

Courses taught by Prof. Dr. Hans Blokland

In Holland, Germany, Belgium and France I have taught courses for BA, MA and PhD-students in political science, sociology, economics, history and philosophy. For most courses student-evaluations are available.

Ethical and political pluralism, and some other truths

The political theory of pluralism has been the most important paradigm of Anglo-Saxon political science from about the forties until the end of the seventies. Also current political science can only be properly understood in the context of the debate on pluralism. To its most important founders belong Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom. Although in academic circles the theory of political pluralism has come under attack, it could be defended that in practical, daily politics it is still the motivating and justifying force. Political pluralism is strongly related to ethical pluralism, eminently formulated by Isaiah Berlin. Ethical pluralism could be considered as the defining characteristic of western civilization. It lays the foundation for, among others, the concept of freedom.

In this course some pivotal texts within pluralist theory are discussed. Most attention will be devoted to the work of Isaiah Berlin, Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom. What do their views have in common? What criticism have they provoked? What is their current relevance, especially in a world where concentrations of economic and political power seem to threaten social, political and cultural pluralism and where the attractiveness of non-pluralist worldviews seems to grow? And can pluralism cope with modernization, with processes of rationalization, differentiation and individualization, processes which seem to make current structures of democratic decision making superseded and irrelevant?

Literature: a reader with texts of Berlin, Dahl, Lindblom, Dewey, Popper, Truman, Brecht, Ricci, Gray, and Blokland. (MA and PhD)

Power: what it is, where it is and how we can know - a search for the epistemological possibilities of social and political knowledge

Distinctive for the Continental, *Sozialwissenschaftliche* tradition of social and political science has been its awareness of the deciding influence of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical assumptions on the observation, description, and explanation of social and political phenomena. In this course this influence is illustrated via a concept which is relevant for almost all research in social and political science: Power.

Power has been the defining concept of political science for decades. Nevertheless, from the mid-seventies onwards, power slowly disappeared from the research-agenda, as well as, the public agenda. Methodological problems, some saturation or weariness and a changing political climate caused this development. Although not necessarily related to this, since then, social inequality and, partly as a result

of this, political inequality has strongly increased in most Western political systems. For that reason, the distribution of power has again attracted the attention of social and political scientists. At the beginning of the century the *American Political Science Association*, for instance, set up a task-force to investigate the consequences of the development of excessive social inequalities for democracy. This task-force published several reports in which political scientists were urged to take up the subject of power again. Social and political irrelevance would otherwise threaten the discipline.

The discourse on power, starting in the fifties, will be analyzed in particular from an epistemological perspective: how and what can we know about the distribution of power in our societies.

Over the years the debate on power turned into a debate on methodology and epistemology. This debate in particular caused the evaporating of political science into many different islands with their own research questions, methodologies, discourses, conferences, journals, and departments. Thus, an analysis of the discourse on power also constitutes an introduction to the philosophy of science of social and political science. Via power we can analyze the epistemological possibilities of social and political knowledge.

Literature: A reader with pivotal texts of, among others, Wright Mills, Hunter, Dahl, Domhoff, Bachrach & Baratz, Spinrad, Walton, Ball, Blokland, Lindblom, Vogel, Hayward, Foucault, Potters & Sloof, Dür, Shapiro, Mead, Jacobs & Skocpol, APSA Task Force, Winters & Page. (MA and PhD)

Political Malaise and the Political Theory of Pluralism

The political discontent, or malaise, that typifies most modern democracies is mainly caused by the widely shared feeling that the political freedom of citizens to influence the development of their society and, related to this, their personal life, has become rather limited. We can only address this discontent when we rehabilitate politics, the deliberate, joint effort to give direction to society and to make the best of ourselves. In this seminar we examine this challenge via a critical appraisal of the pluralist conception of politics and democracy. The political theory of pluralism has been the dominant paradigm of Anglo-Saxon political science since the forties. Current political science can only be properly understood in the context of the debate on pluralism. Also in practical, daily politics it is still the motivating and justifying force.

The pluralist conception was formulated by, above all, Robert A. Dahl, one of the most prominent political scholars and democratic theorists of the last half century. Taking his work as the point of reference, this seminar not only provides an illuminating history of political science, told via Dahl and his critics. It also offers a revealing analysis as to what progress we have made in our thinking on pluralism and democracy, and what progress we could make, given the epistemological constraints of the social sciences.

Above and beyond this, the development and the problems of pluralism and democracy are explored in the context of the process of modernization. We specifically discuss the extent to which individualization, differentiation and rationalization contribute to the current political malaise in those countries which adhere to a pluralist political system.

Literature: A reader with pivotal texts (Latham, Dahl, Lindblom, Dror, Eldersveld et al, Conn, Lynn, Ackerman & Fishkin, Delli Carpini & Keeter, Shapiro, Mead, Von Wright) and H.T.Blokland. 2011. *Pluralism, Democracy and Political Knowledge*. Burlington (VT) and Farnham: Ashgate. (MA and PhD).

What prospects for social and political science? Creating useable knowledge for democratic societies

In the last 15 years, within the social and political sciences more and more doubts have developed about the prevailing search for objective, causal regularities and universal theories. This highly expensive but largely fruitless search is almost universally imposed on academic scholars. The social sciences persist in imitating the natural sciences at the cost of public relevance. According to a growing number of critics, social and political scholars should instead develop empirically-grounded normative arguments aimed at improving the deliberations in the public sphere about the futures of our societies. In this seminar we seek to assess the extent of this discrepancy and its impact on the creation of “usable” knowledge. We especially go into the debates in the last 15 years, debates in political science culminating in the “Perestroika movement” and in sociology in a call for “Public Sociology”.

Literature: Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2001. *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again*; Flyvbjerg, Bent, Todd Landman and Sanford Schram (eds). 2012. *Real Social Science: applied Phronesis*; Burawoy, Michael. 2005. For public sociology (2004 American Sociological Association Presidential address); Nyden, Philip, Leslie Hossfeld and Gwendolyn Nyden, 2012. *Public Sociology: Research, Action, and Change*; and a reader with texts of, among others, Mead, Walker, Shapiro, Smith, Jacobs and Skocpol, Gans, Patterson, Laitin, American Sociological Association Task Force on Institutionalizing Public Sociologies, Braithwaite, and Holmwood. (MA and PhD)

Inquiry and Change: How to Change Society in Incremental Steps via Usable Knowledge

In this seminar we investigate the possibilities of social and political science to contribute to politics, public discourse and public policymaking. This will be done via the intellectual biography of the American political scholar Charles E. Lindblom (1917), one of the most cited scholars in the last half century in the fields of political science and public administration. His work forms an exemplary illustration of the development of our thinking on policymaking, usable knowledge and social and political change. Practical examples of different policy fields (education, culture, media, urban planning) will put the discussion into context.

Literature: highlights of the work of Lindblom (‘The science of muddling through’ 1959, selections from *The Intelligence of Democracy* 1965, *Politics and Markets* 1975, *Usable Knowledge* 1979, and *Inquiry and Change* 1990), critical commentaries on this work (Dror, Anderson, Etzioni, Goodin, Hawkesworth, Lowi, Manley, Vogel, Wildavsky) and other texts putting this work into a wider perspective (Blokland 2011 *Pluralism, Democracy and Political Knowledge*). (BA, MA)

Workshop for work in progress

In 2009 I founded and until 2013 I organized and chaired a weekly workshop for work in progress for the PhD's of the Berlin Graduate School of the Social Sciences. PhD's presented and discussed together (parts of their) their work. The confrontation with different paradigms and disciplines was hoped to prevent parochialism and scholasticism.

Research Design

This course was given in the context of the Master Research Training Program (MA RTP) in Social Sciences of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Students already having a MA in one of the social sciences prepare themselves in this program for writing a dissertation. The MA-thesis consists of a research proposal for a dissertation and the related literature review. Pivotal question in the course is: Which research design fits which research question? Topics discussed were, among others, qualitative and quantitative research, case-studies, comparative research, case-selection, causality and relevance, this all in the context of the current methodological debates in social and political science.

Literature: reader with texts of Schmitter (2008), King, Keohane & Verba (1994), Munck (1999), Abbott (2004), Goertz (2006), Gerring (2007), Della Porta (2008), and Brady & Collier (2004).

Literature Review

How to write a literature review for a research proposal and a dissertation: which topics should be addressed, which literature should be used, which questions should be answered? (PhD).

Main Themes in Contemporary Social and Political Science

In this introductory course pivotal conceptions of and debates in the contemporary social and political sciences are examined: modernization, rationalization, individualization, differentiation, bureaucratization, marketization, globalization, socialization and identity, mass-media and new social media, relativism and postmodernism, social inequality and exclusion, social capital, citizenship, civil society, democracy and deliberation, political apathy (Politikverdrossenheit), populism, subjective wellbeing, happiness.

Literature: Fulcher, James and John Scott. 2011. *Sociology* (4th edition). New York: Oxford University Press. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Statistisches Bundesamt und Wissenschaftszentrum für Sozialforschung. 2011. *Datenreport 2011. Ein Sozialbericht für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, zwei Bänder. Bonn. Reader with articles from newspapers and magazines (BA).

Great Books

In the regular curriculums at universities there is not much room for classical books, often to the disappointment of students. Specialization within the human and social sciences has as a consequence that wide-ranging books habitually covering several disciplines and paradigms, do not fit. Moreover, students are usually informed about the central ideas of the authors concerned via textbooks. Frequently, the

implicit assumption is that scientific progress has made these books obsolete and that their significance is only historical. In this course we investigate to which extent this is actually the case: what have we learned since the book in question was published? In case there has not been much progress, what could explain this? Other reasons to read the original texts are that interpretations never replace the original texts and that the confrontation with these texts has proven to inspire and motivate every new generation of students.

Examples of Great Books are:

- Plato. 380 BC. *Politeia*
- Hobbes, Th. 1651. *Leviathan*
- Machiavelli, N. 1532. *Il Princip*
- Mill, J.S. 1859. *On Liberty*.
- Berlin, I. 1958. *Two Concepts of Liberty*
- Rawls, J. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*.
- Popper, K.R. 1945. *The Open Society and its Enemies*
- Dahl, R.A. & Lindblom, Ch.E. 1953. *Politics, Economics, and Welfare*
- Brecht, A. 1959. *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*.
- Almond, G and Verba, S. 1963. *The Civic Culture*.
- Tocqueville, A. de. 1835. *Democracy in America*.
- Durkheim, E. 1897. *Suicide*.
- Simmel, G. 1907, *Die Philosophie des Geldes*
- Weber, M. 1924. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft/Wissenschaft als Beruf/Politik als Beruf*
- Mannheim, K. 1940. *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*
- Elias, N. 1939. *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation : soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*
- Schumpeter, J. 1942. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.
- Polanyi, K. 1944. *The Great Transformation*.
- Smith, A. 1793. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*
- Marx, K. 1867. *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*
- Keynes, J.M. 1936. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*
- Darwin, Ch.R. 1866. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggles for Life*
- Freud, S. 1930. *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*
- Huizinga, J. 1938. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*

Media, Pluralism and Democracy

The media play a pivotal role in democracies. They inform citizens, control states, foster cultural and political pluralism, create a public sphere. The traditional mass media, especially the written ones, have come more and more under pressure, though. It is questionable whether the new digital media are able to take over their role. This poses the question in which ways democracies are harmed by this development and what societies can do about it. (BA).

Literature: a reader with texts of, among others, Dahl, Fishkin, Postman, Habermas, Fulcher and Scott, Baumgartner & Morris, Blokland, Boyd & Ellison, Brundidge & Rice.

Cultural Politics

Definitions of cultural politics depend on conceptions of politics and culture. In this course we will discuss policies with respect to the arts, the mass media and higher education in several western democracies, as well as their normative justifications. How could political interventions in these spheres be justified? Which kinds of interventions could be currently needed? Are interventions threats to freedom and pluriformity or instead needed, as some argue, to rescue autonomy, quality, pluriformity, and vitality in a functional rational sea of market thinking? (BA)

Literature: Liessmann, Konrad Paul. 2008. *Theorie der Unbildung: Die Irrtümer der Wissensgesellschaft*. München: Piper. Haselbach, Dieter, et al. 2012. *Der Kulturinfarkt: Von Allem zu viel und Überall das Gleiche, Eine Polemik über Kulturpolitik, Kulturstaat, Kultursubvention*. München: Knaus. Reader with texts of, among others, Grafton, Piereson, Taylor, Head, Steinfeld, Dworkin, Feinberg, Brighthouse, Habermas, Alterman, Amsler, Tomlinson.