

**CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
MA OPTIONAL COURSE**

PO 512: INTERPRETATION IN SOCIAL THEORY

Mode of Assessment: 2 Midterm assessments + End-Term examination

Contact hours: 4 Lectures per week

Although it is customary to speak of the social sciences, they were previously identified as 'cultural sciences' and 'human sciences'. These terms were used to differentiate a sphere of study different from the natural sciences: one where the Cartesian duality between subject and object is challenged and an alternative conception of the self and the knowledge process offered.

The hermeneutic tradition was the key site of this enterprise. The course will critically engage with this tradition and attempt to explore the idea of interpretation and meaning within it. In particular it will examine how this framework differs from the post-positivist readings of the role of interpretation and theory in the sciences, and the significance of this framework for students of social and political theory.

1. Situating the Hermeneutic tradition: its place in the Renaissance project of emancipation and Romanticism
2. The idea of *Geisteswissenschaften*: early distinctions between natural sciences, mathematics and human sciences to Dilthey's conception of hermeneutic understanding
3. Idea of the historical self: questioning the Cartesian notion of subject and object; recasting the relationship between the past and the present
4. Leaning on the hermeneutic tradition: Paul Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty
5. Two notions of interpretation: Difference between Hermeneutic Understanding and post-positivist philosophies of science
6. Interpretation, Reason and Critique: Responses from Habermas and Richard Rorty
7. Implications for the study of society and politics: An assessment of the hermeneutic tradition