

SYA 7933, Section 13H2  
Friday 1:55 – 4:55 pm  
120 Pugh Hall

Dr. Charles Gattone  
Department of Sociology  
University of Florida

## **SOCIAL SCIENCE EPISTEMOLOGY FALL 2022**

The interpretive nature of social science is one of the reasons it has been such a contested space throughout modern history. When researchers develop new ideas about their subject matter, they are unavoidably engaged in an ongoing struggle to define social reality. The notion that social scientists are neutral observers gathering value-free information no longer carries much weight in the realm of social theory. It is crucial for researchers interested in improving the quality of their work to recognize this premise and reflect on it as they carry out their investigations and interpret their findings. This seminar provides an opportunity to critically examine a range of epistemological orientations in the social science and consider their connections to social research. We will focus on some of the strengths and weaknesses of these orientations and reflect on various ways to approach social inquiry that take these features into account. The goal of the seminar is to more fully understand the epistemological issues involved in social research as a way to enhance the caliber of our analyses and broaden the perspicacity of our conclusions.

The seminar will be organized on the basis of class discussion, lecture, and review of the reading material. Course requirements include: weekly reading responses, class participation, two group facilitations, and a final paper.

Dr. Gattone's office hours are on Thursday from 2 to 4 p.m. Office: 3352 Turlington Hall  
e-mail address: [cgattone@ufl.edu](mailto:cgattone@ufl.edu)

### Required Readings

Lee McIntyre and Alex Rosenberg (editors) *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2017, ISBN 978-1-138-82575-8).

Available on Ares through Canvas or via the following link:

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ufl/detail.action?docID=4766989>

There are also required articles and book chapters available on Canvas.

Grades for the course will be determined on the basis of the following four requirements:

### Reading Responses

One of the primary responsibilities of seminar participants is to write a brief response to the assigned readings each week. This can be in the form of an analytical critique or an essay outlining a specific position regarding the readings. These will be submitted via Canvas the night before class and discussed in the seminar. The goal of the response

paper is not to summarize the main points of the readings, but to focus on a particular aspect of an author's position and respond to it on the basis of your own insight and criticisms.

### Facilitation

Each student will be responsible for facilitating the discussion of the readings for two class sessions. The goal of the facilitation is not to present an overview of the readings, but to develop an introductory critique of them and raise questions to the class as a way to initiate and sustain discussion. Facilitators should prepare their critique and questions in advance of their sessions and for one of the sessions put together a written critique of the readings in the form of a paper (approximately five pages), which should then be submitted in lieu of the individual reading response for that week. This paper is due the evening prior to the facilitation.

### Class Participation

One of the major goals of the seminar is to encourage students to develop a working understanding of the concepts discussed in class and in the readings. The task of each student in this regard is to prepare critical comments prior to each session and raise them in our weekly conversations. It is thus very important that every member of the seminar contribute to the discussions of these authors and the social issues involved.

### Final Paper

The final paper can be organized on the basis of several possible approaches. One is to develop an assessment and critique of an author we have studied, focusing on a single theme in that author's work and forming a critical appraisal of it. Another is to compare the ideas of two authors and provide a comparative evaluation and assessment of their positions. Other approaches may be acceptable provided they are approved by the professor prior to writing. The subject matter and basic argument of the paper should be submitted in the form of a written abstract consisting of one or two paragraphs. The paper itself should be approximately ten pages in length.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

- 8/26 Introduction to the Course  
Pierre Bourdieu – “Introduction: Epistemology and Methodology”  
*The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*
- 9/2 Positivism  
Vincent Guillin – “Comte and the Positivist Vision”  
Charles Gattone – Positivism: Cutting Through the Myths”  
*A Balanced Epistemological Orientation for the Social Sciences*  
Optional:  
Warren Schmaus – “Durkheim and the Methods of Scientific Sociology”  
*The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science*

- 9/9 Relativism  
 “Relativism” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/#1.2>  
 Charles Gattone – “Relativism: Truth in the Eye of the Beholder”  
 Optional:  
 Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1986) *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, second edition, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 9/16 Interpretivism  
 Brian Fay – “Verstehen and the Reaction Against Positivism”  
*The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science*  
 Charles Gattone – “Interpretivism: Finding Meaning in Everyday Life”  
*A Balanced Epistemological Orientation for the Social Sciences*  
 Optional:  
 Kenneth Baynes – “Interpretivism and Critical Theory”  
*The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science*
- 9/23 Intersubjectivism  
 Richard Rorty – Excerpt from *Philosophy as Poetry*  
 Charles Gattone – “Intersubjectivism: The Quest for Common Ground”  
*A Balanced Epistemological Orientation for the Social Sciences*
- 9/30 Power and Knowledge  
 Michel Foucault – Excerpt from *Power / Knowledge*  
 Pierre Bourdieu – “Vive la Crise!”  
 Dorothy Smith – “Methods of Writing Patriarchy”

**(Homecoming – 10/7 – No Classes)**

- 10/14 Culture and Consciousness  
 Clifford Geertz – “Ideology as a Cultural System”  
*The Interpretation of Cultures*  
 Alfred Schütz – “Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action”  
*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*
- 10/21 Epistemology and Research Methods I  
 Howard Becker – “The Epistemology of Qualitative Research”  
 Kathy Charmaz – “Constructionism and the Grounded Theory Method”  
*Constructing Grounded Theory*  
 Rebecca Hanson, Patricia Richards – “Constructing Ethnographic Knowledge”

- 10/28 Epistemology and Research Methods II  
 Thomas Kuhn – Excerpt from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*  
 Bent Flyvbjerg – Excerpt from *Making Social Science Matter*  
 Eleonora Montuschi – “Objectivity”  
*The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science*
- 11/4 Epistemological Considerations – Race and Ethnicity  
 Margaret Hunter – “Rethinking Epistemology, Methodology, and Racism”  
*Race & Society*  
 Cheryl E. Matias and Peter M. Newlove, “Better the Devil You See Than the One  
 You Don’t” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*

**(November 11<sup>th</sup> – Veteran’s Day – No Classes)**  
**(Abstract of final paper due November 13<sup>th</sup>)**

- 11/18 Gender and Epistemology  
 Sandra Harding – Excerpt from *Is Science Multicultural?: Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies*  
 Elizabeth Anderson – “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and Defense” *Hypatia*  
 Lisa Bergin, 2002, “Testimony, epistemic difference, and privilege: how feminist epistemology can improve our understanding of the communication of knowledge,” *Social Epistemology*.

**(November 23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> – Thanksgiving Break)**

- 12/2 Forging an Enlightened Epistemological Orientation for the Social Sciences  
 Charles Gattone – “Conclusion”  
*A Balanced Epistemological Orientation for the Social Sciences*

**(Final paper due 12/9)**

*Statement of University Policies:* All students are required to sign a statement at registration acknowledging that they understand and agree to abide by the academic honesty guidelines of the university. *Disability Policy:* Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will then provide documentation for the student to present to the professor.