Philosophy 152: Philosophy of Social Science

Winter Term 2023

Nancy Cartwright

The course aims to get you thinking hard about the social and medical sciences: how knowledge in social science is established and what we can do with it; what methodological and ethical problems beset us in trying to establish social knowledge and put it to use. It will also acquaint you with a number of current debates, like the ethical and methodological problems in using randomized controlled trials in development settings in attempt to alleviate poverty, the strengths and weaknesses of case studies, and the entanglement of facts and values in social science. I hope you will leave with an ability to think critically about the social sciences and what they offer, to neither accept reports of what ‘studies show’ as gospel nor to belittle what has been genuinely accomplished.

Many readings are from *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction* (2014), N Cartwright & E Montuschi (eds), OUP. It is recommended that you buy the book.

**Topic 1**. Evidence-based policy: why and how?

Jan 9

Jan 13

Jan 15

Plus introduction of the Baele paper. The Baele paper below for Topic 3 outlines 6 ethical issues facing experiments in development economics. Students should be sure to look through this and choose 1 they will discuss in class next week. I will note what you are each. interested in so we can be sure all 6 are covered

**Readings**

* *PoSS,* Ch 3
* The Nobel Prize ceremony and a talk by Abhijit Banerjee <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFRnY-5K5OU>
* The Nobel Prize ceremony and a talk by Esther Duflo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFRnY-5K5OU>
* The Nobel Prize ceremony and a talk by Michael Kremer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOTHeNZU_JQ>

**Martin Luther King Day.** Jan 16

**Topic 2**. Values in social science

Jan18

Jan 20

Jan 23

**Readings**

* *PoSS,* Ch 9
* Dupre, J (2007), ‘Facts and Values’ in Kincaid, H, Dupré, J & Wylie, A (eds.), *Value Free Science?: Ideals and Illusion*, 27-41

**Topic 3.** The ethics of research in development economics

Please read the Baele paper seriously and look through the others to see how live the issue is. Each student will be asked to discuss briefly in class *how you understand* one of the issues raised and how serious you think it is. You will be asked to have this written out and brought to class – 2 pages please. You may want to use this discussion as part of the basis of your term paper (but you may instead want to use your presentation in weeks 8 & 9 as the basis for a paper or write on a different topic altogether).

Jan 25

Jan 27

**Readings**

* Baele, SJ ‘The ethics of New Development Economics: is the Experimental Approach to Development Economics morally wrong?’, *Journal of Philosophical Economics*
* Bo Rothstein, ‘The Nobel Prize in Economics, Ethics and Corruption’ [This article was published in the op-ed section in main Swedish morning daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter on November 10, 2019.]
* Peter Fredriksson, Torsten Persson, and Jakob Svensson, 2019 reply by members of the Prize committee

**Further reading:**

* Peter Singer, Arthur Baker, Johannes Haushofer, ‘Are Randomized Poverty-Alleviation Experiments Ethical?, *Project Syndicate* Nov 6, 2019

**Topic 4.** Measuring and categorizing.

Plus submission of preferences for topics for group presentations weeks 8 & 9. Sifting through your preferences of what to work on, I’ll sort students into groups to create a group presentation in weeks 8 & 9.

Jan 30

Feb 1

Feb 3

**Readings**

* *PoSS,* ch 14

**Topic 5**. Feminist standpoint theory

Feb 6: Guest lecture. Prof. Sharon Crasnow

Feb 8: Discussion of standpoint theory

**Readings**

* *PoSS,* ch 8

**Review for exam.** Feb 10

**EXAM.** Feb 13

**Breakout meetings to organise presentations.** Feb 15

**Discussion of exams.** Feb 17

**Presidents’ Day.** Feb 20

**T0PIC 6**. Environmental toxicology

Feb 22: Guest lecture. Prof Carl Cranor

Feb 24: Discussion

**Readings.** TBA

**Student presentations. (Weeks 8 & 9)**

Feb 27

March 1

March 3

March 6

March 8

March 10

You may want to use your presentation as part of the basis of your term paper.

**Papers due.** March 13

**Topic 7**. Case studies.

March 13

March 15

March 17

**Readings**

* *PoSS,* Ch 15

**Requirements**

The lectures will not for the most part duplicate the readings but rather place them in context and build from them. So it is crucial that you both come to and participate in class and do the readings. The requirements are designed to encourage that. They are also designed to allow for different ways of showing mastery of the course material.

* Attendance & participation at all classes (10%)
* 2-3 well-constructed paragraphs submitted in writing at the ***beginning*** of class (15%)
  + January 13, summarising one of the Nobel Prize talks
  + January 20, summarising a reading on values
  + Feb 3, summarising the reading on measuring and categorizing
  + Feb 20, summarising a reading on standpoint or toxicology
  + March 15, summarising the reading on case studies
* 2-page discussion of an ethical issue in development studies plus in-class discussion of it. Due January 25 (15%)
* 1 in-class exam, February 13 (20%)
* 1 joint in-class presentation, Weeks 8 & 9. Joint grade (20%)
* 1 final paper, March 10 (no extensions!); 2500 words. (20%)
* You use your discussion of Baele or your in-class presentation as a basis for this paper or write on some different topic covered in the course. There will be no particular prompt for this paper. Find something that you find worth thinking about in more detail and write on that: formulating a question of concern for yourself is part of the learning process
* 100% attendance during last week. You will not be examined on this week’s work. So to ensure you learn this topic, attendance is mandatory. Unexcused failure to attend classes in Week 10 will knock the overall grade down 5% for each class missed.

I will grade on this scale: 12 (A+), 11 (A), 10 (A-), 9 (B+),….1 (D-), 0 (F)

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Office hours: Mondays 9:45; Wednesdays 12:00