

Philosophy of Science SV9108 Spring 2021

Lecturers: Andrea Nightingale, Geography
Gaute Torsvik, Economics

This was the first year that SV9108 Philosophy of Science ran in this format and with this teaching team. Both Gaute and myself decided to take most of the lectures ourselves to help retain continuity. Gaute invited 1 guest lecturer. A total of 59 students regularly attended (or logged into Zoom...) and came from all the disciplines in the Faculty including TIK. The course was delivered in a week when kindergartens in Oslo went to "rødt nivå" and the city was in lock down due to the Corona virus so several students had small children they had to manage at home while attending the course. This context is very important for the comments received.

Overall, the course went extremely well and while some things will change for next year, on the whole it was successful. The majority of the comments on the feedback form reflect that. Andrea also received 5 personal emails and several messages in the Zoom chat thanking her for an excellent and stimulating course. The comments on the feedback form that require attention fall into four main categories: the 2 halves of the course; the level of challenge; digital teaching; interdisciplinary-gender interactions.

1. **The two halves of the course.** Andrea and Gaute were given somewhat different information on how they were expected to share the course. We met early in the autumn and remained in communication with each other about readings, topics and approach to the course throughout. However, we did not plan the course 'together'; it remained as two separate and only partially connected sections. Students noticed this, not only because our teaching styles are different. The content was significantly more abstract and at the level of epistemology and ontology in Andrea's part, whereas Gaute's part was more methodologically focused with an emphasis on evaluating causality.

In many respects, the differences in the two parts was a strength. The Philosophy of Science courses have historically suffered from the diversity of the Faculty and different expectations from students stemming from that diversity. The way it was organised this year helped to give a little of something to everyone.

In other respects, the two parts require more coordination. A joint handbook is clearly required, and Andrea would like more time so she can observe more of Gaute's part. It would also be very useful to have an opening and closing lecture that are done jointly so students can observe the lecturers' different stances and the two can talk together to help connect the parts of the course for the students.

2. **The level of challenge.** The vast majority thought the course was at more or less the right level so no major changes are needed there. However, many students were surprised by the amount of reading required. This was caused by 3 factors. i.) Andrea expected students to read before sessions whereas many thought they could engage readings later when preparing their essays. ii.) Not enough information was sent

directly to students in the weeks before the course so that they would start reading early. A couple students contacted Malin / Andrea about readings in early February so Andrea made the mistake of assuming they knew they had to read in advance. There was a comment about readings not being available, but everything was on Leganto or in Canvas so this comment can be ignored. iii.) There seems to be differences in expectations over how much reading is legitimate for a course like this. Andrea worked from the volume required in the past.

Overall, the course seemed to be pitched at the right level with a majority of students getting benefit from all aspects of the course. With a group this diverse, there will always be some who object to some aspects, or who find it more challenging than they expected. Most found the climate change focus Andrea used to be interesting and relevant. There was no question during the session itself that the example had achieved its pedagogical purpose: to force students to apply the abstract philosophy of science ideas they were learning to a tangible example. In the panel discussion, some students chose to talk about their own discipline / research which was also allowed. There were a few negative comments about the climate change focus, but I think these can be considered within the realm of 'it is not possible to please everyone'. Going forward, Andrea plans to use the climate change example for at least another year or two but she will continue to evaluate whether a shift to another widely relevant topic should be made.

In terms of work required, we can look at reducing a bit the reading required for next year. However, more importantly, *Andrea suggests that the course is listed as running over 5-6 weeks even if lectures remain within 1 week so that students are clear they have to start reading early. Andrea believes it would be beneficial to run the course over 2 weeks—2 days each week—so students can more easily absorb.*

3. **Digital Teaching.** Not many surprises here. Long days on Zoom were too exhausting. Note that Andrea designed her sessions so that they were never on Zoom for an entire morning. She is surprised that the flexibility with pre-recorded lectures, time for small group discussions that were not tied to a large Zoom meeting, etc were not mentioned as helping to break up the days. Many students found benefit in pre-recorded lectures while some did not like them.

There were a few complaints about challenges with technology but these complaints were quite unfair. Andrea used pre-assigned discussion groups which Malin helped her set up in Zoom. When the groups were formed, about 1/4th of the students were not automatically assigned as they should have been so Andrea had to do it manually. A couple of students told her specifically that a.) it had not been stressful for them and b.) if we had been meeting face to face it would have taken longer to break out into groups. Andrea was keen to use pre-assigned groups so that there was disciplinary diversity in the groups.

Recording lectures. Andrea prefers to use powerpoint because it is easier to edit if mistakes are made. She was unable to upload these into the 'video' section of Canvas so they were in the modules. A few students complained it was disorganised,

but again, this is unfair. Andrea kept the Canvas page meticulously organised the entire week with very clear labelling of each session. Gaute did not rely as much on pre-recording.

In the future, Andrea will continue to use pre-recorded lectures and use face to face teaching time to engage in interactive and flipped classroom sessions. This seems to be a better pedagogical approach as students valued being able to go back to pre-recorded lectures. Students who had small children at home were especially appreciative since they could not always follow as closely as they wanted to during the session time.

4. **Interdisciplinary – gender dynamics.** The diversity of the group was challenging. There were a few men who were very dominant during plenary discussions in Andrea's part and one in particular was very negative. In the final session, he was outright rude and his lack of respect for Andrea and what she was teaching became very obvious (he began the week in the first session in the same stance). Several female students found this disturbing and it served to silence them. Andrea struggled with managing this dynamic and that particular student the entire week despite her 20 years of teaching experience—she was well aware of what was going on. Small groups helped significantly, but on the whole, the problem pointed more to the need for gender training within the PhD programs of the Faculty. That particular student should never have thought his behaviour towards Andrea was acceptable to begin with. On the positive side, Andrea used his scepticism as an opportunity to encourage the others to try to look at their own philosophical stance from other positions. Most found this stimulating and exciting and while perhaps did not shift their stance, definitely helped them to think it through more carefully. In the future, Andrea will consider using gender segregated discussion groups, although she is reluctant to use them exclusively. The difficulties of pre-assigning groups in Zoom meant that she did not have the capacity to change the composition of small groups during the week.