Philosophy of Social Science  
20/21 
Semester 1

Short Course Description 
Philosophy of Science has historically been shaped by questions arising from the natural sciences, and in particular the physical sciences. By contrast, this course addresses philosophical questions arising from the distinctive methods and subject matter of the social sciences. How do social scientists go about finding out about the social world? What particular epistemological challenges do they have to confront? What is the ontological status of this social world? Do social entities simply reduce to natural entities? How do the values embedded in our social world shape social science? How should social science aim to shape this social world? This course provides the opportunity to engage with some of the diverse and controversial answers philosophers have given to these questions. Suitable case studies from different social sciences will be used to illustrate and motivate the philosophical questions.

Course Contacts 
Course Organiser: Dr Jo Wolff

Course Secretary: Miss Ann-Marie Cowe
philinfo@ed.ac.uk

Seminar Time and Venue 
Thursdays, 11:10-13:00 
Venue: DSB 1.20

Seminar Preparation and LEARN 
This is a seminar based class. For each session, you will need to prepare a couple of tasks in advance. These can be found on the LEARN page for the course.

- **Pre-Seminar Question Storm**: a quick exercise to get you started on our topic for the week
- **Case Study**: a short video to watch, typically involving a case study from the social sciences pertinent to our topic for the week
- **Reading**: each week, there is 1 required reading, and 1-2 recommended reading. I will assume that you will have read the required reading, but I recommend that you also have a go at the recommended reading.
Lecture Topics and Readings

Week 1 – Introduction: What are social sciences?
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Week 2 – Epistemology: Replication Crisis?
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Week 3 – Epistemology: Models or Experiments?
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Week 4 – Epistemology/Metaphysics: Explanation
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Week 5 – Metaphysics: Ontology
Required Reading

Recommended Reading
Week 6 – Metaphysics: Social Kinds
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Week 7 – Values: Objectivity
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Week 8 – Values: Evidence Based Policy
Required Reading

Recommended Reading
Donal Khosrowi & Julian Reiss (2019) Evidence-Based Policy: The Tension Between the Epistemic and the Normative, Critical Review, 31:2, 179-197,

Week 9 – Natural and Social Sciences: Naturalism
Required Reading

Recommended Reading
tbd

Week 10 – Natural and Social Sciences: Transdisciplinary research
Required Reading

Recommended Reading
Further advice on Readings
Encyclopaedias are a very good source of extra reading. Avoid Wikipedia (it is often inaccurate on philosophy) but there are good internet encyclopaedias that can be useful:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP)
The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP)

Websites
We also recommend the following as starting points for your research:

PhilPapers
Philosophy Compass
The Diversity Reading List

You will need to know how to track down sources, including electronic journals, using the library search engine DiscoverED.

Assessment

There are two pieces of assessment for this course:

(1) Midterm Take Home Test (40%), 1500 words, released Monday 28 February, Deadline to submit: Thursday, 3 March, 12pm (noon)

(2) Final Essay (60%), 2500 words, due Thursday, 21 April, 12pm (noon)

Word limit penalties
The word count of your essay, including footnotes but excluding bibliography, must not exceed the specified word limit. The precise word count must be written on the coversheet. Overlong essays will be penalised according to the following rule: 1% of the maximum obtainable mark will be deducted for every 100 words, or part thereof, over the word limit. So, exceeding the word limit by 1-100 words incurs a deduction of 1%; exceeding by 101-200 words incurs a deduction of 2%; and so on.

Lateness penalties
For a period of one week after the deadline for submission of an assignment, hardcopy or electronic, 5% of the maximum obtainable mark is deducted for every calendar day by which the submission of the work is delayed. After one week of delay, a mark of zero is recorded for any work received. Any deductions due to late submission will be identified by the UG Teaching Office. You will be informed via email of any deductions applied to your work.
Visiting undergraduates
The assessment arrangements for visiting undergraduates are the same as for other students.

Mark Schemes
For Philosophy-specific marking guidelines go here:
Grade-related marking guidelines for Philosophy
For the University’s general marking scheme go here:
Common Marking Scheme

Learning Resources
Learn
You should regularly check your university email and check for announcements on the course Learn page.

The course Learn page will provide information concerning:
- General information and announcement about the course
- Lecture notes and slides
- Tutorial arrangements
- Information about assessment arrangements

University of Edinburgh Library
The library’s hard-copy and online resources can be searched online via DiscoverEd.

Getting in Touch
If you have a question regarding lecture content you should ask it in your tutorial group and/or visit the relevant lecturer to discuss it during their office hour.

For other specifically academic matters you can contact the Course Organiser.

If you have questions not specifically about lecture content, you should contact the Course Secretary.