Epistemology

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Dept. of Political Science
AA 2024-2025

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Course Description

In this course we will explore some aspects related to the (social) epistemology of social science. The course is articulated in four themes: philosophy of science; rationality and rational choice; games and institutions; social norms. In the first set of meetings (philosophy of science) we will look at the issue of progress in science, analyzing various account of science and of its dynamics. In the second set of meetings (rationality), we will concentrate on the theory of rational choice as it has been developed in the second half of the past century, along with applications to political philosophy. In the third set of meetings (institutions) we will focus on the theory of social interactions (game theory) and in particular on those classes of games that are amenable to represent social institutions, with applications to social ontology. Finally, in the fourth set of meetings (norms), we will reflect on the nature of social norms and on ways and instruments to change them.

Course Requirements and Grading

Attendance is mandatory, as are advance reading of relevant materials and class discussion. These elements contribute to class participation. At home and/or in class, you will be expected to formulate research questions related to the material (to be) covered and possibly to solve problems and provide short answers. Students will come to class having completed the assigned readings, which will be collegially discussed, also on the basis of **two** short (2-3 paragraphs max) questions or comments related to the readings. **The questions will have to be emailed to gsillari@luiss.it and the subject line needs to begin with the string [PhD questions].** You are encouraged to ask your questions for discussion in class. Particularly good and particularly bad questions will receive feedback. You will be graded as follows:

Attendance	25%
Written Questions	25% due at beginning of class
Final paper	50% due by November 18

Attendance: simply being present in class will not guarantee full credit for attendance, which will be delivered only upon functional and helpful comments and questions.

Written Questions: Astute questions and comments will receive full credit, compatible with "A". Run-of-the-mill questions and comments will receive partial credit, compatible with "B". Inattentive and superficial questions and comments will receive credit compatible with "C" or lower.

Final Paper: The final paper will consist of a 3000 words research paper or a thorough literature review paper. In any case, the topic will have to be discussed with and approved by the instructor.

Schedule: Philosophy of Social Science
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All meetings last 2 hours overall, Notice that the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (free to consult online) is an excellent resource for background readings on most of the topics we will cover in class. Starred items will be the main focus of class discussion.

Syllabus

1. **Philosophy of Science (week 1)**

   1.1 Intro
   - *Thomas Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?," in: Lakatos and Musgrave, eds. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 1970
   - *Imre Lakatos, "Falsificationism and the methodology of scientific research programmes," sections 1, 2a-c, 3a-b, 4; in: Lakatos and Musgrave, eds. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 1970
   - Daniel Hausman, The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics, Appendix: An Introduction to philosophy of science, pp. 281-330

2. Rationality (week 2)

2.1 Ignorance
- *Resnik, M. D. (1987). *Choices: An introduction to decision theory*. University of Minnesota Press; chs 1-2
- Gaus, G., & Thrasher, J. (2015). Rational choice and the original position: The (many) models of Rawls and Harsanyi. In T. Hinton (Ed.), The Original Position (pp. 39-58). Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press

2.2 Risk
- *Resnik, M. D. (1987). *Choices: An introduction to decision theory*. University of Minnesota Press; chs 3-4
- Binmore, K. (2008). *Rational decisions*. Princeton University Press; ch. 4

3. Institutions and Games (week 3)

3.1 Intro
- *Lewis, D. (1969). *Convention: A philosophical study*. Harvard University Press; ch. 1
- *Guala, F. (2016). *Understanding institutions: The science and philosophy of living together*. Princeton University Press; chs. 1, 2, 3, 4

3.2 Evolution
- *Skyrms, B. (2014). *Evolution of the social contract*. Cambridge University Press; chs. 1, 4
- *O'Connor, C. (2019). *The origins of unfairness: Social categories and cultural evolution*. Oxford University Press, USAchs. *1, *2, 3, 4

3.3 Institutions
- *Ostrom, E. (2000). Collective action and the evolution of social norms. *Journal of economic perspectives*, *14*(3), 137-158.
- Bicchieri, C. (2002). Covenants without swords: Group identity, norms, and communication in social dilemmas. *Rationality and Society*, *14*(2), 192-228.

4. Social Norms (weeks 4-5)

4.1 Social Norms
- *Bicchieri, C. (2006). *The grammar of society: The nature and dynamics of social norms*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 1, 2

- *Bicchieri, C. (2016). *Norms in the wild: How to diagnose, measure, and change social norms*. Oxford University Press, chapters 1, 3

4.2 Measuring Norms
- *Bicchieri, C. (2016). *Norms in the wild: How to diagnose, measure, and change social norms*. Oxford University Press, chapter 2
- *Bicchieri, C., & Xiao, E. (2009). Do the right thing: but only if others do so. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, *22*(2), 191-208.
- Krupka, E. L., & Weber, R. A. (2013). Identifying social norms using coordination games: Why does dictator game sharing vary?. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, *11*(3), 495-524.

4.3 Changing Norms
- *Bicchieri, C. (2016). *Norms in the wild: How to diagnose, measure, and change social norms*. Oxford University Press, chapter 4
- *Bicchieri, C. and E. Dimant. "Nudging with care: The risks and benefits of social information." *Public choice* (2019): 1-22.