The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science

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The course is based around my new book of this title and also extends into the field of professional practice. Sessions are based around chapters of the book, though I might cover the ground in a slightly different order from the book. Students are advised to read the book before the course so that the material is relatively familiar and can be discussed more easily.

Supplementary reading is suggested at the end. This is provided for students to follow up on topics.

The course is designed to examine explanation in political science and foster careful consideration of what types of method are appropriate for different research questions. It does not teach research methods as such. I do not teach any specific qualitative or quantitative techniques, but rather explore what we can do with different methods.

The readings below are not required for the sessions; rather they enable students to follow up on topics. A more comprehensive list can be provided.

Expectations are what students are expected to comprehend after the relevant session.

OVERVIEW

THURSDAY 10 MARCH
09.30-11.00	Session 1: Introducing Ourselves
11.00-11.15	Break
11.15-12.45	Session 2: Isms
12.45-13.45	Lunch
13.45-15.15	Session 3: The Nature of Explanation, Part I

FRIDAY 11 MARCH
09.30-11.00	Session 4: The Nature of Explanation, Part II
11.00-11.15	Break
11.15-12.45	Session 5: The Nature of Theories
12.45-13.45	Lunch
13.45-15.15	Session 6: Generalization and Mechanisms

SATURDAY 12 MARCH
09.30-11.00	Session 7: Hypotheses and Theory Testing
11.00-11.15	Break
11.15-12.45	Session 8: Causation, Part I
12.45-13.45	Lunch
13.45-15.15	Session 9: Causation, Part II

MONDAY 14 MARCH
09.30-11.00	Session 10: Conceptual Analysis, Part I
11.00-11.15	Break
11.15-12.45	Session 11: Conceptual Analysis, Part II
12.45-13.45	Lunch
13.45-15.15	Session 12: Evidence in Moral and Political Philosophy

TUESDAY 15 MARCH
09.30-11.00	Session 13: Political Science as a Vocation – Discussion
11.00-11.15	Break
11.15-12.45	Session 14: Getting Published
12.45-13.45	Lunch
13.45-15.15	Session 15: Winding Up

COURSE GUIDE

THURSDAY 10 MARCH

09.30–11.00   Session 1: Introducing Ourselves
The students will introduce themselves, and the research project(s) on which they are engaged and the methods they expect to use. Dowding will explain some of the work he has engaged upon in the past few years. He will outline the nature of the course and what it will cover.

Expectations
- Students to be able to introduce themselves, state their research question and say a little about what they expect to find, and the methods they (intend to) use.

11.00–11.15   Break

11.15–12.45   Session 2: Isms
This examines some standard general accounts of ontology and epistemology. It will concentrate upon the basic realist–relativist divide and explain how realism and moderate relativism are compatible in various regards, and why only radical relativism does not allow any social science explanation. It examines the logical mistake made by some who use arguments allowing us to infer moderate relativism but use them to conclude radical relativism.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapter 2

Expectations
- To be able to locate the different isms within a general ontological and epistemological profile
- To understand the difference between radical and moderate relativism, and different forms of realism
- To understand the idea of real patterns

12.45–13.45   Lunch

13.45–15.15   Session 3: The Nature of Explanation, Part I
We seem to recognize explanations when we see them, but it has proved impossible to derive the logical form of an explanation. This is because explanations are partly psychological: what counts as an explanation depends upon prior background knowledge. It also depends upon the specific question asked. By examining the failure of DN explanation we can see the desiderata underlying it and understand that these desiderata cannot all be satisfied simultaneously. Thus we can see the constraints and possibilities of explanation in political science
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science,* Chapter 3

Expectations
- To understand the desiderata and failure of DN explanation
- To understand the logical and psychological aspects of explanation and make the link to real patterns
- To understand what we mean by prediction and its relationship to explanation

FRIDAY 11 MARCH

09.30–11.00   Session 4: The Nature of Explanation, Part II
As we saw in Part I, explanations in part depend on the questioner's knowledge and on the nature of the question posed. Here we look at some important distinctions between type and token, and ultimate (structural) and proximate (historical) explanations. We examine the important distinction between metaphysical and epistemological necessity, and we apply these distinctions to distinct nature of quantitative and qualitative explanation.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapter 3

Expectations
- To understand Kripke's distinction between metaphysically necessary but epistemologically contingent; and the epistemologically necessary
- To understand the relationship between generalizations and explanation
- To understand the difference between metaphysically necessary (lawlike) generalizations and empirical generalizations
- To understand the type and token, proximate and ultimate explanation and their relationship to qualitative and quantitative research strategies

11.00–11.15   Break

11.15–12.45   Session 5: The Nature of Theories
The term 'theory' means many different things in social science. I break it down into:
(1) Organizing perspectives – non-falsifiable sets of enquiries informing research strategy, e.g. rational choice theory, discourse analysis
(2) Explanatory theories: formal models – models which derive strict predictions that demonstrate they are rivals
(3) Explanatory theories: non-formal models or frameworks – those which do not derive strict predictions, though they may suggest given hypotheses. We find that non-formal models tend not to be rivals in a strict sense
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapter 4

Expectations
- To understand the different ways the term 'theory' is used in political science
- To understand 'organizing perspective', formal models, non-formal models, and mechanisms
- To understand the different between rival and non-rival explanations

12.45–13.45   Lunch

13.45–15.15   Session 6: Generalization and Mechanisms
We have looked at generalizations already, but here we take another look, examining the relationship between generalizations and mechanisms, and how mechanisms provide psychologically satisfying explanations.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapters 3 and 6

Expectations
- To understand the derivation of predictions or hypotheses
- To see the relationship between mechanisms, generalizations and real patterns
- To understand the difference between metaphysically necessary (lawlike) generalizations and empirical generalizations
- To understand the nature of invariance and its relationship to lawlike and empirical generalizations

SATURDAY 12 MARCH

09.30–11.00   Session 7: Hypotheses and Theory Testing
There are important differences between Bayesian confirmation theories and Popperian falsifiability. Popper's arguments are standardly misunderstood in the literature. Popper is explained. His project fails, but we learn an important lesson: you can't beat something with nothing. We look at why we can be sanguine about Duhem–Quine objections to hypothesis testing.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science,* Chapter 5

Expectations
- To understand the difference between confirmation and corroboration; between disconfirmation and falsifiability
- To understand the failure of Popperian falsifiability, but also its heuristic utility
- To understand the Duhem–Quine thesis, and why we can be sanguine about it
- To be able to apply the inversion strategy to their own work

11.00–11.15   Break

11.15–12.45   Session 8: Causation, Part I
There are many accounts of causation. Here we demarcate two general categories: but for and probabilistic. The first is associated with qualitative explanation, the second with quantitative explanation. We see that we are psychologically adapted to look for and assume causation. Historical analysis always presumes causation, but only absolute or structural explanation can supply it.

Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapter 6

Expectations
- To understand 'but for' and probabilistic accounts of causation
- To understand the specification problem and how it applies to OLS and other simple regression techniques and to case-study analysis
- To see the importance of description and descriptive inference

12.45–13.45   Lunch

13.45–15.15   Session 9: Causation, Part II
Here we discuss how we can demonstrate causation, and how we can assume it in mechanistic explanation.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science,* Chapters 6 and 7

Expectations
- To see the importance of experimental methods, regression discontinuity design and synthetic control methods for overcoming the specification problem
- To see the relationship between invariance, generalizations, mechanisms and real patterns in causal and descriptive explanations
- To understand the relationship between causal and structural explanations
- To complete our understanding of proximate and ultimate explanation in relationship to causal and structural explanations

MONDAY 14 MARCH

09.30–11.00   Session 10: Conceptual Analysis, Part I
We are forced always to do conceptual analysis. We always assume categories. We look at how categories are imposed on the data; thus every explanation and test is theorized. We examine some principles of classification, why strict definitions are needed in coding, but we should be less strict when doing qualitative work – definitions cannot be explanatory. We look again at when redefining is acceptable and when it is not. We look again at Kripke's work on naming and necessity and consider whether natural kinds and essentialism are ever applicable in the social sciences.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapter 8

Expectations
- To understand the psychological need for conceptual analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions
- To see why rarely, if ever, such conditions can be adequately specified
- To see the need for strict definitions in coding exercises
- And why qualitative work needs a more relaxed attitudes to concepts

- To understand the relationship between Kripke's naming and necessity and concepts in the social sciences
- To understand when it is acceptable to redefine concepts in hypothesis testing and when not

11.00–11.15   Break

11.15-12.45   Session 11: Conceptual Analysis, Part II
Taking Kripke's work again, we apply it to categories in moral and political philosophy and see whether it helps us understand the nature of essential contestability.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapter 8

Expectations
- To understand merely verbal disputes, value-laden disputes and the correct application of essential contestability
- To see the link between invariance, natural kinds and concepts in the social sciences – and make the link between lawlike and empirical generalizations

12.45–13.45   Lunch

13.45–15.15   Session 12: Evidence in Moral and Political Philosophy
What is the nature of evidence in moral and political philosophy? Intuitions are used to test moral theories; but moral theories are supposed to be prescriptive, so why should our intuitions matter? Reflective equilibrium is a method, but why should there be only one equilibrium in such reflection? Can we find equilibrium-choosing strategies?
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science,* Chapter 9

Expectations
- To understand the difference between thought experiments and intuition pumps
- To understand the difference (if any!) between intuitions as understood by psychologists and intuitions in philosophy
- To understand the evidential role of rational intuitions and empirical intuitions in political philosophy
- To understand the concept of reflective equilibrium

TUESDAY 15 MARCH

09.30–11.00   Session 13: Political Science as a Vocation – Discussion
What is the difference between political science and public policy? This session examines the difference between (Bayesian) belief and opinion. We look at what the profession of the political scientist is or should be.
Based on Keith Dowding, *Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, Chapter 10

Expectations
- To see the difference between opinion and belief
- To reflect on why they want a career in political science, or what kind of career they want following their doctoral research
- To understand the importance of publication, and the need to develop strategies for publication
- To understand the role of good blind reviewing in the publishing process

11.00–11.15   Break

11.15–12.45   Session 14: Getting Published
This session gives advice on how to get work published, and how to respond to hostile reviews.

Expectation
- To understand the nature and process of getting your work published in top journals

12.45–13.45   Lunch

13.45–15.15   Session 15: Winding Up
The course has covered a lot of ground, with some extremely difficult philosophical work. In the final session, we will look at what we have done over the course, and give the students a final chance to take it all in, reflect on what they have done, and ask questions. (It also provides some leeway so we can extend other sessions if need be.)

Expectations
- All of the above

READING

Students should read the relevant chapters of Keith Dowding, *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science,* London: Palgrave, 2016 before the course. The reading below is not required, but any reading prior to the course will be helpful. These suggestions are to enable students to follow up on topics that take their interest and as it is useful for their own work.

General Books on Political Science Methodology Worth Reading

George, Alexander L. and Bennett, Andrew (2005), *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Gerring, John (2012), *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework* (second edn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

King, Gary, Keohane, Robert O. and Verba, Sidney (1994), *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Session 2: Isms

Dennett, Daniel C. (1998), 'Real Patterns', in his *Brainchildren: Essays on Designing Minds* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

Session 3 and 4: The Nature of Explanation, Parts I and II

Achinstein, Peter (1977), 'What Is an Explanation?', *American Philosophical Quarterly,* 14 (1), 1–15.

Achinstein, Peter (1983), *The Nature of Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Jackson, Frank and Pettit, Philip (1990), 'Program Explanation: A General Perspective', *Analysis,* 50 (2), 107–17.

Kripke, Saul (1980) *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Woodward, James (2000), 'Explanation and Invariance in the Special Sciences', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science,* 51, 197–254.

Session 5: The Nature of Theories

Clarke, Kevin A. and Primo, David M. (2012), *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Collier, David (2011), 'Understanding Process Tracing', *PS: Political Science and Politics,* 44 (4), 823–30.

Morton, Rebecca B. (1999), *Methods and Models: A Guide to the Empirical Analysis of Formal Models in Political Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Session 6: Generalization and Mechanisms

Bennett, Andrew and Checkel, Jeffrey T. (2015), 'Process Tracing: From Philosophical Roots to Best Practices', in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (eds), *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Gerring, John (2012), 'Mere Description', *British Journal of Political Science,* 42 (4), 721–46.

George, Alexander L. and Bennett, Andrew (2005), *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Waldner, David (2012), 'Process Tracing and Causal Mechanisms', in Harold Kincaid (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Social Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Woodward, James (2000), 'Explanation and Invariance in the Special Sciences', *British Journal for the Philosophy Science,* 51, 197–254.

Woodward, James and Hitchcock, Christopher (2003), 'Explanatory Generalizations, Part I: A Counterfactual Account', *Nous,* 37 (1), 124.

Session 7: Hypotheses and Theory Testing

Clarke, Kevin A. and Primo, David M. (2012), *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Popper, Karl R. (1972), *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (revised edn; London: Hutchinson).

Sessions 8 and 9: Causation, Parts I and II

Abadie, Alberto, Diamond, Alexis, and Hainmueller, Jens (2010), 'Synthetic Control Methods for Comparative Case Studies: Estimating the Effects of California's Tobacco Control Program', *Journal of the American Statistical Association,* 105 (490), 493–505.

Dawes, Robyn M. (1996), 'Comment: Counterfactual Inferences as Instances of Statistical Inferences', in Paul E. Tetlock and A. Belkin (eds), *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological and Pyschological Issues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 300–8.

Goertz, Gary and Mahoney, James (2012), *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Grimmer, Justin (2015), 'We Are All Social Scientists Now: How Big Data, Machine Learning, and Causal Inference Work Together', *PS: Political Science and Politics,* 48 (1), 80–3.

Sessions 10 and 11: Conceptual Analysis, Parts I and II

Goertz, Gary (2006), *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Kripke, Saul (1972), 'Naming and Necessity', in Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (eds), *Semantics of Natural Language* (Dordrecht: Reidel), 252–355.

Sartori, Giovanni (1970), 'Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics', *American Political Science Review,* 64 (4), 1033–53.

Soames, Scott (2003), *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Vol. 2: The Age of Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Session 12: Evidence in Moral and Political Philosophy

Bealer, George (1998), 'Intuition and the Autonomy of Philosophy', in M. R. DePaul and W. Ramsey (eds), *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).

Dowding, Keith (2016), 'Thought Experiments and Intuition Pumps' (MS)

Dowding, Keith and William Bosworth (2016), 'Rigid Designation, Essential Contestability and Value Pluralism' (MS)

Greene, Joshua D. (2013), *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap between Us and Them* (New York: Penguin).

Kahneman, Daniel (2011), *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

Rawls, John (2001/1951), 'Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics', in his *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press), 1–19.

Wisniewski, Edward J. (1998), 'The Psychology of Intuition', in M. R. DePaul and W. Ramsey (eds), *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

Session 13: Political Science as a Vocation – Discussion

Dennett, Daniel C. (1978), 'How to Change Your Mind', in his (ed.), *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (London: Penguin).

Session 14: Getting Published

Dowding, Keith (2003), 'Getting Published in Academic Journals: Advice to Doctoral Students and Young Academics, Part One', *ECPR EPS: European Political Science,* 2 (2), 63–70.

Dowding, Keith (2003), 'Getting Published in Academic Journals: Advice to Doctoral Students and Young Academics, Part Two', *ECPR EPS: European Political Science* 2 (3), 77–83.