

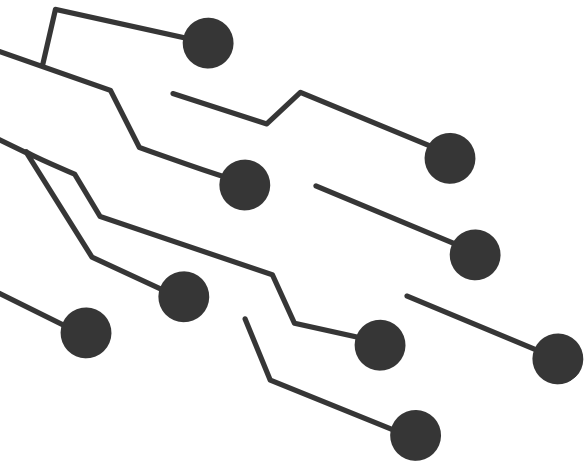


Department of Humanities & Social Sciences

IISER BHOPAL

HSS Lecture Series

Science as a Social Epistemic Practice



The traditional epistemology of science has been largely shaped by an individualist conception of knowledge and rationality, wherein the epistemic agent is conceived as an autonomous subject engaged in justifying beliefs about an objective world. From the Cartesian model of the knowing mind to the logical empiricist ideal of a value-neutral observer, the conception of knowledge was systematically backgrounded in the pursuit of methodological purity and epistemic certainty. However, the historicist and sociological turns in twentieth-century philosophy of science, exemplified by Thomas Kuhn's analysis of paradigms and the sociology of scientific knowledge, exposed the inadequacy of this model by demonstrating that scientific rationality is constituted within social practices, institutions, and communicative networks.

The framework of social epistemology advances this insight by reconceptualizing scientific inquiry with emphasis on the cognitive and social aspects, distributed across communities and regulated by shared epistemic norms and practices. It examines how trust, testimony, and the division of cognitive labour underlies the reliability of scientific knowledge, and how objectivity emerges not through detachment from the social world but through organizational facets of science. Drawing on the works of Alvin Goldman, Helen Longino, Philip Kitcher, and other social epistemologists, the talk argues that the epistemic authority of science rests upon its organized sociality, enables disagreement, critique, and convergence toward justified belief. Therefore any epistemology of science must acknowledge the social epistemic practice.

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SEMINAR HALL 1 - VH

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Professor Vikram Singh Sirola teaches Philosophy at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. His research and teaching interests span Epistemology, Analytic Ethics, and the Philosophy of Science. He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Jawaharlal Nehru University and was awarded the Fulbright-Nehru Senior Research Fellowship at Columbia University, New York. Professor Sirola's recent publications include works on Social Epistemology (2019), Underdetermination in Science (2019), Evolutionary Epistemology (2018), Moral Epistemology (2023), and Scientific Normativity (2025). His contributions to teaching have been recognized with the S.P. Sukhatme Award for Excellence in Teaching (IIT Bombay, 2020) and the Departmental Award for Excellence in Teaching (2018).