



PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

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INTENDED AUDIENCE : UG and PG students of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sciences and Engineering

COURSE OUTLINE :

This course is concerned with the nature of social science inquiry. It is intended for students in all disciplines and those early in their masters and doctoral research programmes. The course travels through philosophy of science, epistemology, ontology and specific applications to the major disciplinary areas. The main objectives of the course are to: (a) introduce the philosophy of science and its application to social sciences, (b) outline major differing classes of theory in social sciences and to explicate their metatheoretical foundations, (c) familiarize students with the plurality of views on these issues in the intellectual community, (d) provide students with an opportunity to apply these concepts to the analysis of issues in social sciences, and (e) provide students with an opportunity to practise scholarly discourses.

ABOUT INSTRUCTOR :

Prof. Sambit Mallick is Professor of Sociology at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. He specializes in the sociology of science and technology, and also includes historical sociology and philosophy of the social sciences among his research interests. His research and teaching are at the intersection of philosophy, social theory, and science and technology studies. His courses under NPTEL have attracted a large number of students even from the remote areas in India and abroad.

COURSE PLAN:

Week 1: Introduction

- History of philosophy of social sciences
- Empiricism and rationalism
- Auguste Comte and positivism
- Epistemology and ontology

Week 2: Emile Durkheim

- Rules of sociological method
- Influence of sciences on sociology
- Objectivity in social sciences
- Social facts, autonomy of knowledge and the necessity of science
- Commonsense and science
- Comparative social sciences Organic analogy and precursor to functionalism

Week 3: Max Weber – I

- Positivism and neo Kantianism
- Methodology of social sciences

Week 4: Max Weber – II

- Methodological individualism
- (Meaningful) social action
- Interpretative understanding (verstehen) of social action: observatory and explanatory understanding
- Ideal types

Week 5: Karl Marx

- Idealism versus materialism
- Materialist conception of history
- Principles of dialectic
- Understanding nature
- Ideology and science: methodological implications

Week 6: Karl Popper: Principle of falsification

- Context of discovery and context of justification
- Hypothetico-deductive model
- Thomas Kuhn: Consensus-driven paradigm
- Normal science: tradition-bound activity
- Anomalies
- Crisis within normal scientific tradition
- Revolutionary science: tradition-shattering activity

Week 7: Positivism versus hermeneutics: conflicting traditions

- Natural sciences versus social sciences
- Objectivity and subjectivity in social sciences
- Quantitative and qualitative research traditions

Week 8: Conclusion

- Beginning of the end of philosophy of social sciences
- Overview of the course