

Philosophy of the Social Sciences
[Draft Syllabus]

Instructor: Keith Douglas

Goal: In this course students will explore to approaches to philosophy and the social sciences. In the first unit, students will explore philosophical concepts (such as thing, property, event, idea) as the occur in social science. In the second unit, specific social sciences, and, if student interest demands, further focus sociotechnologies, will be examined from the perspective of philosophy. A third unit consists of student projects on self selected topics. These will reenforce the other two units.

Texts: *Finding Philosophy in Social Science* (1996) and *Social Science under Debate: A Philosophical Perspective* (1998), both by M. Bunge. Further additional handouts as necessary from journal articles, texts, etc. Hereafter the two primary texts are referred to as FPSS and SSUD.

Methods: Lectures, class discussion, student initiated projects.

Expected Enrollment: ~35 maximum

Time: 3 hours per week in class (30 classes of 1.5 hours).

Evaluation:

Reading Questions: 2 x 5%
In Class Tests: 2 x 25%
Presentation Project: 30%
Class Participation: 10%

Prerequisites: None, but it will help to concurrently take or have taken a science (either social or pure and applied/health) course. An introductory philosophy course will also help.

Description: Philosophy is, in part, about examining ultimate or basic presuppositions and principles of any human activity. This course takes as object of examination the social sciences. We shall first discuss (using FPSS as a starting point) various very general concepts found in many fields of study and everyday life and see how they are found in the social sciences. This will have three objectives. One is to familiarize the student with the rudiments of philosophical analysis, its objectives and methods. A second is to illustrate the unity of the social sciences by these common ideas. Finally, we shall also discuss these ideas' roles in everyday life and science and what they tell us about each.

In our second unit (using SSUD as an initial reference), we shall discuss the relationship between natural and social science and focus particularly on psychology as a familiar (to many students) case of what might be termed a "mixed" science. We shall then discuss the important distinction between positive and normative economics and how this difference can

be analyzed with the help of philosophy. Finally, we shall also discuss whether history (historiography?) counts as a science or not.

Our third unit will consist of student projects, of which more below.

Outline of lectures / discussions / tests:

Reading Questions: Twice (once during each of the first two modules), reading questions will be circulated and collected. I will generally hand these out in the first day of lecture / discussion of each unit and collect them two classes before the in class test on that unit, returning them the following class. (This way students can use the feedback to help study.) These will be graded more or less "all or nothing". If I see that you have made an effort to answer the questions and read the material, you will get a grade of 5. On the other hand, failure to submit answers to the reading questions or if insufficient effort is made, a grade of zero will result. There will also be a section of questions "to think about" on the reading questions hand out which will NOT be collected and graded. See below for what these are for.

In class tests: There will be one of these for each of the first two units as well. These will be open text, but NOT open notes. (If you want to deface your texts by writing in them, go ahead, but you'll find you can't fit too much that would help you anyway.) Each test will have 20-25% of the grade evaluated by around 30 multiple choice questions. These should be easy if you have kept up with your reading. Another 60% or so of the grade will be a short essay on one of the subjects discussed in the reading questions' block of "to think about" section. These will generally require putting together material from two or more lectures / discussions / assigned readings. The remaining proportion of the grade on the exam will be a short paragraph on the general subject of the unit.

Presentation Project: In the weeks after unit two, students will research, discuss amongst each other and present short (3-5 minute talk, 2-3 minutes of questions) introductions to topics related to the course that interest them. They will be graded according to the following scheme:

Interest: 10%
Style: 10%
Depth of research: 40%
Engaging the audience and answering instructor / peer questions: 20%
Effort: 10%
Abstract: 10%

The abstract (see the course schedule) is due prior to the presentation and will finalize the student's topic and reflect input from peers and the instructor.

Class participation: Students are expected to come to class having read the material assigned for that day in the case of the first two units (except the first class, of course) and be willing to discuss it as necessary with peers and the instructor. During the time of presentations, students will gain class participation points by helping their fellow students find a topic, asking

them questions after their presentations, etc. Merely coming to class is not sufficient to pass the participation section!

Schedule:

Each substantive topic will be the subject of lecture and discussion.

Class	Topic	Readings
1	Introduction to the course; self-introductions; reading questions distributed	None
2	Why and what Philosophy?	FPSS 1-12
3	Fact, fact statement, truth, stipulative definitions.	FPSS 15-46; 94-99
4	Goal of science	FPSS 184-218
5	Ideas, Formalization and the Use of Mathematics	FPSS 47-75
6	Inquiry	FPSS 76-107
7	Theory	FPSS 113-125
8	Interpretation, understanding, explanation, prediction 1	FPSS 135-165
9	Testability, evidence 1	FPSS 166-183
10	Testability, evidence 2, reading questions collected	FPSS 166-183
11	Tutorial for test 1; review of reading questions; buffer class	None new
12	Test 1; reading questions distributed	None new
13	Social Science vs. Natural Science	SSUD 4-32
14	Psychology as Mixed Science 1	SSUD 41-46
15	Psychology as Mixed Science 2: Physiological social psychology	[Perhaps handout]
16	Objections to this approach	[Perhaps handout]
17	The nature of economics	SSUD 102-106
18	NGOs and normative economics	[SJC web page handout]
19	What is History?	SSUD 257-259, handout
20	Reading Questions Collected; buffer class; project handout & initial discussion	None new
21	Tutorial; review of reading questions	None new
22	Test 2	None new
23	Students work together to find topics; discussion of project	None new
24	Students go to library	None new
25	Abstracts due. Research and peer help day	None new
25	Student Presentations 1-7	None new
26	Student Presentations 8-13	None new
27	Student Presentations 14-19	None new
28	Student Presentations 20-25	None new
29	Student Presentations 26-31	None new
30	Student Presentations 32-37; recap and goodbye	None new