

PHIL 343: Philosophy of Social Inquiry

Spring 2023

Course Information

Time: MW 11:25A–12:40P

Instructor Name: Ge Fang

Email: gfang1@iit.edu

Instructor office: Siegel Hall 235

Office Hours: W 15:10P–17:10P or by appointments

Classroom: Siegel Hall 203

Course Description

Social sciences include, *inter alia*, psychology, anthropology, sociology, political sciences, and economics. There is an intuitive difference between social sciences and natural sciences, which gives rise to a whole host of philosophical problems: do social sciences and natural sciences share the same method and objective? If so, why does it seem that social sciences is not progressing as fast as natural sciences? If social sciences are different in kind from natural sciences, what should be the proper way of studying social phenomena? Should we aim for predictive and explanatory theories about human actions? Is it even possible? There are polarized responses to these questions. This course provides an extended overview to the central debates in the philosophy of social sciences.

The primary goal of this course is to get students acquainted with the philosophy issues surrounding social sciences. Along the way, the students are trained to develop philosophical skills in

- Interpreting philosophical text
- Judging whether a claim about social science is philosophically controversial
- Identifying theses and defining key terms from philosophical articles
- Reconstructing important arguments from readings in a charitable way
- Evaluating arguments written by other authors
- Constructing valid arguments to support or counter a thesis
- Writing clear academic essays to communicate arguments

Evaluation

Weekly assignments: 20% in total. These are mini tasks designed to develop one's skills in philosophical analysis. These assignments will be published weekly only in the first half of the semester. In the second half, students will use the developed skills to craft the final paper. Exercises include identifying keyword, finding the location for keyword definition, paraphrasing definition, brainstorming illustrative examples, locating the thesis for paper, paraphrasing the thesis, finding supporting reasons for the thesis, finding undermining reasons for thesis, etc. Instructions to these tasks will be published on the blackboard at least a week before its due.

Quizzes (20%): The quizzes in this course will not be conducted in classes. In the first ten weeks, each reading assignment will be accompanied by one or a few open-ended essay questions, except for the very first reading and the readings material associated with weekly assignments above. Think of each essay question as a guide that help you to focus on the important aspects of a difficult reading material. You are encouraged to reflect about these questions while or before you read the text. There is no time limit for the quizzes. There will be no quizzes for the last six weeks to allow more time for you to develop your research paper. There will be 9 quizzes in total. **Top 7 out of 9** count towards your final grade.

There is no limit on length of your response. Your grade on quizzes won't be evaluated on the basis of whether your answer is correct or not. This is not because there is no correctness or wrongness in philosophy, but because it is very rare to get everything right on your first read of a philosophical text. You will get a full grade of 5 points **if I can see, from your response, that you have read the assigned material and thought about it.** Reflection on the material beforehand also prepares you toward the discussions in class.

Paper (60%):

- Research proposal (5%). After the lectures of eighth weeks, you will be asked to come up with a research question for your final paper. I will share tips on how to select a research question. The research question will be due at the end of week 9 (March 10).
- Essay outline (5%). After the lectures of the tenth week, you need to come up with a valid plan to support one answer for the selected research question. This will be due at the end of the week 10 (March 24).
- Outline partial elaboration (5%). Elaborate one central point you made in the outline into 3 pages. This should be submitted by the end of week 12 (April 7).
- Peer review (5%). Write comments for one of your classmates' part of essay. This should be submitted by the end of week 14 (April 14)
- In class presentation (10%). In the last 2 weeks, you will be asked to present in class about your project for 5 minutes.
- Final paper (30%). The length of the final paper should be between 8 to 10 pages in length, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and a standard 12-point font. The final paper is due on May 5.

Discretionary bonus and penalty points: Students who contribute regularly to class discussions will get one grade higher (B to A, C to B, etc..). Students who disrupt the learning environment will lose points. Causes of disruption include arriving late or departing early, leaving the room during class without a medical emergency, **having a computer or other electronic device on during the class**, having a cellular phone or other electronic device beep or ring during class, or otherwise engaging in activities other than attending to class during class.

Attendance: I understand that students sometimes have very good reasons to miss class: religious obligations, illness, a commitment to family or teammates. I will not excuse some absences and not others, and we have designed our procedures to make it possible to score a strong participation even if one falls ill or has multiple religious obligations. I simply ask that you make your decisions as you think wise, and live with the consequences.

Textbook

Many but not all readings may be found in

Hollis, Martin, *The philosophy of social science*, Cambridge.

Other required readings will be uploaded to Blackboard. Physical copies are required so that you can refer to the text during lectures. You will need to download and print these. (Since electronic devices are not permitted in the classroom, you need to print these readings out to be able to refer to them in class. If you want to save paper by printing out just one copy that you will share with your neighbor in class, you may arrange to do this. If you want to study the essay on the screen and then print out the paper in small format, two or more pages to each sheet of paper, you may do that.)

Course schedule (tentative)

Topic 1: Epistemology of science, a primer

1/9 M: Introduction.

1/11 W: Hollis, Chapter 1

1/16 M: MLK day. No class.

1/18 W: Hollis, Chapter 2

1/23 M: Hollis, Chapter 3

1/25 W: Hollis, Chapter 4

Topic 2: Functionalism

1/30 M: Hollis, Chapter 5

2/1 W: Cohen, "Functional Explanation: In Marxism"; SEP "Karl Marx" section 3.

2/6 M: Elster, "Functional Explanation: In Social Science"

Topic 3: Holism and individualism

2/8 W: Little, "Microfoundations of Marxism"

2/13 M: Durkheim, "Social facts"

2/15 W: Kincaid, "Open Empirical and Methodological Issues in the Individualism-Holism Debate"

Topic 4: Game theory

2/20 M: Hollis, Chapter 6

2/22 W: Evolution of cooperation. Axelrod & Hamilton, "The evolution of cooperation"

Topic 5: Interpretationism

2/27 M: Hollis, Chapter 7

3/1 W: Collingwood, "Human Nature and Human History"

3/6 M: Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man"

3/8 W: Geertz, "Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture"

Research Proposal due on 3/10, 23:59pm (Fri)

3/13 M: Spring break. No class

3/15 W: Spring break. No class

3/20 M: Føllesdal, "The Status of Rationality Assumptions in Interpretation and in the Explanation of Action"

3/22 W: Hollis, Chapter 8

Essay outline due on 3/24, 23:59pm (Fri)

Topic 6: Darwinism and social sciences

3/27 M: Hollis, Chapter 9

3/29 W: Cosmides & Toby, "Evolutionary Psychology: A Primer" (BB)

4/3 M: Henrich & Ensminger, "Theoretical Foundations: The Coevolution of Social Norms, Intrinsic Motivation, Markets, and the Institutions of Complex Societies"

Topic 7: Values and relativism in social sciences

4/5 W: Hollis, Chapter 10

Partial elaboration due on 4/7, 23:59pm (Fri)

4/10 M: Douglas, "Values in Social Science"

4/12 W: Hollis, Chapter 11

Peer review due on 4/14, 23:59pm (Fri)

4/17 M: Presentation

4/19 W: Presentation

4/24 M: Presentation

4/26 W: Review session. No required readings.

5/1-6: Exam week. No exam for this course.

Final Paper due on 5/5, 23:59pm (Fri)

Academic Honesty

Students are bound by the IIT policy on academic integrity in all aspects of this course. One of the most common violations of academic integrity is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, copying someone else's exact words, paraphrasing their sentences, or summarizing their thoughts or ideas, without giving credit to the original author. Here is a web resource on when to cite:

http://tigger.uic.edu/~edelberg/crediting_others/index.htm

Disability

Students with disabilities may request accommodations to ensure equal access and equal academic opportunities. Requests for accommodation are coordinated through Center for Disability Resources. The Center for Disability Resources is located in Suite 3F3-1, 10 W 35th St. You can also call them at 312-567-5744 or email them at disabilities@iit.edu. Should accessibility issues arise, be sure to reach out to your instructor about your Accommodation Plan.