

What are the Human Sciences? (and Introduction to the course)

Introduction to the Human Sciences

Lecture 1

05 Jan 2026

Why are we doing this course

1. Because you are receiving a well-rounded education at IITH and not being trained to become only skillful coders or computer engineers.

- Thus you learn about the world we live in, the world in which you will work and earn your living, the world you will change with your work.

2. The difference between a good engineer and an average one is that the good engineer understands the society in which s/he works.

- Thus you study social sciences and humanities – the human sciences.

WHY Human Sciences and not the Humanities and the Social Sciences

The Anglophone versus the Francophone traditions

3. Understanding society based on a different foundation of knowledge

Knowledge in Pre-Modern World



- Not divided into **categories** like we know it today; whether between natural and human sciences or sub-divided further within these
- All creation was considered emanating from the same divine source and interlinked in a divine law/plan
- Thus knowledge about the world was interlinked and there could not be a division...
- ...once we **know divine will**, we would know everything there is to know about the world, the humans and everything else

**EVERYTHING WAS THE WORK OF GOD OR
DIVINE WILL**

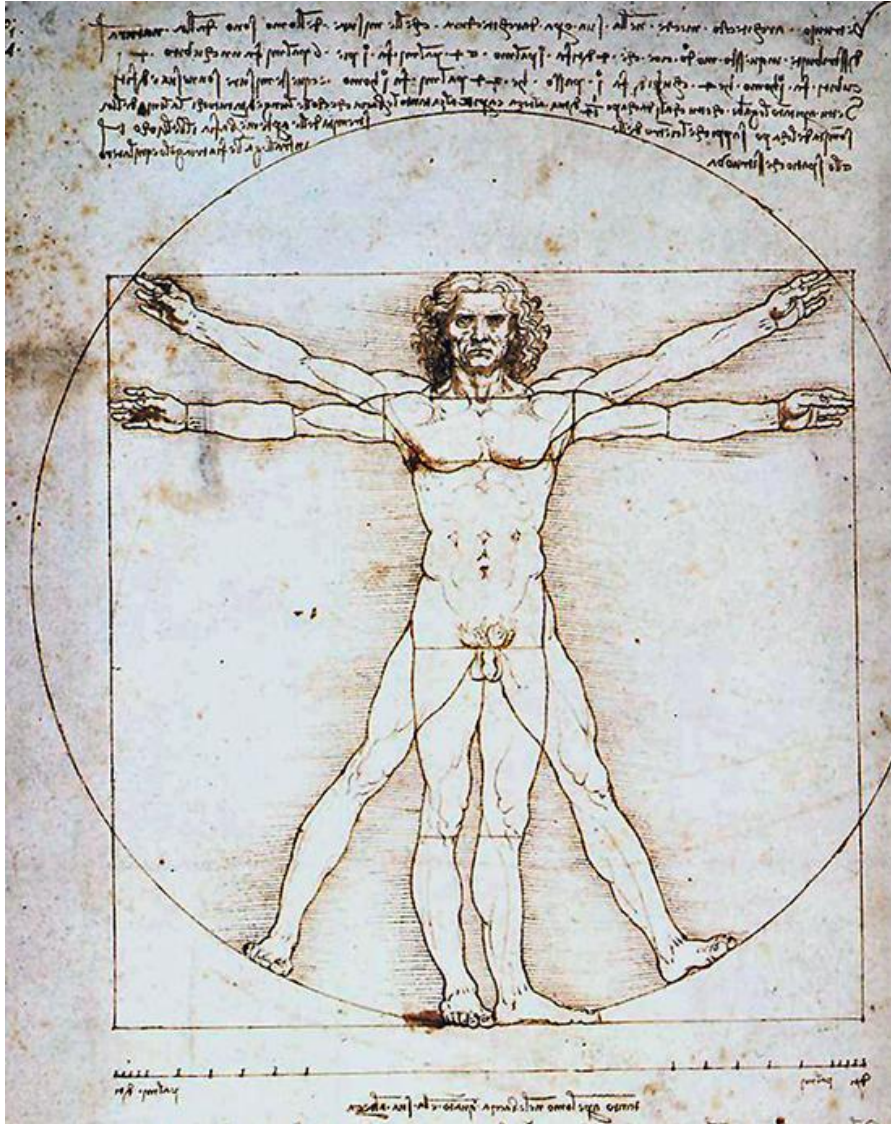
Heliocentric Revolution

- Archaic knowledge systems held world to be the **centre of creation**
- The Sun, Moon and Heavens moved around the earth (which was flat)
- Major shift: Sun the centre of the solar system and earth merely one among many planets
- **Physical laws** same everywhere and **explain** physical world
- Natural Sciences are **bereft of divine will**
 - And other than **first causes**

DE-CENTRING CREATION :: DIS-ENCHANTMENT OF NATURE



Centering the Human



- In Archaic society, human action mere expression of Divine Will
- Study of history was **study of God's actions**; or **morality**
- Shift towards study of **Man and his actions** in its own right, not as an agent of God
- First in arts and literature, then in the study of History
- Emergence of Human Sciences
 - Popularly called Humanities and Social Sciences
- Like Natural Sciences, bereft of any divine will

HUMANISM

IDEA THAT "SUBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE" IS HUMAN BEING

What is Knowledge

Archaic Society

- Theology: real knowledge is UNDERSTANDING divine will; God's creation
- Philosophy: knowledge about how to make the world work; subservient to divine will.
- UNDERSTANDING, NOT EXPLANATION

Modern Society

- Philosophy elevated to mother discipline; Theology vanishes
- History shifts from God's story to Human's story
- History is about both understanding and explaining
 - Society
 - Economy
 - Polity
 - Culture

Disciplines and Disciplinary Boundaries

- Overarching themes
 - How did different disciplines develop? How did we reach where we are?
 - Important milestones/processes: the Scientific and Industrial revolutions, Enlightenment, Colonialism, Decolonization (as an ongoing process), Structuralism and its posts...
- Relationship between disciplines
 - How various disciplines have different questions/approaches
 - How disciplines speak to each other
 - How these disciplinary relationships play out in modern academic traditions of 'interdisciplinarity'

USEFUL examples: The study of coal communities, cricket...

Aims of the Course

- Introduction to the origin of each modern discipline
 - Main framing questions of each discipline
 - Present state of knowledge; in India.
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- Start with the study of the past
 - Study production and consumption
 - Study how these themes are addressed in Literature
 - Then how society is governed and power exercised
 - Study of social organization in society
 - Conclude with how all these themes are addressed in Philosophy

Expectations

- All readings are done
- All classes are attended
- Class Participation
- Class Discipline
- Deadlines are adhered to





Grading

- Absolute grades
 - A grades for going beyond what is expected
 - B grades for meeting expectations
 - C grades for doing less than expected
- Credit (and grades) will be given for creative thinking
- No one gets full marks in Human Sciences
 - Don't panic!

Designed the course to be a journey of ideas

ENJOY THE RIDE

