A5. Knowing and the Known: The Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences

Instructor details
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Short Bio
Patrick Thaddeus Jackson is Professor of World Politics and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education in the School of International Service at the American University in Washington, DC; in 2003-2004, he served as President of the International Studies Association-Northeast; in 2012-2013, he is doing so again. He is Series Editor of the University of Michigan Press' book series Configurations: Critical Studies of World Politics. His most recent book The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations was published by Routledge in 2011.


Short course outline
The social sciences have long been concerned with the epistemic status of their empirical claims. Unlike in the natural sciences, where an evident record of practical success tends to make the exploration of such philosophical issues a narrowly specialized endeavour, in the social sciences, differences between the philosophies of science underpinning the empirical work of varied researchers produces important and evident differences in the kind of social-scientific work that they do. Philosophy of science issues are, in this way, closer to the surface of social-scientific research, and part of being a competent social scientist involves coming to terms with and developing a position on those issues. This course will provide a survey of important authors and themes in the philosophy of the social sciences, concentrating in particular on the relationship of the mind to the social world and on the relationship between knowledge and experience; students will have ample opportunities to draw out the implications of different stances on these issues for their concrete empirical research.

Long 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 a sort of 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 scepticism about the scientific status of fields of inquiry like physics and biology. The social science have long laboured 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 draw on 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.

Day-to-day schedule (Monday 13 February to Friday 17 February)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
<th>Details [NB : incl. timing of lecture v/s lab or fieldwork etc. hours]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Overview; Logical Positivism</td>
<td>1.5 hour lecture; 1.5 hour seminar; blogging assignment #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Neopositivism and Falsification</td>
<td>1.5 hour lecture; 1.5 hour seminar; blogging assignment #2</td>
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<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Scientific Realism</td>
<td>1.5 hour lecture; 1.5 hour seminar; blogging assignment #3</td>
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<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Ideal-types and Pragmatism</td>
<td>1.5 hour lecture; 1.5 hour seminar; blogging assignment #4</td>
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<td>Day 5</td>
<td>Critical Theory</td>
<td>1.5 hour lecture; 1.5 hour seminar; blogging assignment #5</td>
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NOTE: this course will make extensive use of group blogs. On the first day of the course, every student will be assigned to a blogging group, and every day each student will be required to post an answer to the daily blog question, as well as posting one comment on a classmate’s blog post.
The daily readings must be completed before the daily blogging assignment is completed. Blog questions will frequently ask students to take an issue from that day’s lecture and seminar and elaborate on it in the context of the student’s own work and discipline.

**Day-to-day reading list**

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Readings (please list at least the compulsory reading for the scheduled day)</th>
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**Requested prior knowledge**

This course presumes no prior detailed familiarity with the philosophy of social science, beyond that gained by any practicing social scientist in the course of meeting the challenges associated with the conduct of her or his research project. The course does, however, presume a willingness to think of social science as a philosophical rather than just a technical endeavour. A course in basic European philosophy during one’s university experience would be a plus, although the reading of a couple of good survey books like Richard Bernstein’s *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* or Ian Hacking’s *The Social Construction of What?* are advised as a refresher in any event. The vocabulary introduced and developed in the instructor’s own book *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (Routledge, 2011) will inform the course lectures.

**Software used**

Access to the InterNet so that people can participate in group blogs.

**Literature**


**Lecture room requirement**

I will need something that can transform from a traditional lecture room in the first session each morning to a seminar style in the second session.