

HPSC2022 Philosophy of Social Science

Course Syllabus

2013-14 session | Dr Emma Tobin | e.tobin@ucl.ac.uk

Course Information

What is the method of social science (e.g. anthropology, economics, sociology, psychology etc.)? Do all social sciences use the same scientific method and how does this compare to natural science? Should we even aspire to using the so called scientific method for investigating the social world, given its shortcomings in the value laden social sphere? Is there a compromise or must we renege on objectivity when faced with inquiry into the social world? These questions will be examined against the background of general topics in the philosophy of the social sciences including the explanation and interpretation of action; naturalist and hermeneutic social theory; reductionism and methodological individualism; rational choice theory and relativism. More general topics in philosophy of science, such as theories of scientific explanation, causation and laws will also be discussed in relation to social science.

Basic course information

Course website:	http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/staff/tobin/hpsc2022
Moodle Web site:	https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=12887
Assessment:	One Essay (3,000 words) (50%), One exam (3 hours) (50%)
Timetable:	www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/hpsc
Prerequisites:	['no pre-requisites']
Required texts:	['no required texts']
Course tutor(s):	Dr Emma Tobin
Contact:	e.tobin@ucl.ac.uk t: 020 76791321
Web:	http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/staff/tobin
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room 2.4a
Office hours:	Monday 3-4; Thursday 2-3

Schedule

UCL Week	Topic	Date	Activity
6	Lecture: Introduction Seminar	[3-10-13]	Read Lecture Reading Video + Questions
7	Lecture: Naturalism and the Unity of Science Seminar	[10-10-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
8	Lecture: Methodological Individualism Seminar	[17-10-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
9	Lecture: Rational Choice Theory and Folk Psychology	[24-10-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
10	Lecture: Relativism about Rationality	[31-10-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
11	Reading Week	[7-11-13]	
12	Lecture: The Prisoners Dilemma	[14-11-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
13	Lecture: Functionalism	[21-11-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
14	Lecture: Social Ontology	[28-12-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
15	Lecture: Social Scientific Laws	[5-12-13]	Read Lecture Reading Read Seminar Reading
16	Lecture: Ethical Issues in Social Scientific Research	[12-12-13]	Read Lecture Reading Bring Case Study to Seminar

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
Essay	[An essay of your choice to be agreed with the Tutor tbc in the Seminars]	[November 29 th 2013 23:59]	3000
Exam	[3 hour exam in summer]	Summer 2013	3 hour exam

Assignments

Essays must be submitted via Moodle

In order to be deemed 'complete' on this module, students must attempt both the essay and the examination in the summer.

Criteria for assessment

The departmental marking guidelines for individual items of assessment can be found in the STS Student Handbook.

Aims and Objectives

Aims:

To teach students the basic foundational thinkers and topics in philosophy of social science.

Objectives:

Students will be able to evaluate the key philosophical accounts of many core topics in the philosophy of social science.

Students will be able to write philosophically cohesive essays, where philosophical theories are explained and arguments for them critically evaluated.

Students will be able to discuss philosophical arguments systematically and present these to their peers.

Reading list:

Useful Background Reading:

Rosenberg, A. (1995), *The Philosophy of Social Science* 2nd edition, Colorado: Westview Press.

Hollis, M. (1994), *The Philosophy of Social Science*, Colorado: Westview Press.

H Kincaid, (1996), *Philosophical Foundations of the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Little, D. (1991), *Varieties of Social Explanation*, Colorado: Westview Press.

Trigg, R. (1985), *Understanding Social Science: A Philosophical Introduction to the Social Sciences*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Collections of Articles on Philosophy of Social Science:

Braybrooke, D. (ed.), *Philosophical Problems of the Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan, 1965.

Brodbeck, M. (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan, 1968.

Martin, M. and McIntyre, L. (eds.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, MIT Press, 1994.

Natanson, M. (ed.), *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: A Reader*, New York: Random House, 196

Lecture and Seminar Reading:

(1) Lecture One: Introduction

Lecture Reading:

Hollis, M. Introduction, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1-20.

Seminar Activity:

Please watch the **video** on moodle as a case study for discussion in class. Think about the questions posted on moodle and bring along your answers to class.

(2) Lecture Two: Naturalism vs. the Disunity of Science

Lecture Reading:

Hollis, M. (1994), 'Positive Science: The Empiricist Way' in *The Philosophy of Social Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Chapter 3.

Seminar Reading:

Fodor, J. (1974), "Special Sciences (or The Disunity of the Sciences as a working hypothesis)", *Synthese*, 28(2): 97-115.

(3) Lecture Three: Methodological Individualism

Lecture Reading:

Heath, J. (2010), Methodological Individualism, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Online.

Seminar Reading:

Popper, K. (1944a), "The Poverty of Historicism I", *Economica*, 11: 86-103.

(4) Lecture 4: Rational Choice Theory and Folk Psychology

Required Reading:

Elster, J. (1985), "The Nature and Scope of Rational-Choice Explanation", in Martin, M. and McIntyre, L. (eds.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, MIT Press, 1994, 311-322.

Seminar Reading:

Dennett's "Real Patterns", *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXVIII, 27-51, January 1991.

(5) Lecture 5: Relativism About Rationality

Lecture Reading:

O'Grady, P. "Relativism About Rationality", *Relativism*, Acumen, Chapter 5.

Required Reading:

D. Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: OUP, 1983.

(6) Lecture 6: The Prisoners Dilemma

Lecture Reading:

Hollis, M. "Games with Rational Agents", *The Philosophy of Social Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Chapter 6.

Seminar Reading:

Binmore, K. (1987) "Modelling "Rational Players: Part 1": *Economics and Philosophy*, 3(2) 179-214.

(7) Lecture 7: Functionalism

Lecture Reading:

Durkheim, Emile, "Social Facts" in Martin, M. and McIntyre, L. (eds.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, MIT Press, 1994, 311-322.

Seminar Reading:

Kincaid, H. (1990) "Assessing Functional Explanations in the Social Sciences", *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association I*: 341-354.

(8) Lecture 8: Social Ontology

Lecture Reading:

Hacking, I. (1999) *The Social Construction of What?* Harvard, Harvard University Press, Ch. 1 & 5.

Seminar Reading:

Khalidi, M.A. (2010) "Interactive Kinds", *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*

(9) Lecture 9: Social Scientific Laws

Lecture Reading:

Roberts, J.I. (2003) "There are no Laws of the Social Sciences", *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Science*, Hitchcock, (ed.) Wiley Blackwell. Ch. 7

Seminar Reading:

Kincaid, H. (2003) "There are laws in the Social Sciences" *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Science*, Hitchcock, (ed.) Wiley Blackwell. Ch. 8

(10) Lecture 10: Ethical Issues in Social Science Research

Lecture Reading:

Wilkerson, T.M. (2004) "Individualism and the Ethics of Research on Humans", *NEC Forum*, March, 16(1): 6-26.

Seminar Read

Students will be divided into small groups and expected to present a case study, which reflects ethical issues in social science research.

Course expectations

Students are expected to attend 1 lectures and 1 seminar per week.

Students should read the core readings in advance of each lecture/seminar.

They will be expected to actively participate in seminar discussion.

Students will be asked to present/lead the seminar at the weekly seminars.

Important policy information

Details of college and departmental policies relating to modules and assessments can be found in the STS Student Handbook www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook

All students taking modules in the STS department are expected to read these policies.
