Division of Humanities  
Course Syllabus

Course Code: HUMA5901  
Course Title: Philosophy of Social Science  
Course Offered in: Fall 2023, 3.00 – 5.50 pm on Tuesdays (Room 5566)  
Course Instructor: Prof. Yafeng SHAN (Office: 3356; Office Hours: 2 – 4 pm on Wednesdays; Email: hmyfshan@ust.hk)

Course Description:  
This is an advanced module in the philosophy of social science. The students will be provided with an overview of important issues in the philosophy of social science. In particular, the module will examine some of the central debates in the philosophy of the social sciences, such as the paradigm wars and the methodological holism/individualism debate, and discuss some key concepts in the social sciences including ‘social mechanism’, ‘explanation’, and ‘causation’.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course ILOs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrate an advanced understanding of the philosophical assumptions behind the methodologies of the social sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrate an advanced understanding of key concepts in the social sciences</td>
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<td>3. Demonstrate comprehensive familiarity of central debates in the philosophy of the social sciences</td>
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<td>4. Demonstrate intellectual originality in their writing</td>
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<td>5. Consider the views of others, whether spoken or written, and develop a critique that furthers investigation</td>
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<td>6. Demonstrate their capacity to conduct extensive research and original, independent study</td>
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<td>7. Construct and evaluate methodologies and arguments as well as propose new hypotheses</td>
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Course Outline:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 Sep</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy of Social Science</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12 Sep</td>
<td>Positivism</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19 Sept</td>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>26 Sep</td>
<td>Critical Realism</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3 Oct</td>
<td>The Paradigm Wars</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10 Oct</td>
<td>Philosophical Foundations of Mixed Methods Research</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>17 Oct</td>
<td>Methodological Individualism and Holism</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>24 Oct</td>
<td>Explanation in the Social Sciences (1): Functionalism</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>31 Oct</td>
<td>Explanation in the Social Sciences (2): Structuralism</td>
<td>Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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### Course Syllabus

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7 Nov</td>
<td>Causation in the Social Sciences (1): Causal Monism and Pluralism. Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>14 Nov</td>
<td>Causation in the Social Sciences (2): Evidential Pluralism. Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in the discussion.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>21 Nov</td>
<td>Social Mechanism. Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in the discussion.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>28 Nov</td>
<td>Social Ontology. Read required reading, attend the lecture, and participate in the discussion.</td>
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**Planned Assessment Tasks:**

- **Final Assessment:** A 3,500-word essay 100%

- **Non-Assessed Assignment:** A 20-minute presentation (NB. Each student is required to do one presentation.)

**Readings:**

**Week 1**

**Topic: Introduction to Philosophy of Social Science**

**Required Reading**


**Further Reading**


Week 2  
**Topic: Positivism**  
**Required Reading**  
**Further Reading**  

Week 3  
**Topic: Interpretivism**  
**Required Reading**  
**Further Reading**  

Week 4  
**Topic: Critical Realism**  
**Required Reading**  
**Further Reading**


**Week 5**

**Topic: The Paradigm Wars**

**Required Reading**


**Further Reading**


**Week 6**

**Topic: Philosophical Foundations of Mixed Methods Research**

**Required Reading**


**Further Reading**


**Week 7**

**Topic: Methodological Individualism and Holism**

**Required Reading**

Further Reading

Week 8
Topic: Explanation in the Social Sciences (1): Functionalism

Required Reading

Further Reading

Week 9
Topic: Explanation in the Social Sciences (2): Structuralism

Required Reading

Further Reading
Jackson, Frank, and Philip Pettit. 1992. “Structural Explanation in Social Theory.” In Reduction, Explanation and Realism, edited by David Charles and Kathleen Lennon,
Week 10

**Topic: Causation in the Social Sciences (1): Causal Monism and Pluralism**

**Required Reading**


**Further Reading**


Week 11

**Topic: Causation in the Social Sciences (2): Evidential Pluralism**

**Required Reading**


https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-021-00415-z.

**Further Reading**


Week 12

**Topic: Social Mechanism**

**Required Reading**


**Further Reading**


Week 13

Topic: Social Ontology

Required Reading


Further Reading
