations. **Readings:** Schelling; Ullmann-Margalit; Dayer-Tieffenbach; ESB Ch. 19.

February 26. Rational-choice explanation. **Readings:** ESB Ch.11; Hampsher-Monk and Hindmoor; Elster (2014).

March 5. Emotional-choice explanation. **Readings:** Rick and Loewenstein; ESB Ch. 8; Elster (2010).

March 12. Behavioral economics. **Readings:** Ainslie; Tversky and Kahneman (1974); Tversky and Kahneman (1981); ESB Ch. 6 and Ch. 12.

Spring break

March 26. Mechanisms of individual belief formation. **Readings:** Festinger and Carlsmith; Kunda; Quattrone and Tversky ; ESB Ch. 7.

April 2. Mechanisms of collective belief formation. **Readings:** Knapp; Bikchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch; ESB Ch. 23

April 9. Game theory and bargaining theory. **Readings:** Goeree and Holt; Muthoo; ESB Ch. 19, Ch. 20, Ch. 25.

April 16. Collective action. **Readings:** Fine and Clarkson; Kades; ESB Ch. 24.

April 23. Student presentations.

Readings

Ainslie, G. (1975), "Specious reward", *Psychological Bulletin* 82, 463-96.

Arrow, K. (1994), "Methodological individualism and social knowledge", *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings* 84, 1-8.

- Bikchandani, S., Hirshleifer, D. and Welch, I. (1998), "Learning from the behavior of others: Conformity, fads, and informational cascades," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, 151–70.
- Dayer-Tieffenbach, E. (2011), *Invisible Hand Explanations*, Ph. D. Dissertation, archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:18326/ATTACHMENT01
- Elster, J. (2010), "Emotional choice and rational choice", in P. Goldie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook in the Philosophy of Emotion*, Oxford University Press.
- Elster, J. (2014), "Tool-box or toy-box?" (Unpublished manuscript.)
- Festinger, L. and Carlsmith, J. (1959), "Cognitive consequences of forced compliance," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 58, 203–10.
- Fine, P. and Clarkson, J. (1986), "Individual versus public priorities in the determination of optimal vaccination policies", *American Journal of Epidemiology* 124 (1986), 1012-20.
- Goeree, J. and Holt, C. (2001), "Ten little treasures of game theory and ten intuitive contradictions," *American Economic Review* 91, 1402–22.
- Hampsher-Monk, I and Hindmoor, A. (2010), "Rational choice and interpretive evidence", *Political Studies* 58, 47-65.
- Kades, E. (2005) "Preserving a precious resource: Rationalizing the use of antibiotics", *Northwestern University Law Review* 99, 611-75.
- Kincaid, H. (2006) "Functional explanation and evolutionary social science", in S. Turner et al. (eds.), *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*, Amsterdam: North Holland.
- Knapp, R. (1944), "A psychology of rumor", *Public Opinion Quarterly* 8, 22-37.
- Kunda, Z. (1992), «Motivated person perception: Constructing justifications for desired beliefs », *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 28, 145-168
- List, C. and Spiekerman, K. (2013), "Methodological holism and individualism in political science", *American Political Science Review* 107, 629-43.
- Muthoo, A. (2000) "A non-technical introduction to bargaining theory", *World Economics* 1, 145-66.
- Quattrone, G. and Tversky, A. (1984), "Causal versus diagnostic contingencies: On self-deception and the voter's illusion", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 46, 237-48.
- Rick, S. and Loewenstein, G. (2008), "The role of emotion in economic behavior", in M. Lewis, J. Haviland-Jones and L. Barrett (eds.), *Handbook of Emotions*, 3rd ed., New York: Guilford Press
- Schelling, T. (1971), "Dynamic models of segregation", *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 1 (1971), 143-86.

Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. (1974), "Judgment under uncertainty", *Science* 185, 1124-31.

Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. (1981), "The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice", *Science* 211, 453-58.

Ullmann-Margalit, E. (1978), "Invisible-hand explanations", *Synthese* 39, 263-91.