

Phil 223 A01 Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Sciences Fall 2022

Instructor: Prof. Peter Dietsch
Lectures: MR 11:30-12:50
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Course description

This course aims to provide students with an introductory understanding of the nature of society as well as our understanding of it. In particular, it looks at the philosophical presuppositions of the dominant currents of social scientific theories. How do we explain social phenomena? What does it mean to invoke causal relations in social setting? Is the individual the basic unit of analysis in social science and, if so, in what sense? How is one to understand the distinction between facts and values in social analysis?

Course Website

Online materials will be made available via Uvic Brightspace. Access your customized Brightspace page by signing in to Uvic and clicking on Online Tools. You should see Brightspace as an option.

Texts

Core readings will most likely be available as a course pack for sale at the UVic Bookstore.

Grading System

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90 – 100	A+	9	An 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. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
85 – 89	A	8	
80 – 84	A-	7	
77 – 79	B+	6	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
73 – 76	B	5	
70 – 72	B-	4	
65 – 69	C+	3	A 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.
60 – 64	C	2	
50 – 59	D	1	A 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.
0 – 49	F	0	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is up to the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade during the course that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing

the matter with the TA in a respectful, open-minded manner. If you are still not satisfied with your grade, you can ask for a re-correction of the copy by the instructor. The new grade will count, whether it is higher or lower than the original one.

For additional information regarding undergraduate grades, please consult the [Grading](#) section of the Uvic Undergraduate Calendar.

All evaluations of tests and assignments will be calculated according to percentage scores. Letter grades and grade point scores are listed purely for reference.

Final examinations are the property of Uvic and are not returned. They are available for viewing at the Records Office according to Uvic Examinations procedures and regulations.

Uvic is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all members. Further information regarding Uvic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are located in the Uvic calendar [General University Policies](#), but if you have any particular concerns related to our course please do not hesitate to contact me.

Graded student activities

- 1500-word essay (40%) due on 14 November
[5 percentage points penalty for each 100-word increment over 1500 words, excluding footnotes and bibliography – *everything* else counts; e.g. 1507 words => 5 percentage points penalty; 1623 words => 10 p.p. penalty]
- 2-hour final exam (50%)
- Weekly summaries of readings (400 words; 10 weeks out of 12; 10%)

Policy on Late Assignments

5% per working day will be subtracted from grade unless students are delayed by illness or family emergency.

Plagiarism

Review the [University Policy on Academic Integrity](#) very carefully, and be aware that anti-plagiarism software may be used in this course. Resources will be provided via Brightspace for students seeking guidance about what constitutes plagiarism and how they can avoid it, but it is the responsibility of each student to be informed about these details.

Counseling Services

Many, if not most, students experience some difficulties with their mental health during their years as undergraduate students. Make sure you are familiar with [Uvic Counseling Services](#), which is an excellent resource you have at your disposal on campus. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, but if at any point you can benefit from help with mental health issues, please contact Counseling Services. They genuinely want to help, and why not take advantage of this free resource?

Important Dates

Please consult the Uvic calendar's [Academic Year Important Dates](#) for information about last possible dates to withdraw from courses without penalty, examinations period start/end dates, etc.

Technology in Classroom

Some students require laptops or voice recognition apps for their learning strategies, so I do not prohibit their use in the classroom. However, studies demonstrate that multi-tasking reduces the performance of other nearby students. Therefore, I strongly discourage the use of computers in the classroom. Anyone caught on social media, internet surfing, etc. will be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

Uvic Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response

Learn more about preventing sexualized violence by visiting www.uvic.ca/svp. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized violence and needs advice, and/or support, please contact the Sexualized Violence Resource Office in EQHR, Sedgewick C119; email: svpcoordinator@uvic.ca.

Territory Acknowledgment

The University of Victoria is committed to acknowledging and respecting the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. For information about support for indigenous students and efforts to foster reconciliation, visit the Uvic [Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement](#).

Detailed course plan

Week 1 (Sept 8): Introduction

Complementary literature

- Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, 5th edition, Westview Press, 2016, ch. 1.
- Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, revised and updated edition 2002, ch. 1.

The books from which these chapters are drawn provide good introductions to the philosophy of social science that might prove useful as background reading.

PART I: MODELS OF EXPLANATION

Week 2 (Sept 12 & 15): Methodological naturalism

Compulsory reading

- John Stuart Mill, *System of Logic*, Book 6 ‘On the logic of the Moral Sciences’, chapters 6, 9 and 10.

Complementary literature

- Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, London: Macmillan, 1984 [1893], preface to the first edition.
- Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, 5th edition, Westview Press, 2016, ch. 2.
- Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, revised and updated edition 2002, chs. 2-4.

Week 3 (Sept 19 & 22): The interpretative tradition

Compulsory reading

- Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”, *Review of Metaphysics* 25/1 (1971): 3-51.

Complementary literature

- Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”, in: *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 3–30.
- William Outhwaite, *New Philosophies of Social Science. Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1987, ch. 4.
- Daniel Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*, 1991, ch. 4.

Week 4 (Sept 26 & 29): Causal analysis

Compulsory reading

- Nancy Cartwright, “Causal inference”, in: Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, *Philosophy of Social Science. A New Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 308-26.

Complementary literature

- Daniel Steel, “Social Mechanisms and Causal Inference”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34/1 (2004): 55-78.
- Christopher Hitchcock, “How to be a causal pluralist”, in: P. Machamer and G. Wolters (eds.), *Thinking about Causes: From Greek Philosophy to Modern Physics*, Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2007, 200-21.
- Daniel Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*, 1991, ch. 2.
- Julian Reiss, *The Philosophy of Economics – A Contemporary Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2013, ch. 5.

Week 5 (Oct 3 & 6): Rational choice theory

Compulsory reading

- Amartya Sen, “Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory”, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6/4 (1977): 317-44.

Complementary literature

- Daniel Kahneman, “Maps of Bounded Rationality: A Perspective on Intuitive Judgment and Choice”, Nobel Prize Lecture, 2002.
- Geoffrey Brennan, “Five Rational Actor Accounts of the Welfare State”, *Kyklos* 2/3 (2001), 213-234.
- Shaun Hargreaves-Heap et al., *The Theory of Choice: A Critical Guide*, Blackwell, 1992.
- Jon Elster, “Social Norms and Economic Theory”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 3 (1989), 99-117.

PART II: METHODOLOGICAL DEBATES

Week 6 (Oct 13): Functionalism and materialism (Oct 10: Thanksgiving)

Compulsory reading

- Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, revised and updated edition 2002, ch. 5.

Complementary literature

- Harold Kincaid, “Assessing Functional Explanations in the Social Sciences,” *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, vol. 1990, 1990, pp. 341–354. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/192715.

- Daniel Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*, 1991, ch. 6.
- Van Parijs, Philippe. 1982. "Functionalist Marxism Rehabilitated." *Theory and Society* 11(4): 497–511.

Week 7 (Oct 17 & 20): Methodological individualism

Compulsory reading

- Jon Elster, "The Case for Methodological Individualism," *Theory and Society*, 11 (1982): 453–482, *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/657101>.

Complementary literature

- Harold Kincaid, "Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism," *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1986, pp. 492–513. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/187903.
- Goldstein 'The Inadequacy of the Principle of Methodological Individualism' *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 53, no. 25 (1956), 801-813.
- Watkins 'The Alleged Inadequacy of Methodological Individualism' *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 55, no. 9 (1958), 390-395.

Week 8 (Oct 24 & 27): Modelling

Compulsory reading

- Mary S. Morgan, "What if? Models, fact and fiction in economics" (Keynes Lecture in Economics 2013) *Journal of the British Academy* 2, pp. 231-268.

Complementary literature

- Francesco Guala, "Models, Simulations, and Experiments", in: Magnani, L., Nersessian, N.J. (eds) *Model-Based Reasoning*, Boston, MA: Springer, 2002.
- Milton Friedman, "The methodology of positive economics", in: Milton Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics*, University of Chicago Press, 1953.
- Daniel M. Hausman, "Why look under the hood?", in: Daniel M. Hausman, *Essays on Philosophy and Economics Methodology*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, 70-3.

Week 9 (Oct 31 & Nov 3): Facts and values in social sciences

Compulsory reading

- Max Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, London, Macmillan, 1949, 51-63.
- Amartya Sen, "Accounts Actions and Values: Objectivity of Social Science", in C. Lloyd (ed.), *Social Theory and Political Practice*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, pp. 87-107.

Complementary literature

- Heather Douglas, "Values in Social Science", in: Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, *Philosophy of Social Science. A New Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 162-82.
- Daniel M. Hausman and Michael S. McPherson, *Economic analysis and moral philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, appendix.
- Robert Solow, "Science and ideology in economics", *The Public Interest* (1970), 94-107.

Week 10 (Nov 7): The feminist question in social science (Nov 10: reading break)

Compulsory reading

- Sandra Harding, “After Mr. Nowhere: What Kind of Proper Self for a Scientist?”, *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, 1/1 (2015): 1–22.

Complementary literature

- Alison Wylie, “The Feminist Question in Science: What Does it Mean to ‘Do Social Science as a Feminist?’”, in: Francesco Guala & Daniel Steel (eds.), *The Philosophy of Social Science Reader*, Routledge, 2010, chapter 4.
- Sharon Crasnow, “Feminist Standpoint Theory”, in: Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, *Philosophy of Social Science. A New Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 145-61.

Week 11 (Nov 14 & 17): Evidence-based policy

Compulsory reading

- Nancy Cartwright, “What Are Randomised Controlled Trials Good For?” *Philosophical Studies*, 147/1 (2010), pp. 59–70.
- Sanjay Reddy, “Randomize this! On Poor Economics”, *Review of Agrarian Studies* 2/2(2012): 60-73.

Complementary literature

- Howard White, “An introduction to the use of randomised control trials to evaluate development interventions”, *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 5/1 (2013): 30-49, DOI:10.1080/19439342.2013.764652.
- Julian Reiss, *The Philosophy of Economics – A Contemporary Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2013, ch. 11.
- Angus Deaton, “Instruments, Randomization, and Learning about Development”, *Journal of Economic Literature* 48/2 (2010): 424-55.

Week 12 (Nov 21 & 24): Norms, conventions, institutions

Compulsory reading

- Cristina Bicchieri and Hugo Mercier, “Norms and Beliefs: How Change Occurs”, in: Maria Xenitidou and Bruce Edmonds, *The Complexity of Social Norms*, Springer, 2014, pp. 37-54.

Complementary literature

- Cristina Bicchieri, “The Rules We Live By”, chapter 1 of *The Grammar of Society. The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- John R. Searle, “What is an Institution?”, *Journal of Institutional Economics*, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2005, pp. 1-22.
- Frank Hindriks and Francesco Guala, “Institutions, rules, and equilibria: a unified theory”, *Journal of Institutional Economics* 11/3 (2015): 459-80.

Week 13 (Nov 28 & Dec 1): Behavioural economics and the ‘nudge’

Compulsory reading

- Richard H. Thaler et Cass R. Sunstein, “Libertarian Paternalism”, *The American Economic Review* 93/2 (2003), 175-79.

- Luc Bovens, “The Ethics of Nudge”, in: Till Grüne-Yanoff and Sven-Ove Hansson (eds.), *Preference Change*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2009, 207-19.
- Daniel Kahneman, “A Psychological Perspective on Economics”, *American Economic Review*, 93/2 (2003): 162-168.

Complementary literature

- Julian Reiss, *The Philosophy of Economics – A Contemporary Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2013, ch. 15.