

## THE ETHOS OF SCIENCE

### Objectivity, disinterestedness and autonomy of scientific research

Seminar  
Fall term  
AY 2021-22

#### General information

- Designed for MA level, open to PhD students, 2cp (= 4 ECTS credits).
- See e-learning site for all readings and further material and announcements related to the course: <https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=13409>

#### TOPIC, AIM AND STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

This course deals with three important norms that are often mentioned as part of the ethos of science: objectivity, disinterestedness, and the autonomy of academic research. We will study what these norms are, how they relate to each other and how they structure scientific knowledge production. The aim is to better understand which tensions might arise from the mentioned relations, be this in the natural and social sciences or the humanities. To reach that aim we will focus in the first part on classic and contemporary texts by J. St. Mill, M. Weber, R. Merton, H. Arendt, P. Kitcher, J. Kourany, H. Longino. In the second part, we will first concentrate on one particular case: Holocaust denial. The core guiding normative question of that part is: Is such denial protected by the principle that academic research should be autonomous? If so (or not), why (not)? Based on that example, students will have to do their own case studies, i.e. students have to apply (what they learned) to another case, which they choose and develop as part of the course meetings, in interaction with each other and the course instructor. Suggestions for possible case studies (e.g. with respect to research on sex differences, biases in medical research, or climate change denial) and a 'know how' introduction on when and how to do case study work in philosophy will be provided.

#### LEARNING GOALS, REQUIREMENTS, DELIVERABLES AND GRADING

Students will understand the core issues related to the topic of the course. They will practice their reading, analytic and discussion skills. In particular, they will learn to understand the different roles examples can have in their argumentation and practice the use of case studies. A secure background in philosophical reasoning is required. Yet, no preliminary knowledge about the topic of the course is necessary for successful participation.

Students are required to read the mandatory material for each class and to participate in oral discussions. Students might have to prepare short presentations of the core readings, depending on number of students participating. Students will also

have to work on a specific case study and to write a short post on what they learned about the role of examples. See for more details on rules of participation in the Handout attached to this Syllabus.

Even though the core readings in Part I are epistemological in orientation, students are encouraged to follow their own interest, with respect to disciplinary background or material covered (e.g. from, anthropology, gender studies, history, literary studies, nationalism studies, philosophy, political sciences, public policy, religious studies, sociology, urban studies, visual studies, etc.)

Grading will be based on the written final paper (see attached Handouts for details). Exceptional participation during the course can lead to an upgrade (e.g. from A- for the paper to an A for the overall course). The case study work developed during the course can be reused in the final paper.

## **SCHEDULE**

Wk 1: Introduction

### *Part I: Classic and contemporary contributions*

Wk 2: John Stuart Mill on the freedom of speech and the productive role of dissent

Wk 3: Max Weber on objectivity and the value-free ideal of science

Wk 4: Robert Merton on the ethos of science

Wk 5: Hannah Arendt on truth and politics

Wk 6: Helen Longino on diversity as social objectivity to overcome biases in research

Wk 7: Philip Kitcher on the autonomy of sciences

Wk 8: Janet Kourany on whether some research in the social sciences should be forbidden

Wk 9: Heather Douglas on academic freedom and responsibility of sciences

### *Part II: Case studies*

Wk 10: The case of Holocaust denial

Wk 11: Workshop on how to do case studies as part of philosophical work; develop your own case study

Wk 12: First presentation of case studies

## REFERENCES (CORE READINGS AND FURTHER RELATED MATERIAL)

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- Bernal, J. D. (1939). *The social function of science*. London: George Routledge & Sons.
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- Bilgrami, A., & Cole, J. R. (2015). *Who's afraid of academic freedom?* Irvington: Columbia University Press.
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- Cohen-Cole, J. (2014). *The Open Mind: Cold War politics and the sciences of human nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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- Guston, D. H. (2009). *Between Politics and Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ignatieff, M., & Roch, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Academic freedom: The global challenge*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
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- Kourany, J. A. (2016). Should some knowledge be forbidden? The case of cognitive differences research. *Philosophy of Science*, 83, 779–790.
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- Weber, M. 1904 (1949). *Die Objektivität sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis* (Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy). Engl. Version in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch (ed. and trans.), New York: Free Press.

## GENERAL RULES: PARTICIPATION, PRESENTATIONS, WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Maria Kronfeldner

Interaction in class should be based on mutual reliability and mutual respect and should result in a fair and open intellectual exchange.

### Participation

- Students are required to **attend classes regularly**.
- Students should **participate actively in seminar discussions**.
- Students have to **prepare the required reading** for the course in depth.
- They have to **be able to ask questions** and **make comments on the required reading** and
- **respond to the presentations** of other students.

### Presentations should

- include the **reconstruction of the main arguments of the text** and
- **interpretative remarks** or
- **substantial research questions** for discussion.
- If asked, students also have to **exhibit research skills** (e.g. referring to further literature regarding the topic).
- Students are expected to **prepare and distribute a one-page handout** (strict limit!) that they distribute before their presentation. The tendency in student presentations is to simply accumulate material, especially via powerpoint presentations. Yet, the art of thinking also consists in selecting the relevant from the irrelevant.

### Written assignments

Format and length of the written assignments varies. See course syllabus or specification on the e-learning site for this. If a longer term paper is assigned as an argumentative piece, this can be:

- either a careful **critique** of a particular and important argument for a position,
- a **comparison** between competing arguments about alternative solutions to a problem,
- or a **defense** of some particular position/argument against some relevant criticism.

In all these cases, your own argumentation, your critical voice, should be a significant part of the paper. Rule of thumb for the ideal: 20/80 (20% retelling of what others said; 80% your own way of organizing and defending things).

I will **evaluate assignments** according to the criteria in the student record manual:

CEU GRADING SYSTEM				EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM GRADING SCALE			
GRADE	NAME	POINT	CREDIT	GRADE	STUDENTS*	DEFINITION	AT CEU
A	Outstanding	4.00	yes	A	10%	Outstanding performance with minor errors	A
A-	Excellent	3.67	yes	B	25%	Above the average standard but with some errors	A-/B+
B+	Good	3.33	yes	C	30%	Generally sound work with a number of notable errors	B+/B
B	Fair	3.00	yes	D	25%	Fair but with significant shortcomings	B/B-
B-	Satisfactory	2.67	yes	E	10%	Performance meets the minimum criteria	C+
C+	Minimum Pass	2.33	yes	FX	-	Some more work required before the credit can be awarded	INC
F	Fail	0.00	no	F	-	Considerable further work is required	F

\* Percentage of successful students normally achieving the grade

**Feedback:** I will not comment on the performance of students during class, except where this is necessary, but in case students would like more feedback on their class performance, they can see me during office hours or after class. In response to the term paper, students will receive a feedback sheet, which will translate the CEU grading system into specific criteria for academic argumentative writing. See next page.

**To stay up-to-date** students need to regularly check the e-learning site (moodle) of the course!

## FEEDBACK-SHEET

**Seminar:**  
**Piece:**  
**Student ID/Name:**

**1. General evaluation**

**Grade (tendency):**  
(not necessarily the final grade)

**2. Comparison to previous pieces (if applicable)**

**3. What you could improve**

**4. Further remarks**  
See also comments in your text.

**SPECIFIC CRITERIA** (Grade will result from scores on all criteria and also whether one is at the top or low end of a grade with respect to a specific criterion, which is not possible to represent in the grid, though)

*A = 4.00-3.68, A- = 3.67-3.34; B+ = 3.33-3.01; B = 3.00-2.68; B- = 2.67-2.34; C+ = 2.33 (Minimum pass)*

<b>Research topic, argumentation and research skills</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A-B</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B-C</b>	<b>C</b>
		<b>+</b>		<b>+</b>	
I. Does the paper have a precise, manageable, meaningful, independent and relevant substantial question, given its topic? Does it have a clear structure and upshot?					
II. Are the arguments precise, coherent and exhibiting argumentative depth?					
III. Are important concepts explicated?					
IV. Does the paper critically engage with the literature in an original way (e.g. anticipating counterarguments, developing an original organization of the material and/or argumentation)?					
V. Is there an indication for adequate comprehension of the relevant literature (incl. are the interpretations charitable)?					
VI. Is the paper mentioning relevant references, and is it clear who speaks (authorial voice)? Is there an indication of mastery of research techniques (e.g. have independently found sources been used)?					
<b>Form and Presentation</b>					
VII. Does the paper conform to the standards of academic writing? (quotations, layout, spelling, grammar, punctuation, word count mentioned, academic writing style, labeling of tables and figures, bibliography properly formatted and complete)					