

Course title: Philosophy of Social Sciences				
Course code: RPB 177		No. of credits: 3	L-T-P: 28-14-0	Learning hours: 42
Pre-requisite course code and title (if any): None				
Department: Policy Studies				
Course coordinator(s): Dr L N Venkataraman			Course instructor(s): Dr L N Venkataraman	
Contact details: venkataraman.ln@terisas.ac.in				
Course Type: Compulsory (Pre-PhD course)			Course offered in: Semester 1	
Course Description While the social sciences “think” about society (they engage in the study of society), the philosophy of social sciences “thinks about such thinking” and deals with the contestations about the aims, methods, concepts and theories in the social sciences. This course will accordingly focus on the philosophical issues that arise in our attempts to understand the social world from scientific perspectives. The limits of the positivist approach, following Auguste Comte, and the interpretative approach, following Wilhelm Dilthey, will be discussed in order to explore new ways of studying the social world. The course will include basic questions such as: what is the scientific status of the social sciences? Can they be “objective”? Are there “social laws” like physical laws? When is it appropriate to be “holistic” and “reductionist”? “Quantitative” and “qualitative”? What are the relationships between rationality and action, causal explanation and interpretations? The course will end with some key practical and ethical implications for the researcher.				
Course objectives				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To sharpen the students’ capacity to understand the social world ▪ To strengthen the ability of students to make informed epistemological and methodological choices in their own research ▪ To enhance the students’ critical awareness of their own preconceptions and biases in order to help students to deal with them 				
Course content				
Module	Topic	L	T	P
1	Introduction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The nature of philosophical enquiry - Distinctiveness of philosophical enquiry in comparison to other cognitive disciplines - Varieties of knowledge: the differences between philosophy and (social) sciences - Introduction to the philosophy of social sciences 	7	2	
2	How can we know about social facts? Distinction between “social” and “natural” facts: are social sciences like natural sciences? (see Bishop) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values and the world: fragility and resilience of values (see Bishop) - Problems of description, interpretation and comprehension of social practices, traditions, institutions and roles – is there a construction of the social reality? (see chapter 8, Benton and craib) - What is a paradigm, a theory? (see Chapter 2 of Gopal Guru’s book) (godfrey smith_chapter 5) (newman-chapter 2, page 23-34) - - “Quantitative” versus “qualitative” analyses (see in Chapter 4 of Lawrence Neuman pp.84-95) 	6	4	
3	Explantation in social sciences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reductionist and holistic perspectives: the individual and the structure - Rule-guided praxis and law-governed processes: rational and causal 	6	4	

	analysis of social actions - Evolutionary, functional and causal explanations - Hermeneutic (interpretative) understanding - - Looking beyond positivism and hermeneutics			
4	Practical and ethical implications of aims and methods of social enquiry - Critical theory and praxis (see Turner and Roth) - Value-neutrality, value-orientation, and self-reflexivity (see Martin Hollis_Philosophy of social sc) - Objectivity and relativism: postmodernist debates (see Bishop) - Ecological approach to the philosophy of the social sciences - Feminist approach to the philosophy of the social sciences (chapter 9-benton and craib and chapter 38-research methods in social sciences) - - Subaltern approach to the philosophy of the social sciences	9	4	
	TOTAL	28	14	0
Evaluation criteria:				
		Weightage (%)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Writing of two essays: 60% (30% each) ▪ Final written exam: 40% 				
Learning Objectives: By the end of the course, students will: - be better equipped to deal with the complexity of the social world and with the different ways of studying it - be able to make conscious epistemological and methodological choices in their own doctoral research work - gain some clarity with respect to “scientific objectivity”				
Pedagogical approach Lectures, seminars, discussions, invited speakers				
Materials: The books marked with one asterisk (*) are readers; the book with two asterisks (**) is a textbook. **Bishop, Robert C. (2007) The Philosophy of the Social Sciences: An Introduction. London: Continuum. Flew, Antony (1975) Thinking About Thinking. London: Collins Fontana. Gamez, David & Havi Carel (eds) (2004) What Philosophy Is. London: Continuum. Guru, Gopal & Sundar Sarukkai (2012) The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Spender, Dale (1981) Men’s Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines. New York: Pergamon Press. *Steel, Daniel & Francesco Guala (eds) (2010) The Philosophy of Social Science Reader. London: Routledge. *Turner, Stephen & Paul Roth (eds) (2002) The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences. Oxford: Blackwell.				
Other readings				
Additional information (If any): This course is not a methodology course; instead, it will be a course on the appraisal of the competitive methods in social sciences				

Student responsibilities:

Intensive reading and critical writing

Course reviewers:

1. Prof. Rajeev Bhargava, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi
2. Prof. Bhagat Oinam, Centre for Philosophy, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi