

Unless indicated otherwise, all readings are from:

M. Martin and L.C. McIntyre (eds.) (1994) *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Sciences*. MIT Press.

Other collections:

A. Ryan (ed) (1973) *The Philosophy of Social Explanation*. OUP.

M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.) (1982) *Rationality and Relativism*. Basil Blackwell.

WK 1: LAWS AND EXPLANATION

‘An adequate explanation is incomplete unless it might have functioned as a prediction. Social science is concerned with human actions. Human actions are unpredictable because of the complexity of the phenomena involved. Therefore, there is little prospect for devising adequate explanations in social science.’ Assess this reasoning.

Your answer may include discussion of the following questions:

- What is the pattern of nomological explanation?
- What is the relation between laws and generalisations?
- How to distinguish between simple and complex laws?
- What is the rôle of mathematics in successful predictions?

Readings

C.G. Hempel, ‘The Function of General Laws in History’.

M. Scriven, ‘A Possible Distinction Between Traditional Scientific Disciplines and the Study of Human Behavior’.

Further readings

H. Kincaid, ‘Defending Laws in the Social Sciences’.

B. Fay, ‘General Laws and Explaining Behaviour’.

- Your essay should be between 4 and 6 pages long.
- The first paragraph of your essay must state the main thesis for which you wish to argue in the essay.
- The last paragraph of the essay must restate the main thesis, summarise the way in which you have argued for it, and indicate any outstanding problems.

WK 2: INTERPRETATION AND UNDERSTANDING

Can there be a hermeneutical explanation which functions as a prediction? Why?

Your answer may include discussion of *some* of the following questions:

- Is there a gap between social science and natural science?
- What is emphatic understanding?
- Why does interpretation seem indispensable in social sciences (e.g., history)?
- Is it possible to understand a person with a sufficiently different background?

Readings

R.C. Collingwood, 'Human Nature and Human History'

C. Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man'

Further readings

W. Dray, 'The Rationale for Actions'

M. Martin, 'Taylor on Interpretation and the Sciences of Man'

- Your essay should be between 4 and 6 pages long.
- The first paragraph of your essay must state the main thesis for which you wish to argue in the essay.
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WK 3: FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATION

Is the success of functional explanation (in social sciences) dependent on the existence of social evolution?

Readings

G.A. Cohen, 'Functional Explanation: In Marxism'

J. Elster, 'Functional Explanation: In Social Science'

Further readings

C.G. Hempel, 'The Logic of Functional Analysis'

H. Kincaid, 'Assessing Functional Explanations in Social Sciences'

- Your essay should be between 4 and 6 pages long.
- The first paragraph of your essay must state the main thesis for which you wish to argue in the essay.
- The last paragraph of the essay must restate the main thesis, summarise the way in which you have argued for it, and indicate any outstanding problems.

WK 4: OBJECTIVITY AND RELATIVISM

‘The evidence with which the social scientist (unlike the natural scientist) operates is based on the testimony of other people. It should be expected that this evidence is influenced by other people’s beliefs and prejudices. Therefore, social knowledge is never objective.’ **Discuss.**

Readings

R.G. Collingwood, ‘Lectures on the Philosophy of History’, in: *The Idea of History* (1993), §§10-43.

M. Weber, ‘Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy’

C. Taylor, ‘Neutrality in Political Science’

Further readings

R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Part V, §3.

T. Kuhn (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, chs. II-III, V-IX.

A. MacIntyre, ‘Is a Science of Comparative Politics Possible?’, in: Ryan (1973).

- Your essay should be between 4 and 6 pages long.
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WK 5: RATIONALITY

‘For individuals to act rationally is for them to maximise their own expected well-being.’ Does this make promotion of a collective good irrational?

Readings

J. Elster, ‘The Nature and Scope of Rational-Choice Explanation’

D.K. Henderson, ‘The Principle of Charity and the Problem of Irrationality’

Further readings

D. Follesdal, ‘The Status of Rationality Assumptions in Interpretation and in the Explanation of Action’

- Your essay should be between 4 and 6 pages long.
- The first paragraph of your essay must state the main thesis for which you wish to argue in the essay.
- The last paragraph of the essay must restate the main thesis, summarise the way in which you have argued for it, and indicate any outstanding problems.

WK 6: SOCIAL FACTS

Is it contradictory to admit the existence of social facts whilst at the same time maintaining the ineliminable rôle of interpretation in the social sciences?

Readings

E. Durkheim, 'Social Facts'

J.W.N. Watkins, 'Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences'

R.W. Miller, 'Methodological Individualism and Social Explanation'

Further readings

E. Durkheim, *Suicide* (1952), Introduction

S. Lukes, 'Methodological Individualism Reconsidered'

D. Little, 'Microfoundations of Marxism'

- Your essay should be between 4 and 6 pages long.
- The first paragraph of your essay must state the main thesis for which you wish to argue in the essay.
- The last paragraph of the essay must restate the main thesis, summarise the way in which you have argued for it, and indicate any outstanding problems.

WK 7: ECONOMICS AND PREDICTION

‘Economic theory must be more than a structure of tautologies if it is to be able to predict and not merely describe the consequences of action; if it is to be something different from disguised mathematics.’ **Discuss.**

Readings

A. Gibbard and H. Varian, ‘Economic Models’, in: *Journal of Philosophy* (1978), pp. 664-77.

[Available online through JSTOR.]

A. Rosenberg, ‘If Economics Isn’t Science, What Is It?’

Further readings

M. Friedman, ‘The Methodology of Positive Economics’

A. Rosenberg, ‘The Puzzle of Economic Modelling’, in: *Journal of Philosophy* (1978), pp. 679-83. [Available online through JSTOR.]

- Your essay should be between 4 and 6 pages long.
- The first paragraph of your essay must state the main thesis for which you wish to argue in the essay.
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WK 8: PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL REALITY: SYMPOSIUM

‘Climate promotes, but it does not compel, a given course of [social] development.’ Does this mean we can neither give social explanations based on meteorological data, nor make predictions of social phænomena (with these data available to us)?

Readings

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Bks. 14-15, 17-18

J.G. Herder, *Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Mankind*, Bks. VII-VIII, in: F.M. Barnard (ed.) (1969) *J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, pp. 382-411. [in Bodleian U. Camera]

E. Durkheim, *Suicide* (1952) Bk. I(3).

Further readings

H.T. Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, vol. I, ch. II.

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- The first paragraph of your essay must state the main thesis for which you wish to argue in the essay.
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