

Phil 60/HPS 60: Introduction to Philosophy of Science Section 1 Handout

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Outline:

1. John's background:
 - a. From New Zealand
 - b. Works in three areas that relate to science in some way:
 - i. Philosophy of science
 - ii. Metascience
 - iii. Psychology and cognitive science
 - c. Non-authoritarian:
 - i. "John" instead of "Mr. Wilcox"
 - ii. You can disagree with me and object to anything I think, do or say
2. Administrative issues:
 - a. Office hours on Thursdays, 5pm, 92N of the Philosophy Department
 - b. Support mental health
 - c. Anonymous feedback form: <https://forms.gle/N2qHyiwF8Sxx8Fc38>
 - d. Sectional optional on the 21st of October
3. Break into pairs, introduce yourself to each other and consider the following questions:
 - a. What do you hope to get out of the course?
 - b. What do you want to get out of today's section?
 - c. Are there any questions you want to discuss?
4. Why is philosophy of science important?
 - a. Common answers:
 - i. Fosters open-mindedness and freedom from dogmatism
 - ii. Helps us to critically evaluate claims *about* and *in* science better
 - iii. Generally helps us to become better, clearer and more rigorous thinkers
5. The first assignment:

Instructions: Answer **ONE** of the below questions, provide an argument for your answer, consider a well-motivated objection to your answer or argument, and offer a reply to that objection.

Questions:

1. **The importance of physics relative to other sciences:** To some extent, academic philosophy of science has been the most focused on physics out of all the sciences. This is reflected in the Okasha reading, since most of his historical account of science concerns physics--or related fields like astrophysics. Okasha justifies his historical focus on physics by claiming that "physics is both historically important and in a sense the most fundamental scientific discipline" (Okasha, 2016, p. 7). Do you think that physics

should have some privileged importance in philosophy of science or in how we view the sciences more generally?

2. **Scientism:** Susan Haack (2012) characterizes scientism as “a kind of over-enthusiastic and uncritically deferential attitude towards science, an inability to see or an unwillingness to acknowledge its fallibility, its limitations, and its potential dangers” (p. 76). She claims that there are six signs of scientism. Do you disagree with any aspects of her characterization of scientism or its signs?

Marking criteria:

1. **Clarity of expression:** Do you clearly say what you mean so that others can understand it well?
2. **Argumentative rigor:** Do you successfully justify your main conclusion(s) without making questionable assumptions or inferences?
3. **Rebuttal of some objection(s):** Do you consider and reply to some objection(s) to your argument or conclusion?
4. **Any objections considered are well motivated:** Are any such objections well-motivated in the sense that someone realistically could find the objection persuasive (before you have replied to it, that is)?