Philosophy template

**Simplified roadmap for determining one’s paradigmatic stance[[1]](#footnote-1)**

***In relation to the research question that you pose – what do you assume? Read the first paragraph of all four statements across the top of the page and then follow the arrows down (and possibly across) until you reach the bottom of the page.***

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| **Ontology** | **or**  **Realism**  You believe that there is a single truth to be found and there are facts that exist in relation to the research problem that can be uncovered. Social reality is a concrete structure revealed through behavioural patterns. | **Internal Realism**  You believe that there is a truth but that it is often obscured by a variety of complications (e.g. constructs and definitions). Facts, although concrete, cannot always be accessed directly. Reality is a concrete process. | **or**  **Relativism**  You believe that there are *many truths* held by different people (including your own) and what counts as a relevant fact will therefore *depend on the observer*. Reality is a social construction. Context is revealed through human action and interpretation. | **Nominalism**  You believe that there is *no single truth* to be found and that *facts are created* (i.e. not uncovered). Reality is a projection of human imagination. |
| **Epistemology** | **Hard Positivism**  You want to be objective and detached like a scientist in a lab and use constructs to reduce issues/data to the simplest terms. You operationalise and quantify.  **Design Implications** | **Positivism**  You want to be objective but also acknowledge that social science comes with particular challenges (e.g. people define things in different ways) as you aim to discover fundamental laws underlying human behaviour. | **Weak Constructivism**  You acknowledge that you are part of the world that you investigate. While recognizing total objectivity is not possible when it comes to the social world, your focus is on inter-subjectively confirmable experiences and behaviours.  **Design Implications** | **Hard Constructivism**  You argue that the social context alone conditions our understanding of the world and so creates it – things are true because they are held to be true. |
| **Role of Theory** | **Theory testing** aimsat **confirming** universal laws of human behaviour. | **Theory generation through asking multiple questions across a suitable sample** with a view to understand how various aspects within the data are linked and by so doing obtain generalizable findings. | **Theory generation** implies focus on context and the transferability of understanding gained from one setting to another (as opposed to generalizability). | **Sensemaking and understanding new insight** with the option of developing theoretical considerations. |
| **Methodology** | Research strategies and methods, you may chose tend to be quantitative involving large randomised samples. | Research strategies and methods you may chose are predominantly quantitative but there are also qualitative approaches such as some case study designs to understand what behaviours might explain particular results or content analysis which gives some quantification to particular themes. | Research strategies and methods you may chose are predominantly qualitative (across the spectrum) – often used is some form of ‘rich description’ written into the analysis to provide detailed account in context – but may also include some quantification of elements to gain some sense of the frequency of occurrence. | Research strategies and methods you may chose allow you to explore human subjectivity from the inside such as autoethnography, some interview-based approaches or narrative ethnography. |

1. Please note that this overview aims at assisting you with an initial assessment. Depending on the type and level of your research project, you may wish to reflect on your choices on a deeper level. This said, this roadmap can provide a useful starting point and may be sufficient for student projects. Implications indicated at the bottom (in grey) will be discussed in the next chapter on research design. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)