

Introduction to Philosophy of the Social Sciences

PHIL 223

Instructor: Karen Brown
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30 - 3:30
Fridays 12:00 - 1:00
and by appointment



Street Art by Just Cobe. In Runzmatteweg, Freiburg, Germany.

Live Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Wednesdays
1:30 to 2:20

Course Description

In carrying out their work social scientists, knowingly or not, take up positions on philosophical issues. Their choices display beliefs about the kinds of questions the social sciences can answer, what methods are most likely to produce knowledge in their fields and what kind of knowledge we should be looking for. They cast their nets for causal mechanisms or for accounts of meaning. They pin their hopes on empirical methods or on interpretive strategies. They see success in accurate predictions or in an understanding of human experience from the inside. Their choices reveal their underlying philosophy of social science. This course will explore the reasons for choosing one way or another on these issues as we unearth and evaluate the philosophical foundations of the social sciences.

We will begin by considering what makes the social sciences so different from the natural sciences. Then we'll explore the strengths and weaknesses of approaching the social world through behaviourism, functionalism, rational choice theory, social construction theory, standpoint theory, philosophical anthropology and evolutionary psychology. Along the way we will look into the current crisis of replication failures in the social sciences, explore the complexities of the push for evidence-based policy, consider the value of participatory research and investigate the disconnect between philosophical accounts of well being and constructs of well-being in the social sciences.

Class Meetings

All of our class meetings will be conducted over Zoom. You can attend the meetings live from 1:30 to 2:20 Pacific Time on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. You'll find the link to join the live meetings on the Brightspace page. The same link will work for the duration of the course. I encourage you to make it to the live meetings so that you can ask questions, participate in class discussions, meet the other students and give me chance to meet you. But if you do miss class, you can watch recordings of our meetings on Brightspace. To access Brightspace go to bright.uvic.ca and log in with your netlink ID.

Office Hours

I'll be available to meet with you on Zoom during scheduled office hours or by appointment. You'll find the separate link for the office hours on the course Brightspace page. When you join the office hours Zoom meeting you may initially be placed in a waiting room. That will happen if you get there before me or if I am already speaking with a student. Please stay connected and I will let you in as soon as I can.

Technical Help

You'll find a link to the Zoom Help Center on Brightspace along with a link to UVic's *Learn Anywhere* site. That site is designed to help students navigate all aspects of UVic's online learning environment. Don't hesitate to ask me for help with any technical issues you run into. If I can't help I'll find someone who can.

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Texts

Both books are available through the UVic Book Store as both paper editions and ebooks.

Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, eds. **Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction**. Oxford University Press. 2014.

Alexander Rosenberg. **Philosophy of Social Science**. Fifth Edition. Westview Press. 2015.

All additional readings will be available on the Brightspace page.

Course Work

Four online quizzes	5% each
Two take-home exams	25% each
Take-home final exam	30%

Submitting Take-home Exams

Your take-home exams must be submitted on-line through Brightspace. Specific instructions and times submissions are due are posted on Brightspace along with the the exam questions and advice on how to do well on these exams.

You'll have one week to write each of the take-home exams. Unexcused **late submissions** will immediately lose 5% and will lose an additional 5% every 24 hours. If the lateness was unavoidable let me know so that we can waive the late penalty.

Online Quizzes

These will be be timed multiple choice and short answer quizzes that you will take on Brightspace. Each quiz will be available on Brightspace for 8 hours. So you can choose when in that 8 hour window you want to take it. But once you open the quiz you will have only 30 minutes to submit your answers. Information about what to expect on individual quizzes will be posted on Brightspace. If you miss a quiz due to illness or exceptional circumstance contact me immediately to schedule a make-up quiz.

Grading

Grades for the course will be assigned using the UVIC Undergraduate Grading Scale:

Percentage	Grade	
90 - 100	A+	A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations.
85 - 89	A	
80 - 84	A-	
		B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates good comprehension of the course material, good command of the skills needed to work with it, and full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application.
77 - 79	B+	
73 - 76	B	
70 - 72	B-	C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.
65 - 69	C+	
60 - 64	C	D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
50 - 59	D	
		N indicates that the course requirements were not completed.
Below 50	N or F	

Introduction to Philosophy of the Social Sciences

Academic Integrity

The University Policy on Academic Integrity (covering plagiarism, multiple submission, unauthorized use of an editor, falsifying materials, cheating and aiding others to cheat) will be enforced in this course. **You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the policy.** You can find it online in the UVIC Calendar at https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/Sk_0xsM_V?bc=true&bcCurrent=08%20-%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrity&bcGroup=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations&bclItemType=policies

If you have any questions about what this policy requires or any doubts about whether or not you are complying with it, please don't hesitate to ask me about it.

Course Schedule

Readings marked **C/M** are in Cartwright and Montuschi.

Readings marked **R** are in Rosenberg.

Readings marked **B** are available through Brightspace.

Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class and posted on the Brightspace page.

September 9	Chapter 1: What is the Philosophy of Social Science? R Fritz Machlup "Are the Social Sciences Really Inferior?" B
September 15, 16	Chapter 2: The Methodological Divide: Naturalism Versus Interpretation R Lee McIntyre "Complexity and Social Scientific Laws" B
September 22, 23	Eileen Munro "Evidence-Based Policy" C/M Gary Gutting "How Reliable are the Social Sciences?" B Daniel Engber "Sad Face" B
September 25	Q u i z 1 opens at noon —closes at 8 p.m.
September 29, 30	Uljana Feest "Why Replication is Overrated" C/M Chapter 3: The Explanation of Human Action R
October 2	T A K E - H O M E E X A M O N E due at 5 p.m.
October 6, 7	Anna Alexandrova Well-Being C/M Michael Sandel "If I Ruled the World" B
October 13, 14	Chapter 5: Behaviorism in the Behavioral Sciences R
October 16	Q u i z 2 opens at noon —closes at 8 p.m.
October 20, 21	Chapter 6: Problems of Rational Choice Theory R Katie Steele "Choice Models" C/M
October 27, 28	Chapter 7: Social Psychology and the Construction of Society R Hacking "What is Social Construction? The Teenage Pregnancy Example" B Cristina Bicchieri "Norms, conventions, and the Power of Expectations" C/M
October 30	T A K E - H O M E E X A M T W O due at 5 p.m.

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Course Schedule *continued*

November 3, 4 Chapter 8: European Philosophy of Social Science **R**
Chapter 9: Holism and Antireductionism in Sociology and
Psychology **R**

November 6 Quiz 3 opens at noon —closes at 8 p.m.

Reading Break — November 9 through November 11

November 17, 18 Eleonora Montuschi "Scientific Objectivity" **C/M**
Sharon Crasnow "Feminist Standpoint Theory" **C/M**
Alison Wylie "Community-Based Collaborative
Archaeology" **C/M**

November 24, 25 Chapter 10: Functionalism as a Research Program **R**
Mark Risjord "No Strings Attached" **B**

November 27 Quiz 4 opens at noon —closes at 8 p.m.

December 1, 2 Chapter 11: Sociobiology or the Standard Social Science
Model? **R**

December 9 TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM due at 5 p.m.

Territory Acknowledgement

The University of Victoria acknowledges with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Equity

Uvic is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive, supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members. Information about Uvic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are available at [If you have any particular concerns about equity in our course please don't hesitate to contact me.](#)

Religious Accommodation

Information regarding accommodation of religious observance can be located in the UVIC Calendar at <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/r1q0gofdn?bc=true&bcCurrent=10%20-%20Accommodation%20of%20Religious%20Observance&bcGroup=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations&bcItemType=policies>