**PHIL 156 – PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**Spring 2024**

**Instructor:**  Manuel Barrantes ([barrantes@csus.edu](mailto:barrantes@csus.edu); 540.246.8822)

**Class meetings:** Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays 11:00-11:50am

**In-Person Office Hours:** Thursdays 11am-1pm (Mendocino Hall 3022)

**Online Office Hours:** Mondays & Fridays 1:15-1:45pm; Thursdays 11am-1pm; and by appointment.

(<https://csus.zoom.us/j/5268471798>)

**Credit hours:**  3WTU

**I. Course Description**

This course is a survey of some of the most important topics in the philosophy of the social sciences, including issues pertaining to ontology, epistemology, methodology, values & objectivity, scientific models, and explanation. The course is divided in three units, each of which addresses one of the following questions: What are social phenomena and social categories? What makes social science different from natural science? And, how does social sciences explain social phenomena? All readings will be posted on canvas.

**II. Methodology**

The semester is divided in three units of five weeks each. Every week (except the first) you must participate in an online discussion with your classmates. In addition, at the end of each unit you will take an in-class test, consisting on a summary question and an essay question. Finally, at the end of the semester you must submit a term paper. Each class you will be asked to elaborate on your online posts and comment on the readings. There will be at least one guest lecture (possibly more). Office hours will be held during the times outlined above. You do not need an appointment to come to regular office hours, but you may have to wait if I am with another student. If you can’t make it to office hours, contact me and we will set up an appointment. Communication will be via canvas announcements and canvas email.

**III. Learning OUTCOMES**

* You will learn the concepts necessary to understand some of the most important debates in current philosophy of social science, including: What are social phenomena and social categories? What makes social science different from natural science? How do values influence the practice of social science? What kinds of mathematical and computational models are used in social science? And, how does social science explain social phenomena?
* You will learn to write philosophy papers and evaluate philosophical arguments.

**IV. Course Requirements**

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| **%** | **Assignments** | **Modality and due dates** |
| 60% | 3 Tests | Non-cumulative in-class tests covering both lectures and readings. Guidelines and study guides will be posted on canvas. Tests will be taken in class on Fridays of weeks 5, 10 and 15. Makeups should be requested in person after class at your earliest convenience, **not by email**, and will receive a 1/3 letter-grade penalty, unless you have a documented justification. |
| 20% | 14 discussions | Every week you must post a question about the reading(s) and answer one of your classmates’ questions. Guidelines will be posted on canvas. You may be required to elaborate on your question during class. Discussions are due right before the Monday class. The lowest 3 grades will be dropped. *Absolutely no makeups for discussions.* |
| 20% | Final paper | A 1500-word paper elaborating on one of the previous papers based on feedback received. This paper is due Friday of finals week at 11:59pm. *Late papers will receive a 1/3 letter-grade penalty and are only allowed within 72 hours of the deadline.* |

**V. GRADING SCALE**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter** | **Range** | | **Letter** | **Range** | | **Letter** | **Range** | | **Letter** | **Range** | |
| A | 100% | to 94% | B | < 87% | to 84% | C | < 77% | to 74% | D | < 67% | to 64% |
| A- | < 94% | to 90% | B- | < 84% | to 80% | C- | < 74% | to 70% | D- | < 64% | to 61% |
| B+ | < 90% | to 87% | C+ | < 80% | to 77% | D+ | < 70% | to 67% | F | < 61% | to 0% |

**VI. SCHEDULE**

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| **Date** | **Readings** | **Assignments\*** |
| **Unit 1: Values in Social Science** | | |
| Week 1  1.22-1.26 | Introduction | *No assignments* |
| Week 2  1.29-2.2 | Max Weber, The Meaning of ‘Ethical Neutrality’ (p.1-12) | Discussion |
| Week 3  2.5-2.7 | Eleonora Montuschi, Scientific Objectivity | Discussion |
| Week 4  2.12-2.16 | Heather Douglas, Values in Social Science | Discussion |
| Week 5  2.19-2.23 | Naomi Oreskes, Why Trust Science (chapter 1) | Discussion  **Test 1** |
| **Unit 2: Social Ontology and Social Categories** | | |
| Week 6  2.26-3.1 | Deborah Tollefsen, Social Ontology | Discussion |
| Week 7  3.4-3.8 | Helen Longino, Individuals or Populations? | Discussion |
| Week 8  3.11-3.15 | Gregg Henriques and Mariafé Panizo, Defining Mental Disorders and Depression | Discussion |
| Week 9  3.25-3.29 | Sally Haslanger, Gender and race: (What) are they? (What) do we want them to be? | Discussion |
| Week 10  4.3-4.5 | Jorge Gracia, The Nature of Ethnicity, with Special Reference to Hispanic/Latino Identity | Discussion  **Test 2** |
| **Unit 3: How does social science explain social phenomena?** | | |
| Week 11  4.8-4.12 | James Woodward, Explanation in Psychiatry | Discussion |
| Week 12  4.15-4.19 | James Woodward, Explanation in the Social Sciences | Discussion |
| Week 13  4.22-4.26 | Sally Haslanger, What is a (social) structural explanation? | Discussion |
| Week 14  4.29-5.3 | Saray Ayala-López and Erin Beeghly, Explaining Injustice: Structural analysis, Bias and Individuals. | Discussion |
| Week 15  5.6-5.10 | Lauren Ross, What is a social structural explanation? A causal account | Discussion  **Test 3**  **Final paper** (Due 5.10 at 11:59pm.) |

\* All discussions are due Wednesday right before class. Tests will be taken in the classroom on the Friday of the week specified in the schedule.

**VII. course Policies and STUDENT RESOURCES**

* All work done in this course is subject to the CSUS academic honesty policy, which you may read at: [Academic Honesty Policy & Procedures.](https://sacramentostate.policystat.com/policy/11300038/latest) You can also check the [Library’s guide on Plagiarism](https://csus.libguides.com/plagiarism) and *my note on Canvas*.
* If you are experiencing serious distress, you can contact either [Student Health and Counseling Services](https://www.csus.edu/shcs/) or [Peer and Academic Resource Center](https://www.csus.edu/parc/).
* You can check out a laptop at the [CSUS University Library](https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/teaching-learning/laptop-checkout.html).
* If you are experiencing any COVID- like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, loss of smell or taste, nausea, diarrhea, or headache) or have had exposure to someone who has tested positive for COVID, contact [Student Health & Counseling Services (SHCS)](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/) and notify me. More information can be found [here](https://www.csus.edu/return-to-campus/).
* If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments (including pregnancy-related disabilities), please contact [Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/)) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from SSWD is required before any modifications. These adjustments are not retroactive.
* Sac State is committed to supporting students and fostering a campus environment free of sexual misconduct and gender-based discrimination. If a student chooses to disclose to a faculty or staff member an experience related to sexual misconduct which includes, but is not limited to rape, relationship violence, or stalking, all faculty and staff members are obligated to report this disclosure to the university’s Title IX Coordinator. Contact Sac State’s Title IX Coordinator, Skip Bishop, at 916.278.5770 or email at william.bishop@csus.edu. Upon receipt of the report, the Title IX Coordinator will contact you to inform you of your rights and options as a survivor and connect you with support resources, including resolution options for holding accountable the person who harmed you. Students who elect not to discuss their experience with the Title IX Coordinator can speak confidentially to the following confidential resources: Student Health & Counseling Services at The WELL 916.278.6461; [www.csus.edu/shcs](http://www.csus.edu/shcs). Campus Confidential Advocate – Laura Swartzen ([weave@csus.edu](mailto:weave@csus.edu)). On Campus Phone Number: 916.278.5850 (during business hours) WEAVE 24/7 Hotline: 916.920.2952.