

**Knowing and the Known:  
The Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences  
[DRAFT course syllabus, 23 June 2017]**

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This course will meet Thursday, Friday, and Saturday 10:00-12:00 and 14:00-17:00 during the “refresher” period preceding the main Summer School. Class sessions will generally be a mix of lecture, discussion, and workshop. Please come to class with the session’s readings done.

Course Outline

This course is a broad survey of epistemological, ontological, and methodological issues relevant to the production of knowledge in the social sciences. The course has three overlapping and interrelated objectives:

- to provide you with a grounding in these issues as they are conceptualized and debated by philosophers, social theorists, and intellectuals more generally;
- to act as an introduction to the ways in which these issues have been incorporated (sometimes—often!—inaccurately) into different branches of the social sciences;
- to serve as a forum for reflection on the relationship between these issues and the concrete conduct of research, both your own and that of others.

That having been said, this is neither a technical “research design” nor a “proposal writing” class, but is pitched as a somewhat greater level of abstraction. As we proceed through the course, however, you should try not to lose sight of the fact that these philosophical debates have profound consequences for practical research. Treat this course as an opportunity to set aside some time to think critically, creatively, and expansively about the status of knowledge, both that which you have produced and will produce, and that produced by others.

The “science question” rests more heavily on the social sciences than it does on the natural sciences, for the simple reason that the evident successes of the natural sciences in enhancing the human ability to control and manipulate the physical world stands as a powerful rejoinder to any skepticism about the scientific status of fields of inquiry like physics and biology. The social sciences have long labored in the shadow of those successes, and one popular response has been to try to model the social sciences on one or another of the natural sciences; this naturalism forms one of the recurrent gestures in the philosophy of the social sciences, and we will trace it through its incarnation in the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle and then into the “post-positivist” embrace of falsification as the mark of a scientific statement. Problems generated by the firm emphasis on lawlike generalizations through both of these naturalistic approaches to social science lead to the reformulated naturalism of critical realism, as well as to the rejection of naturalism by pragmatists and followers of classical sociologists like Max Weber. Finally, we will consider the tradition of critical theory stemming from the Frankfurt School, and the contemporary manifestation of that commitment to reflexive knowledge in feminist and post-colonial approaches to social science.

While not an exhaustive survey of the philosophy of the social sciences, this course will serve as an opportunity to explore some of the perennial issues of great relevance to the conduct of social-scientific inquiry, and will thus function as a solid foundation for subsequent reading and discussion—and for the practice of social science. Throughout the course we will make reference to exemplary work from Anthropology, Economics, Sociology, Political Science; students will be encouraged to draw on their own disciplines as well as these others in producing their reflections and participating in our lively discussions. Assigned readings are drawn from the philosophical literature, and lectures will seek to illuminate the contexts of these works; seminar discussions will focus on elucidating the arguments of these texts and their implications for social-scientific research; workshop activities will focus on encouraging students to connect the philosophical issues to questions and concerns in their home fields and disciplines, and to their own research projects and interests.

### Readings

I will place all required readings on the course website in PDF format, *except* for the one book I have required you to obtain your own copy of: Raymond Geuss' *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1981). You are also free to locate the readings on your own, especially since I may not be able to put the readings on the course website until the middle of July. Readings will be discussed in the daily class sessions, and referenced in the daily lectures. Please come to class with the readings read, and with your copies and notes in hand.

### Reflections

During the workshop sessions of the course, students may be asked to reflect, in writing, on some question or questions that arise from or relate to the the day's readings. In particular, they will be asked to relate the philosophical material we are considering to their own research projects and interests. These reflections are not to be handed in to PTJ, but should be made available in some form (either written out, or typed on your own laptop/tablet) so that others can look at them during the ensuing discussion.

### Daily Schedule

Thursday 27 July

Session 1, 10:00-12:00

Topic: Cartesian Anxiety and the Positivist Project: the road to the Vienna Circle.

Readings: A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Chapters I, II, V, VI, VI; Carl Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History."

Recommended additional readings: Richard Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*; Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*; Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*

Session 2, 14:00-17:00

Topic: Neopositivism: hypothesis-testing and cross-case comparison

Readings: Karl Popper, "Conjectural Knowledge: My Solution to the Problem of Induction" and "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject" (both in Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*); Thomas Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?" (in Lakatos and Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth*

*of Knowledge*); Imre Lakatos, "History of Science and its Rational Reconstructions" (in Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*).

Recommended additional readings: Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*; Terrence Ball, "From Paradigms to Research Programs: Towards a Post-Kuhnian Political Science," *American Journal of Political Science* 20:1 (1976): 151-177; Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*.

Friday 28 July

Session 3, 10:00-12:00

Topic: Critical Realism: causal powers and dispositional causation

Readings: John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, chapters 1, 7, 8; Roy Bhaskar, "On the Possibility of Social Scientific Knowledge and the Limits of Naturalism" (in Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*).

Recommended additional readings: Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*; Rom Harre and Paul Secord, *The Explanation of Social Behavior*; Hilary Putnam, *Representation and Reality*.

Session 4, 14:00-17:00

Topic: Analyticism: ideal-types and singular causal analysis

Readings: Max Weber, "The 'Objectivity' of Social Science and Social Policy" (translation in Whimster ed. *The Essential Weber*, other translations of this essay are misleading, so please use this one or else read it in the original German); Bas van Fraassen, "To Save the Phenomena" (*Journal of Philosophy* 73:18, 1976) and "Precis of *The Empirical Stance*" (*Philosophical Studies* 121:2, 2004).

Recommended additional readings: Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*; John Shotter, *Conversational Realities*; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*; John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*.

Saturday 29 July

Session 5, 10:00-12:00

Topic: Reflexivity and Critical Theory: theorizing from a point of view

Readings: Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*.

Recommended additional readings: Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*; Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*; Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

Session 6, 14:00-17:00

Topic: "Mixed methods," universal standards, and the vocation of social science

Reading: Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Must International Studies Be A Science?" *Millennium* 45:3 (2015).