

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

2nd Term, Academic Year 2024-2025

Mondays, 9.00-11.00 (Seminar Rooms 2 & 3, Badia Fiesolana)

First Seminar Session: 06.01.25

Last Seminar Session: 24.03.25

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Description

This seminar critically examines the conceptual scaffolding that stands behind all social science research: philosophy and theory. It begins – Part I - with six sessions on how we understand the social world we seek to study. As positivists? Critical realists? Interpretivists? What are relational ontologies and how do/should they change the way we do social science? In this first part, we also devote two sessions to the philosophical history and contemporary usages of that little thing upon which many of us rely: cause (☺). This broad philosophical focus allows us to see the strengths and limitations of our preferred way of doing social science, as well as the pluses and minuses of the differing ways we understand cause (expected outcomes; counterfactual; manipulative; processual; local) and operationalize it (causal effects, causal mechanisms, local causation, constitutive causation).

Part II consists of four sessions on how we use theory to explain, understand, critique 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 do in practice – going back and forth between deductive hunches and inductive discovery? Should your thesis be an exercise in theory testing or theory building? Which approach is better? How do you decide?

The seminar is worth 20 credits.

Learning Outcomes

- An understanding of the varying links among philosophy, cause, theory and empirical social science.
- On philosophy, an appreciation of recent developments, in particular, the move to relational ontologies and the stress on uncertainty's role.

- An understanding of science and of pluralism in political science and sociology. What is the science in social science? What does pluralism get you? What do you lose?
- Regarding theory, an appreciation of the differing ways in which it can be built, and the connection – or lack thereof - between positive theory and normative, critical and interpretive approaches.

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. At the beginning of each session, we will use these memos, as well as input from other seminar participants to craft a ‘bottom up’ agenda for that day’s topic and readings.

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).
- Box-Steffensmeier, Janet, Henry Brady and David Collier, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Der Derian, James and Alexander Wendt, Editors, *Quantum International Relations: A Human Science for World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Routledge, 1973).
- Hollis, Martin, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 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).
- 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).
- Price, Richard, Editor, *Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics* (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, some of the books above (and articles below) 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 or theory 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 always provided.)
- Difficult-to-Access Materials: This includes work-in-progress 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 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 circulated by 12.00/noon on the Friday before our Monday meeting. These memos – 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 – PHILOSOPHIES OF SOCIAL SCIENCE & CAUSATION

- **Session 1** (6 January) – Philosophies of Social Science: The Basics
- **No Class** (13 January)
- **Session 2** (20 January) – Science and Pluralism
- **Session 3** (27 January) – Relational Ontologies I: Moving Beyond Newtonianism; Uncertainty and Social Science
- **Session 4** (3 February) – Relational Ontologies II: The Social World as Quantum Mechanical
- **Session 5** (10 February) – Causation I: Philosophical/Conceptual History
- **Session 6** (17 February) - Causation II: Contemporary Understandings and Debates

PART II - THEORY

- **Session 7** (24 February) – Theory I: Positive & Normative
- **No Class** (3 March)
- **Session 8** (10 March) – Theory II: Interpretive & Critical
- **Session 9** (17 March) – Building Theory I: Deduction/Induction/Abduction; Grounded Theory; ‘Pull It off the Shelf and Tweak’
- **Session 10** (24 March) - Building Theory II: Normative Theory & Empirical Social Science

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, 2, 3. ([E-Book](#))

Session 2: Science and Pluralism

Ludwig, David and Stéphanie Ruphy, "[Scientific Pluralism](#)", in Edward N. Zalta, Editor, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Department of Philosophy, Stanford University, Winter 2021).

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, 4, 5, 6, 7. ([E-Book](#))

Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Rush Smith, Editors, *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) – Chapters 1, 13. ([E-Book](#))

Session 3: Relational Ontologies I - Moving Beyond Newtonianism; Uncertainty and Social Science

Emirbayer, Mustafa, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," *The American Journal of Sociology* 103/2 (1997): 281-317.

Demetriou, Chares, "Charles Tilly and Relational Sociology," in F. Dépelteau, Editor, *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) - pp. 307–324. ([E-Book](#))

Jackson, Patrick and Daniel Nexon, "Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 5/3 (1999): 291-332.

Katzenstein, Peter J., Editor, *Uncertainty and its Discontents: Worldviews in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) – Chapters 1, 3. ([E-Book](#))

Session 4: Relational Ontologies II - The Social World as Quantum Mechanical

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

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

Der Derian, James and Alexander Wendt, Editors, *Quantum International Relations: A Human Science for World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

The Ohio State University, [Quantum Social Science Bootcamp](#), Columbus, Ohio: Mershon Center for International Security Studies, Ohio State University (July 2024).

Session 5: Causation I – Philosophical/Conceptual History

Lebow, Richard Ned, "Reason and Cause," in Richard Ned Lebow, *Reason and Cause: Social Science and the Social World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Kurki, Milja, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6. ([E-Book](#))

Session 6: Causation II – Contemporary Understandings and Debates

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](#))

Jenkins, Jeffery, Nolan McCarty and Charles Stewart III, “Learning from Each Other: Causal Inference and American Political Development,” *Public Choice* 185/3-4 (2020): 245-251.

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

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

Hedström, Peter, “Studying Mechanisms to Strengthen Causal Inferences in Quantitative Research,” in Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, and David Collier, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) – Chapter 13. ([E-Book](#))

Norman, Ludvig and Derek Beach, “Rethinking the Fundamental Problem of Causal inference in Political Science: Why It is Not a Fundamental Problem but a Methodological Choice,” Working Paper: University of Stockholm and Aarhus University (7 February 2024). ([Brightspace](#))

Quantum Information Lab, “[Quantum Causality](#),” Department of Physics, University of Rome (accessed 21.11.24).

Part II: Theory

Session 7: Theory I – Positive & Normative

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](#))

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

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](#))

Ackerly, Brooke, L. Cabrera, F. Forman, G.F. Johnson, C. Tenove and A. Wiener, “Unearthing Grounded Normative Theory: Practices and Commitments of Empirical Research in Political Theory,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 27/2 (2021): 156–182.

Session 8: Theory II – Interpretive & Critical

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](#))

Murphy, Michael, “On Quantum Social Theory and Critical International Relations,” in James Der Derian and Alexander Wendt, Editors, *Quantum International Relations: A Human Science for World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) – Chapter 12. ([E-Book](#))

Session 9: Building Theory I – Deduction/Induction/Abduction; Grounded Theory; ‘Pull It off the Shelf and Tweak’

Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Routledge, 1973) – Chapters I, II, X, XI. ([E-Book](#))¹

Charmaz, Kathy, Reconstructing Theorizing in Grounded Theory Studies, in Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory, Second Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2014) – Chapter 9. ([Brightspace](#))

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.

Session 10: Building Theory II - Normative Theory & 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, 10. ([E-Book](#))

¹ The Library *does* have Glaser and Strauss as an e-book, but the hyper link is unstable/incorrect.