

77992 - PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (1) (LM) ANNO ACCADEMICO 2023/2024

Conoscenze e abilità da conseguire

The course aims at providing a deep knowledge of the major issues tackled in the contemporary epistemological debate on the social sciences. Core methodological and conceptual aspects of history, archaeology, anthropology, economics, psychology and - partly - medicine are addressed. Students will get familiar with relevant debates in contemporary philosophy of the social sciences, and shall be able to analyse and discuss key topics on the construction of scientific knowledge in such disciplines.

Contenuti

Il corso affronta alcune questioni e dibattiti che sono centrali alla filosofia delle scienze sociali contemporanea. Dopo una breve introduzione alla disciplina, in cui verrà fatto un confronto tra le scienze sociali e le scienze naturali, verranno trattati i seguenti argomenti: 1) il carattere value-free/laden (privo/carico di valore) delle scienze sociali in relazione alla questione della loro oggettività; 2) la necessità e la possibilità dell'interpretazione dei fenomeni sociali; 3) la natura dei concetti e dei generi sociali; 4) il potenziale di individualismo e funzionalismo come modelli di spiegazione dei fenomeni sociali; 5) la natura di norme e istituzioni sociali; 6) l'esistenza di leggi nel sociale; 7) il ruolo di cause e meccanismi nelle scienze sociali. Durante il corso questi argomenti saranno esplorati a fondo, utilizzando casi-studio provenienti da diversi campi delle scienze sociali e tracciando connessioni con dibattiti che affrontano temi simili nell'ambito della filosofia generale della scienza.

The course addresses some issues and debates that are central to contemporary philosophy of social science. After a brief introduction to the discipline, in which a comparison will be made between the social sciences and the natural sciences, the following topics will be covered: 1) the value-free/laden character of the social sciences in relation to the question of their objectivity; 2) the necessity and possibility of interpreting social phenomena; 3) the nature of social concepts and genres; 4) the potential of individualism and functionalism as models of explanation of social phenomena; 5) the nature of social norms and institutions; 6) the existence of laws in the social domain; 7) the role of causes and mechanisms in the social sciences. During the course these topics will be explored in depth, using case studies from different fields of social sciences and drawing connections with debates that address similar themes within the general philosophy of science.

Bibliografia

Reference textbook:

- Risjord, M. (2014) *Philosophy of Social Science: A Contemporary Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

Further resources:

- Kaldis, B. (2013). *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Zalta, E. N. and Nodelman, U. (2024). *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Accessible at [<https://plato.stanford.edu/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/)

Mandatory readings:

Week 2 (Lecture: Values and Objectivity)

- Weber, M. (1949 [1904]). Objectivity in “social science”. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (English trans.), Glencoe, IL: Free Press, pp. 49–90 (excerpt: 72–82)
- Nagel, E. (1994 [1961]). The value-oriented bias of social enquiry. Reprinted in Martin, M & McIntyre, L., *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 371–84.

Week 3 (Seminar: Feminism in Social Science)

- Haack, S. (1998 [1993]). Knowledge and propaganda: Reflections of an old feminist. Reprinted in *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 123–36.
- Wylie, A. (2007). The feminist question in science: What does it mean to ‘do social science as a feminist’? In Hesse-Biber, S. (ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Research*. Sage Publications. pp. 567-78.

Week 4 (Lecture: Interpretation)

- Taylor, C. (1971). Interpretation and the sciences of man. *Review of Metaphysics* 25: 1–51.

Week 5 (Lecture: Social Kinds)

- Hacking, I (1995). The looping effect of human kinds. In Sperber, D., Premack, D., & Premack A. J. (eds.), *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate*, Clarendon Press, pp. 351-83.

Week 6 (Seminar: Do We Need “Race”?)

- Taylor, P.C. (2004). What races are: the metaphysics of critical race theory. In *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*, Malden, MA: Polity Press, pp. 70–118 (excerpt: 85-ff.)
- Hochman, Adam (2017). Replacing race: Interactive constructionism about racialized groups. *Ergo*, 4: 61–92.

Week 7 (Lecture: Rational Choice)

- Paternotte, C. (2011). Rational choice theory. In I. Jarvie & Zamorra-Bonilla, J. (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science*. Sage Publications. pp. 307–21.
- Steele, K. (2014). Choice models. In Cartwright, N. & Montuschi, E. (eds.), *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*. Oxford University Press, pp. 185–207.

Week 8 (Seminar: Methodological Individualism)

- van Hees, M. (1997). Explaining institutions: A defence of reductionism. *European Journal of Political Research* 32: 51–69.
- Zahle, J. & Kincaid, H. (2019). Why be a methodological individualist? *Synthese* 196 (2): 655–75.

Week 9 (Lecture: Functionalism)

- Kincaid, H. (1990). Assessing functional explanations in the social sciences. *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association 1990*: 341–54.
- Rosenberg, A. (2017). Functionalism. In McIntyre, L. & Rosenberg, A. (eds.), *The*

Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science, pp. 147–58.

Week 10 (Seminar: Cultural Evolution)

- Sober (1992). Models of cultural evolution. In Paul Griffiths (eds.), *Trees of Life: Essays in Philosophy of Biology*, Springer Netherlands, pp. 477–92.
- Boyd, R., & Richerson, P.J. (2000). Memes: Universal acid or a better mousetrap? In Aunger, R. (ed.), *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 143–62.

Week 11 (Seminar: Norms)

- Bicchieri, C. (2006). The rules we live by. In *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–54 (excerpt: 1–34).
- Brennan, G., Eriksson, L., Goodin, R.E., & Southwood, N. (2013). Norms. In *Explaining Norms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 15–39.

Week 12 (Seminar: Institutions)

- Searle, J. R. (2005), What is an institution?, *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 1: 1–22.
- Guala, F. (2016). “Constitution” and “Normativity”. In *Understanding Institutions: The Philosophy and Science of Living Together*. Princeton University Press, pp. 57–85.

Week 13 (Lecture: Causation)

- Woodward, J. (2021). Theories of causation. In *Causation with a Human Face: Normative Theory and Descriptive Psychology*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 61–114.

Week 14 (Seminar: Are there social laws?)

- Roberts, J. T. (2004). There are no laws of the social sciences, in Hitchcock, C. (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Science*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 151–67.
- Reiss, J. (2017). Are there social scientific laws?, In McIntyre, L. & Rosenberg, A. (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science*, New York: Routledge, pp. 295–309.

Week 15 (Seminar: Do we need mechanisms?)

- Steel, D. (2007). Social mechanisms and process tracing. In *Across the Boundaries: Extrapolation in Biology and Social Science*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 174–97.
- Kincaid, H. (2021). Making progress on causal inference in economics. In Kincaid, H. & Ross, D. (eds.), *A Modern Guide to Philosophy of Economics*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 28–65.

Suggested readings (mandatory for non-attending students):

- Douglas, H E. (2000). Inductive risk and values in science, *Philosophy of Science*, 67(4): 559–79.
- Kincaid, H. (1996). A science of interpretation? In *Philosophical Foundations of the Social Sciences: Analyzing Controversies in Social Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 191–221.
- Salmon, M.H. (1989). Explanation in the social sciences. In Ditcher, P. & Salmon,

W.C. (eds.), *Scientific explanation. Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science*, Vol. 13, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 384-409.

- Cronbach, L. J. & Meehl, P. E. (1955). Construct validity in psychological tests. *Psychological Bulletin* 52 (4): 281–302 (excerpts: 281–83, 290–94).
- Guala, F. (2016). “Reflexivity” and “Interaction”. In *Understanding Institutions: The Philosophy and Science of Living Together*. Princeton University Press, pp. 119–145.
- Ney, A. & Hazlett, A. (2014). The metaphysics of race. In Ney, A. (au.), *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Routledge, pp. 249–79.
- Guala, F. (2006). Has Game Theory Been Refuted? *The Journal of Philosophy* 103(5): 239–63.
- Vanberg, V. (2012). Rational choice, preferences over actions and rule-following behaviour, in Maki, U. (ed.), *Philosophy of Economics*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 505–30.
- Kincaid, H. (2007). Functional explanation and evolutionary social science. In Turner, S. & Risjord, M. (Eds.), *Philosophy of Sociology and Anthropology*, Dordrecht: Elsevier, pp. 213–47.
- Dawkins, R. (1976). Memes: the new replicators. In *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 189–201.
- Cartwright, N. (1999). Nomological machines and the laws they produce. In *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, pp. 49–74.
- Elster, J. (1998). A plea for mechanisms. In Hedström, P. & Swedberg, R. (eds.), *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, pp. 45–73.

Metodi didattici

Lezioni frontali anticipate da letture di testi, alternate a seminari di gruppo su testi selezionati dal docente.

Modalità di verifica e valutazione dell'apprendimento

La valutazione dell'apprendimento si effettuerà tramite la verifica del conseguimento dei seguenti obiettivi didattici: assimilazione delle nozioni presentate nel corso; conoscenza dei testi e delle letture di riferimento; capacità di orientarsi criticamente nei dibattiti contemporanei sulle tematiche affrontate nel corso; correttezza, chiarezza, sintesi e fluidità espositiva; uso della terminologia appropriata.

La verifica si effettuerà tramite un esame orale, che farà seguito alla consegna di un saggio in lingua inglese (min. 2500 parole, max. 3000 parole) su uno dei temi affrontati nel corso, con una bibliografia concordata col docente. Un primo draft del saggio dovrà essere consegnato non oltre *due* settimane prima della sessione d'esame a cui lo studente intende presentarsi. La consegna sarà seguita dal feedback del docente. La versione definitiva sarà presentata entro *una* settimana prima della sessione d'esame. La valutazione complessiva terrà conto della discussione del saggio in sede d'esame, nonché — per i frequentanti — della partecipazione alla discussione in aula.

L'accertamento di conoscenze e competenze si formalizzerà in una valutazione espressa in trentesimi, secondo i seguenti criteri di giudizio:

30 e lode: eccellente

30: ottimo
27-29: buono
24-26: discreto
21-23: più che sufficiente
18-20: appena sufficiente
<18: insufficiente

Strumenti a supporto della didattica

Durante le lezioni verranno utilizzate slides, dispense e documenti di approfondimento. Il materiale utilizzato sarà messo a disposizione degli studenti tramite la piattaforma virtuale.unibo.it

Orario di ricevimento

Durante il corso, per appuntamento nel mio ufficio. Dopo il corso, da remoto.