

SYLLABUS
PHIL 201 | Philosophy of the Social Sciences / SOC 395 | Sociology Integrative Seminar
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DESCRIPTION

This course will investigate the foundational assumptions at work in the social sciences. Emerging in the wake of modernity and in concert with the rise of positivism, the social sciences have, since the beginning, been concerned with basic philosophical questions when reflecting on “method.” What does it mean to have “scientific” knowledge of the “social” world? What counts as “knowledge?” What is “science” in such a context? How has our understanding of “science” changed after the demise of positivism? What are the implications of hermeneutics for scientific observation and the notion of “objectivity?” And what are the implications of that for the project of the social sciences? Is positivism still with us? How are we to understand the “social?” Just what *are* human beings, and thus what is the nature of human community? Is social science merely *descriptive*, or also critical and *prescriptive*?

We will engage these questions of method and theory in the social sciences, with a particular interest in the challenge of reductionism. More specifically, we will be tackling these issues from a Christian perspective with a Reformed accent, drawing on the philosophical and theological resources of the Augustinian Christian tradition to interrogate regnant assumptions in the social sciences. We will be particularly interested in the goals of social scientific theory and research, attentive to the central role of justice in the articulation of a Christian philosophy of the social sciences.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand key theories in the social sciences, as well as the philosophical and theological assumptions operative behind them, including the Christian heritage of the social sciences
- Appreciate the historical emergence of the social sciences
- Critically engage dominant paradigms in the social sciences from the perspective of a Christian worldview as articulated in the Augustinian and Reformed tradition
- Articulate the core aspects of the Christian worldview as it bears upon our understanding of the human person and human society
- See the fundamental philosophical issues in the methodologies of the social sciences
- Appreciate the central concern of social justice in the social sciences
- Engage in social scientific research that is attentive to the role of philosophical and theological assumptions in data gathering and analysis
- Articulate findings in the social sciences through advanced writing

TEXTS

Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (Oxford, 2003).

John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Blackwell, 2006).

Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke, 2004).

Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Eerdmans, 1983).

On reserve

Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy, and Newton Malony, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Fortress, 1998).

Herman Dooyeweerd, *A Christian Theory of Social Institutions* (Dooyeweerd Foundation, 1986).

Paul Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard Mouw, eds., *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science* (University Press of America, 1989).

W. James Bradley and Kurt C. Schaefer, *The Uses and Misuses of Data and Models: The Mathematization of the Human Sciences* (Sage, 1998).

James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy* (Baker Academic, 2004).

OTHER READINGS [handouts provided]

Donald Black, "The Epistemology of Pure Sociology," *Law & Social Inquiry* 20 (1995): 829-870.

-----, "Dreams of Pure Sociology," *Sociological Theory* 18 (2000): 343-367.

-----, "The Purification of Sociology," *Contemporary Sociology* 29 (2000): 705-709.

Lori Gottlieb, "How Do I Love Thee? The New Science of Love," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 2006): 58-70.

Daniel Izuzquiza, "Can a Gift Be Wrapped? John Milbank and Supernatural Sociology," *Heythrop Journal* 67 (2006): 387-404.

Christian Batalden Scharen, "'Judicious narratives,' or ethnography as ecclesiology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 125-142.

Iain Wallace, "Territory, Typology, Theology: Geopolitics and the Christian Scriptures," *Geopolitics* 11 (2006): 209-230.

Bruce Wearne, "Deism and the Absence of Christian Sociology," *Philosophia Reformata* 68 (2003): 1-22.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance, close reading of texts before class, thoughtful participation in class discussions, completion of homework assignments, and timely submission of all assignments is a base-line requirement for success in this class. [10%]
2. Two **synthetic reflection papers** on assigned questions integrating readings from the course. Further details will be provided in class. [2x20%=40%]
3. One **film reflection paper** on a film viewed in class. [10%]
4. A **final paper** based on a collaborative research project on religion and place, with attention to issues of theory and the philosophical and theological assumptions that inform social scientific research and analysis Professor Mulder (Sociology) and Smith (Philosophy) have been named Faculty Fellows of the Calvin Center for Social Research (2006-2008). This is a multi-year research project that seeks to better understand evangelical perceptions of "the city." You have the opportunity to play a significant role in this study. Your responsibility will be to interview two individuals (digitally recorded with instruments provided by the professors), transcribe the interviews, and write a reflection paper based on the research (a guide with orienting questions will be provided). The reflection paper, integrating the research with readings and themes discussed in the class, will be 7-8 pages in length. One class period will be devoted to training students for this project. We will be making efforts to have students interview a range of individuals based on geography and religious affiliation. [40%]

GRADING

Your final grade will be calculated on the basis of the above breakdown; all assignments must be completed to receive a final grade. Grade/percentile equivalents for the course are as follows:

A 100-95	B+ 89-87	C+ 79-77	D 69-65
A- 94-90	B 86-83	C 76-73	F 64-0
	B- 82-80	C- 72-70	

Satisfactory completion of assignments constitutes C-level work; B-level work exhibits a comprehension and understanding of philosophical concepts, terms, and categories (and their relation) and well-reasoned reflection on the topics and texts; A-level work is characterized by all of the above plus a creative appropriation, understanding, and communication of philosophical ideas, as well as passionate attention to the readings and issues of the course.

ACADEMIC ETHICS

The instructor, and Calvin College, highly value academic integrity and excellence. As such, no violation of academic integrity (e.g., plagiarism, use of sources without citation, use of internet resources without documentation) will be tolerated. (Students are responsible for consulting and understanding the College's policy on Academic Integrity, *Calvin College Student Conduct Code*, I.13-4). Any violation of academic integrity will result in failure of the course and referral to the Dean, where the violation will be put on record.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to revision)

OUTLINE

- I. What are the social sciences?
 - A. The Emergence of the Social Sciences: History (Dilthey, Milbank)
 - B. Social Theory, Social Science, and Normativity (Smith, Taylor, Dooyeweerd)
- II. Normativity in the Social Sciences
 - A. Theories of the Human Person (Smith)
 - B. Accounts of “Society”: Power, Privilege, Peace (Taylor, Milbank, Dooyeweerd)
 - C. Description or Prescription? Justice in the Social Sciences
 - 1. History (Frankfurt School)
 - 2. Societal Shalom (Wolterstorff)
- III. Christian Social Science? Imagining Society Otherwise
 - A. Diagnoses of Modernity: Taylor, Wolterstorff, Milbank
 - B. *Shalom* and the Social Sciences: Wolterstorff
 - C. The Earthly City and the City of God: Competing Visions of Human Society (Milbank)

Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments
January	30T	Introductory Session: Who are we? Why do we care about the social sciences?
February	1R	What is social science? The specter of reductionism
	6T	“How Do I Love Thee?,” <i>Atlantic Monthly</i> [handout]
	8R	Whence social science? Historical considerations
	13T	Milbank, 1-25
	15R	Sociology as heresy?
	20T	Milbank, 51-74 [75-100]
	22R	The human person in the social sciences: regnant paradigms and alternative visions
	27T	Smith, 3-43
March	1R	Discussion: Reductionism across the social sciences [Guest lecturer]
	6T	Milbank, 259-277
	8R	Introduction to the <i>Subdivided by Faith</i> Project
	13T	Humans as believing animals
	15R	Smith, 45-61
	20T	Human as story-telling animals
	22R	Smith, 63-94
	27T	Theory at work: “social imaginaries”
April	1R	Taylor, 23-48
	6T	Reflection Paper 1 Due
	8R	Christian worldview as social imaginary
	13T	Olthuis, “On Worldviews” [handout]
	15R	Formation of the Social Imaginary: <i>The Persuaders</i>
	20T	Discussion of <i>The Persuaders</i>
	22R	Justice, Social Science, & Social Transformation
	27T	Wolterstorff, 3-22
	29R	***SPRING BREAK***
	3T	Outline of the “modern” social imaginary
	5R	Taylor, 1-22
	10T	Elements of the <i>modern</i> social imaginary, I
	12R	Taylor, 69-99
	17T	Elements of the <i>modern</i> social imaginary, II
	19R	Taylor, 101-107, 143-161
	24T	Formation of the social imaginary: <i>Brazil</i>
	26R	<i>Brazil</i> , cont’d
	29R	Discussion of <i>Brazil</i>
	3T	Film Reflection Due
	5R	Diagnosis of the modern social imaginary, I
	10T	Wolterstorff, 23-41 (42-68)
	12R	Diagnosis of the modern social imaginary, II
	17T	Milbank, 278-326 [TBD]
	19R	[Academic Advising]
	24T	Imagining society otherwise, I: Justice & wealth
	26R	Wolterstorff, 69-98
May	1T	Imagining society otherwise, II: politics and cities
	3R	Wolterstorff, 99-140
	5R	Imagining social theory otherwise, I
	10T	Milbank, 382-413
	12R	Imagining social theory otherwise, II
	17T	Milbank, 413-442
	19R	Reflection Paper 2 Due

Final Research Paper Due: Wed., May 16, 1:30pm