

## EXPLANATION IN ART/HISTORY/SCIENCE STRUCTURE

*Time & Place* Second floor seminar room, Philosophy Building (5 Washington Place)  
Tuesday 1–3 PM

*Texts* Some readings can be found by following the links embedded in the reading list; the remainder will be posted online at [www.nyu.edu/classes/stevens/ExplnF14](http://www.nyu.edu/classes/stevens/ExplnF14). A user name and password are required (to be announced in class).

*Content* How does explanation or understanding in the social sciences, humanities (our central example will be history), and the arts differ from explanation in the natural sciences? The view that there is a deep divide between the two has been neologised in a series of famous terminological oppositions: the Naturwissenschaften versus Geisteswissenschaften, erklären versus verstehen, the nomothetic versus the idiographic, STEM versus the humanities. In this seminar we investigate the divide, using theories of explanation in natural science as a foil to think in particular about explanation in history and aesthetics.

Topics will include: the idea of understanding something in all its individuality, rather than by subsuming it under generalizations; narrative explanation; the availability and theoretical utility (or otherwise) of general principles of taste, or laws of history; the role of reason in critical discussion; the relative importance of experience, imagination and feeling in devising and assessing historical and artistic explanations; and the role (or otherwise) of concepts in aesthetic engagement.

*Evaluation* Your grade is based on two papers (50% each).

- The first paper should be 10 to 12 pages long. The second paper may be another essay of the same length on a different topic, or a 20 to 24 page extension and rewrite of the first. If you pursue this latter option, then, you will submit a 12 page paper and then a 24 page paper that is based on (and may incorporate all of) the shorter paper.
- The first paper is due on November 4th. The second paper is due on the last day of term, which is December 12th.

- In the event of your taking an incomplete, all coursework must be submitted before the first day of classes of the spring semester, or you will receive a failing grade. No extensions: this is a fixed deadline.

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