

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Philosophy of Social Science
Course Code	: PHI3283
Recommended Study Year	: 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th Years
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective - Philosophy of Natural and Human Sciences Profile
Prerequisite(s)	: None
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course discusses foundational and methodological issues in social sciences. Are social sciences characterized by a fundamentally different approach to their subject than the perspective adopted in natural sciences? Are there laws in social science? What is the meaning and role of functional explanation in social sciences? How is biological knowledge about human evolution relevant for social science? Is methodological individualism acceptable, and if yes, in what version? What is the role of rationality in social science explanations? What is the relation between individual and collective rationality? Can social science be value-free?

Aims

The course aims to:

- Introduce the students to basic philosophical disagreements about the nature and methods of social science;
- Present various contemporary theories on the distinctness of social science as well as on its connections with other areas of inquiry;
- Enable students to gain more awareness of foundational issues in social sciences.
- Provide students with the theoretical tools to develop their own views on the debated topics.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- (LO1) Describe various arguments about the nature of social science in a rational and precise way.
- (LO2) Illustrate how different views on central problems in social science have developed and how they are relevant for contemporary philosophical debates.
- (LO3) Explain controversial issues to lay people in a clear and accessible way.
- (LO4) Defend their own views on the topics discussed throughout the course.

Indicative Content

- Differences and similarities between social and natural sciences
- Methodological individualism vs. methodological holism
- Social constructivism
- The nature and origin of social institutions

- Causal explanation vs. understanding
- Functional explanation
- Natural selection vs. cultural selection
- Biology and explanation of human behavior
- Individual and collective rationality
- The role of values in social science

Teaching Method

Sectional.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

- A midterm exam, in which they will have to answer short questions for example relating to the nature and origin of social institutions (to assess LO1 and LO4).
- A final exam, in which they will have to answer short questions on the debates discussed in the course (to assess LO2, LO3, and LO4).
- a presentation, in which students will have to explore a specific topic of their choice among those debated in the course (to assess LO4).
- In the discussion sessions, students will answer short questions on the weekly lectures (to assess LO1-2-3-4).

Assessment

10% Class participation; 20% Presentation; 30% Midterm exam; 40% Final exam.

Required Readings

M. Martin and L.C. McIntyre, eds. *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Sciences*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1994.

A. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, 4th ed. Colorado: Westview Press, (2012).

Supplementary Readings

J. Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

M. Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

H. Kincaid, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

S. P. Turner & P. A. Roth (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

D. Steel & F. Guala (eds.), *The Philosophy of Social Science Reader*, London: Routledge, 2011.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.

- (4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>