Philosophy of Science, 7.5 ECTS


Place: Lund University School of Economics and Management, Alfa 2, 4th floor

Course leader: Tomas Hellström (tomas.hellstrom@fek.lu.se)

Participants must have completed at least one year of their PhD studies before taking this course. If more than 15 students wish to enroll, priority will be given according to years in the program.

Content and learning goals

The course aims to introduce the PhD student to central topics in the philosophy of science and social science. It covers the modern history of the philosophy of science and deals with topics such as the relationship between the social sciences and the natural sciences, naturalism and interpretivism, explanation and generalization in the social sciences, rationality assumptions in social explanations, and the role of values in social science.

After the course the PhD student should be able to account for the aims, possible uses, and main schools of philosophy of science for social science. They should also be able to discuss their own research and that of others in terms of philosophical and methodological assumptions and problems. Finally, they should be able to critically discuss their field of research and discipline from a philosophy of science perspective.

Course requirements

This course is organized as a series of seminars. This means shared responsibility for discussing the materials and for raising issues. Each participant is expected to read the texts in advance of each seminar, and come prepared to talk about them in class. The course is examined based on performance along two dimensions:

1. Participation

Quality is more important that quantity on this dimension. That said, excessive silence will affect your chances of getting a passing grade. We will discuss all readings for each seminar, with student discussion-starters appointed at random during class. Typically, the course leader will present for the first 30–40 minutes before letting students kick of discussions.

Participants bring 0.5–1 printed out page of questions, topics and issues to be discussed to be handed to the course responsible at the beginning of the seminar. As you prepare, consider what you like or dislike about the texts. What was interesting? Do you disagree with an argument; what would it take to persuade you? Are the different texts in agreement or do they disagree? A good seminar should have active dialogue and debate. If someone proposes an idea that is counter to your view, speak up. Your task is to engage each other in assessing the readings.

We realize that the texts can be a bit challenging at first, especially for more junior scholars unfamiliar with philosophical writing. However, we strongly urge you to come as prepared as possible!
2. Term paper

Before the final session, you are expected to submit a five-page essay (double spaced, 12-point, not including references and exhibits) relating the course contents to your own research. This paper is due one week before the last seminar, giving you in effect 1 week to prepare the paper after the second to last session. An opponent will be appointed for each term paper.

In the essay, you will select themes from the course as point of departure and use this to reflect on your own dissertation project or broader research field. It is important that the relevant course readings are used in the essay and that you reference the essay properly to demonstrate your use of the literature.

Course schedule and readings

April 15, 13.15–15.00: Welcome and introduction: What is Philosophy of Science?
   What kind of questions does PoS address? How can PoS be used in research?
   - Question: What philosophical questions regarding your research are especially pressing to your work and why?
   Readings: Hausman, 1991; Bunge, M. 1967, Klemke et al., 1997

April 29, 13.15–15.00: Values and objectivity in social science
   Topics related to the fact/value distinction and the role of values in social science
   - Questions: What is the relation between facts and values in your research or general field? How is this problematic, or not?

May 13, 13.15–15.00: Social explanation: The possibility of theory
   Generalization and social explanations in social science
   - Questions: What is the role of theory in your field? What are the limits on, possibilities for, explaining and generalizing?
   Readings: Hempel, 1942; Friedman, 1966; Rosenberg, 1983; Kincaid, 1990; Barnes, 2001

May 27, 13.15–15.00: Understanding: Interpretive, critical and deconstructive approaches
   The main alternatives to naturalism in social science
   - Questions: Are there questions in your project that naturalism cannot answer? What are they and why?
   Readings: Geertz, 1983; Föllesdal, 1982; Searle, 1983; Hacking 1999; (chs. 1-2); Mink, 1965

June 10, 13.15-16.00: Final meeting: Term paper presentation and discussion

Literature

Readings marked * are available in Martin, M. & McIntyre, L. (1994). Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science. MIT Press, and also through most university databases

Readings will also be available as hand-outs. Contact course leader.
*Durkheim, E. (1938). ‘What is a social fact?’, chapter 1 in The Rules of Sociological Method


