

Seminar: Foundations of Political and Social Science – Philosophy, Theory and Ethics

2nd Term, Academic Year 2022-2023

Mondays, 9.00-11.00 (Seminar Room 2, Badia)

First Seminar Session: 09.01.23

Last Seminar Session: 13.03.23

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Description

This seminar critically examines the scaffolding that stands behind all social science research. It begins – Part I - with four sessions on how we understand the social world we seek to study. As positivists? Critical realists? Interpretivists? In these first weeks, we will also explore the extensive philosophical literature behind that little thing upon which almost all of us rely: cause (☺). This broad philosophical focus allows us to see both the strengths and limitations of our preferred way of doing social science, as well as the pluses and minuses of the differing ways we operationalize causality (causal effects, causal mechanisms, local causation, constitutive causation).

Part II consists of three sessions on how we use theory to explain, understand or normatively assess the world around us. But how do we develop theory? Deductively? Inductively? Abductively? Do we advance a new theory, starting from first principles? Or do we begin with existing theory, seeking to modify it? What role is there for normative theorizing in our empirical studies? Does sociology's grounded theory offer a toolkit for what many of us do in practice – going back and forth between deductive hunches and inductive discovery?

In the seminar's final three weeks – Part III – we complete the scaffolding by turning to ethics. All social science must be ethical – but what does this mean in practice? We develop a broad understanding of ethics – grounded in the core principles of do no harm and research integrity - noting its dynamic nature throughout the research process. We then drill down and explore ethical dilemmas and challenges in three different methodological/design areas: (1) qualitative; (2) quantitative; and (3) experiments.

The seminar is worth 20 credits.

Learning Outcomes

- An understanding of the varying links among philosophy, cause, theory, ethics and empirical social science.

- On philosophy, an appreciation of recent developments, in particular, the stress on capturing the role of uncertainty and the move to relational ontologies: What do these portend for everything we ‘do’ in empirical social science?
- An understanding of science and pluralism in political and social science: What is the science in social science? What does pluralism get you? What are the trade-offs?
- Regarding theory, an appreciation of the differing ways in which it can be built, and the connection(s) between positive/problem-solving and normative theory.
- On ethics, a procedural and dynamic appreciation of the concept as both ‘do no harm’ and research integrity; operationally, what does it look like for different methodological traditions and (experimental) designs?

Format

The class will be run as a seminar, where debate and discussion are the norm. For Sessions 2 - 10, response memos – prepared by 1-2 researchers for each session – will inform and guide our debates.

Seminar Readings

Books to be read – mostly select chapters - include the following.

- Bevir, Mark and Jason Blakely, *Interpretive Social Science: An Anti-Naturalist Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- Cartwright, Nancy, *A Philosopher Looks at Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
- Christensen, Garret, Jeremy Freese and Edward Miguel, *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How to Do Open Science* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019).
- della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Routledge, 1973).
- Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney, *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- Hollis, Martin, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- Iltis, Ana and Douglas MacKay, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- Jackson, Patrick, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- Jemielniak, Dariusz, *Thick Big Data: Doing Digital Social Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- Katzenstein, Peter, Editor, *Uncertainty and its Discontents: Worldviews in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
- Kurki, Milja, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Wendt, Alexander, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

On the readings, please note that some of the books (and articles) have a part of a title or a subtitle with phrases like ‘World Politics’ or ‘International Relations.’ Don’t worry! Their philosophical arguments and insights on cause, theory or ethics are relevant across sub-fields and apply to both political science and sociology / analytic sociology.

Seminar readings are accessible in a variety of ways.

- **Books & Chapters in Books:** Most books are available electronically from the EUI Library. In the reading list below, these are indicated by (**E-Book**). (The direct hyperlink to the book is provided whenever possible.)
- **Difficult-to-Access Materials:** This includes articles from newsletters and books/chapters only available in paper format. These will be uploaded to the seminar [Brightspace page](#), and are indicated by (**Brightspace**) on the syllabus.
- **Journal Articles:** These are easily obtained electronically through the EUI Library.

If you encounter any problems accessing seminar readings, please contact Pia Dittmar.

Requirements

There are two requirements.

- **Seminar Participation:** This is a PhD seminar, and your active participation *on a regular, weekly basis* is required and mandatory. I cannot stress enough the (pedagogic) importance of this requirement.
- **Response Memos:** Each researcher must prepare two response memos, choosing from the topics and readings covered in two of the nine available sessions (2 – 10). Each memo should be three pages (double-spaced); it should assess, critique and raise questions on one or more of the readings for a given week.

The memos should be uploaded to Brightspace by 12.00/noon on the Friday before our Monday meeting. These memos (usually, 1 or 2 per session) – and their authors (☺) – will then guide and structure our discussions.

To pass the seminar, you must participate actively and prepare two response memos.

Schedule

PART I – PHILOSOPHY AND CAUSATION

- Session 1 (9 January) – Philosophies of Social Science: The Basics
- Session 2 (16 January) – Philosophies of Social Science: Theory + Experiment = Science? Science and Pluralism
- Session 3 (23 January) – Philosophies of Social Science: Uncertainty, Relational Ontologies
- Session 4 (30 January) – Causation

PART II - THEORY

- Session 5 (6 February) – Theory: Normative, Positive, Interpretative, Critical
- Session 6 (13 February) – Normative Theory and Empirical Social Science
- Session 7 (20 February) – Building Theory: Analytical, Deduction/Induction/Abduction, or ‘Pull It off the Shelf and Tweak’?

PART III - ETHICS

- Session 8 (27 February) – Open Science, Ethics & Research Transparency, Qualitative Methods & Ethics
- Session 9 (6 March) – Quantitative Methods, Computational Social Science, Big Data and Ethics
- Session 10 (13 March) – Experiments and Ethics

Seminar Topics & Readings

Part I: Philosophies of Social Science, Causation

Session 1: Philosophies of Social Science – The Basics

della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapter 2. ([E-Book](#))

Hollis, Martin, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) – Chapters 1, 3. ([E-Book](#))

Jackson, Patrick, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2016) – Chapters 1-2. ([E-Book](#))

Bevir, Mark and Jason Blakely, *Interpretive Social Science: An Anti-Naturalist Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) – Chapters 1-3. ([E-Book](#))

Session 2: Philosophies of Social Science – Theory + Experiment = Science? Science and Pluralism

Cartwright, Nancy, *A Philosopher Looks at Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) – Chapters 1-2. ([E-Book](#))

Jackson, Patrick, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2016) – Chapters 3-7. ([E-Book](#))

Session 3: Philosophies of Social Science – Uncertainty, Relational Ontologies

Katzenstein, Peter J., Editor, *Uncertainty and its Discontents: Worldviews in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) – Chapters 1, 10. ([E-Book](#))

Wendt, Alexander, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 1, 8, 10, Conclusion. ([E-Book](#))

Erskine, Toni, Stefano Guzzini and David A. Welch, Editors, “Book Symposium: Alexander Wendt, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology*,” *International Theory* 14/1 (2022): 115-209.

Session 4: Causation

Kurki, Milja, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5. ([E-Book](#))

Groff, Ruth, “Getting Past Hume in the Philosophy of Social Science,” in Phyllis McKay Illari, Federica Russo, and Jon Williamson, Editors, *Causality in the Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) – Chapter 14. ([Brightspace](#))

Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney, *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012) – Chapter 6. ([E-Book](#))

Brady, Henry, “Causation and Explanation in Social Science,” in Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady and David Collier, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) – Chapter 10. ([E-Book](#))

Cartwright, Nancy and Angus Deaton, “Understanding and Misunderstanding Randomized Controlled Trials,” *Social Science & Medicine* 210 (2018): 2-21.

Hedstrom, Peter and Petri Ylikoski, “Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 49–67.

Part II: Theory

Session 5: Theory – Normative, Positive, Interpretative, Critical

Bauböck, Rainer, “Normative Political Theory and Empirical Research,” in Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapter 3. ([E-Book](#))

Van Evera, Stephen, “Hypotheses, Laws, and Theories: A User’s Guide,” in Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Bevir, Mark and Jason Blakely, “Concept Formation,” in Bevir and Blakely, *Interpretive Social Science: An Anti-Naturalist Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) – Chapter 4. ([E-Book](#))

Wendt, Alexander, “Quantum Theory as Critical Theory: Alienation, Entanglement and the Politics of Social Physics,” Article Manuscript (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, May 2021). ([Brightspace](#))

Session 6: Normative Theory and Empirical Social Science

Thacher, David, “The Normative Case Study,” *American Journal of Sociology* 111/6 (2006): 1631–76.

Kymlicka, Will, “Testing the Liberal Multiculturalist Hypothesis: Normative Theories and Social Science Evidence,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 43/2 (2010): 257–271.

Price, Richard, Editor, *Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapters 1, 2, 10. ([E-Book](#))

Session 7: Building Theory – Analytical, Deduction/Induction/Abduction, or ‘Pull It off the Shelf and Tweak’?

Coleman, James, “Metatheory: Explanation in Social Science,” in Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Routledge, 1973) – Chapters I, II, X, XI. ([E-Book](#))

Priya, Arya, “Grounded Theory as a Strategy of Qualitative Research: An Attempt at Demystifying Its Intricacies,” *Sociological Bulletin* 65/1 (2016): 50-68.

Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Walt, “Leaving Theory Behind: Why Simplistic Hypothesis Testing is Bad for International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 19/3 (2013): 427–457.

Part III: Ethics

Session 8: Open Science, Ethics & Research Transparency, Qualitative Methods & Ethics

Rinke, Eike Mark and Alexander Wuttke, “Open Minds, Open Methods: Transparency and Inclusion in Pursuit of Better Scholarship,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54/2 (2021): 281-84.

Christensen, Garret, Jeremy Freese and Edward Miguel, “What Is Ethical Research? And “Conclusion,” in Christensen, Freese and Miguel, *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How to Do Open Science* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019) – Chapters 2, 12. ([E-Book](#))

Kapiszewski, Diana and Elisabeth Wood, “Ethics, Epistemology, and Openness in Research with Human Participants,” *Perspectives on Politics* (FirstView, 15.03.21: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720004703>).

Jacobs, Alan, et al, “The Qualitative Transparency Deliberations: Insights and Implications,” *Perspectives on Politics* 19/1 (2021): 171-208.

The two references below represent excellent European and American efforts to operationalize core ethical principles for empirical social science. They are not required reading, but will likely be a valuable resource for your research going forward.

European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, “[Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#)” (Brussels: European Commission, October 2018).

American Political Science Association, “[Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research](#)” (Washington, DC: Spring APSA Council Meeting, 4 April 2020).

Session 9: Quantitative Methods, Computational Social Science, Big Data and Ethics

Fozdar, Farida and Mark Israel, “Sociological Research Ethics: Contributions and Controversies,” in Ana S. Iltis and Douglas MacKay, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) – Chapter 16. ([E-Book](#))

Lazer, David, *et al*, “Computational Social Science: Obstacles and Opportunities - Data Sharing, Research Ethics, and Incentives Must Improve,” *Science* 369/6507 (28 August 2020): 1060-62.

Hollingshead, William, Anabel Quan-Haase and Wenhong Chen, “Ethics and Privacy in Computational Social Science: A Call for Pedagogy,” in Uwe Engel, Anabel Quan-Haase, Sunny Xun Liu and Lars Lyberg, Editors, *Handbook of Computational Social Science, Volume 1* (New York: Routledge, 2022) – Chapter 11. ([Brightspace](#))

Jemielniak, Dariusz, “Research Ethics,” in Jemielniak, *Thick Big Data: Doing Digital Social Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) – Chapter 4. ([E-Book](#))¹

Hoover Green, Amelia and Dara Kay Cohen, “[Centering Human Subjects: The Ethics of ‘Desk Research’ on Political Violence](#),” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6/2 (2021).

Session 10: Experiments and Ethics

Desposato, Scott, “The Ethical Challenges of Political Science Field Experiments,” in Ana S. Iltis and Douglas MacKay, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) – Chapter 14. ([E-Book](#))

Phillips, Trisha, “Ethics of Field Experiments,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (2021): 277–300.

¹ The Jemielniak e-book was ordered by the Library on 23.11.22; its URL was thus not available for this version of the syllabus.

Barnfield, Matthew, “Misinformation in Experimental Political Science,” *Perspectives on Politics* (FirstView, 28.10.22: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722003115>).²

Sagan, Scott D. and Benjamin Valentino, “Revisiting Hiroshima in Iran: What Americans Really Think about Using Nuclear Weapons and Killing Noncombatants,” *International Security* 42/1 (2017): 41–79.

Carpenter, Charli, Alexander Montgomery and Alexandria Nysten, “Breaking Bad? How Survey Experiments Prime Americans for War Crimes,” *Perspectives on Politics* 19/3 (2021): 912-924.

² For a blog version of Barnfield’s argument, see “[Against Misinformation as Method in Political Science](#),” *The Loop: ECPR’s Political Science Blog* (21.11.22).