

PHIL 461: PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

The *Idea of a Social Science*: Objectivity, Looping Effects, and Collaborative Research Practice

Winter 2022 – Term 2

Instructor: Professor Alison Wylie

Class meetings: Tuesdays/Thursdays 2:00-3:30, BUCH B319

Office hours: Wednesdays, 3:00-5:00 and by appointment

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Can human, social subjects be studied “scientifically” or does social inquiry require a distinctive interpretive methodology? The debate about “naturalism” – whether the social sciences can or should model themselves on the natural sciences – has long been central to philosophy of the social sciences. Our point of departure will be an assessment of claims for and against naturalism. We then consider the implications of this philosophical debate for research practice. Topics for discussion will include:

- objectivity: whether, or in what form, this epistemic ideal applies to the social sciences;
- “looping effects”: what impact social research has on its subjects;
- social values and goals of social justice: how these do, or should, inform social research;
- community-based collaborative practice: why it matters to engage stakeholders in research

Readings will include Winch’s classic defence of anti-naturalism, *The Idea of a Social Science* (1958/2008) and Cartwright and Montuschi’s anthology, *Philosophy of Social Science* (2008). All other assigned readings will be available online through LOCR.

Requirements: this will be a reading-intensive course with the emphasis on seminar-style discussion. The requirements include active participation and weekly discussion posts (40%), as well as two essay assignments (60%): a short expository mid-term paper and a thesis-driven final term paper.

Prerequisites: at least one prior course in a social science and/or in philosophy is recommended. Contact the instructor if you have any questions about appropriate background for this course.

Graduate students are most welcome. If you prefer to take this course for 500-level credit contact the instructor to make the necessary arrangements before registration closes.