**Philosophy of Social Science**

Tuesday, 12:30-13:00

Room 129

**Instructor:** Tamás Paár

The course focuses on some of the main issues discussed within the philosophy of social science. In the first half of the semester, we explore whether explanations, predictions, and value-free objectivity are possible in the social sciences. In the second half of the semester, we focus on dilemmas such as naturalism vs humanism, descriptivism vs interpretivism, and relativism vs ethnocentrism.

**Requirements:**

* regular attendance and active class participation
* short quizzes at the beginning of classes
* presentation
* end of term exam

**Topics:**

1. **Sept. 9.** Introduction
2. **Sept. 16.** Explanation I. **Hempel**’s deductive-nomological model
3. **Sept. 23.** Explanation II. **Webb** on explanation in the social sciences
4. **Sept. 30.** Prediction I. **MacIntyre**’s critique of the predictive power of social sciences
5. **Oct. 7.** Prediction II. **Webb** on prediction in the social sciences
6. **Oct. 14.** Values I. Ernest **Nagel**’s continuity thesis
7. **Oct. 21.** Values II. **Risjord** on values in the social sciences
* Oct. 28. (fall break)
1. **Nov. 4.** Descriptivism I. **Winch**’s Idea of a Social Science
2. **Nov. 11.** Descriptivism II. **Winch** on understanding a primitive society
3. **Nov. 18.** Descriptivism vs Interpretivism. **Taylor** and **Midgley** on

comparing and criticizing cultures

1. **Nov. 25.** Interpretivism I. **Taylor** on interpretation in the social sciences
2. **Dec. 2.** Interpretivism II. **Martin**’s critique of Taylor
3. **Dec. 9.** Exam

**Mandatory readings:**

Hempel, Carl G.: The Function of General Laws in History. In Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre (eds.): *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. MIT, 1994. 43-54.

MacIntyre, Alasdair: *After Virtue.* Ch. 8. The Character of Generalizations in Social Science and their Lack of Predictive Power. Notre Dame, 2007. 88-108.

Martin, Michael: Taylor on Interpretation and the Sciences of Man. In Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre (eds.): *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. MIT, 1994. 259-279.

Midgley, Mary: Trying Out One’s New Sword. In *Heart and Mind*. St. Martin’s Press, 1981. 160-165.

Nagel, Ernest: The Value-Oriented Bias of Social Inquiry. In Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre (eds.): *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. MIT, 1994. 571-584.

Risjord, Mark: *Philosophy of Social Science. A Contemporary Introduction.* Ch. 1. 2 Objectivity, Values, and the Possibility of a Social Science. Routledge, 2023. 14-33.

Taylor, Charles: Interpretation and the Sciences of Man. In Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre (eds.): *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. MIT, 1994. 181-213.

Taylor, Charles: Understanding and ethnocentricity. Section II. In *Philosophical Papers 2. Philosophy and the Human Sciences.* Cambridge, 1985. 123-130.

Webb, Keith: *An Introduction to Problems in the Philosophy of Social Sciences*. Pinter, 1995. 127-155.

Winch, Peter: *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy.* Routledge, 1990. 1-45.

Winch, Peter: Understanding a Primitive Society. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct., 1964), 307-324.

**Suggested readings:**

See the online course folder.