

## WORKSHOP

### A Science of Society?

### Controversies over the Possibility of Social-Scientific Knowledge around 1900

Organization: Martin Kusch, Elisabeth Nemeth, Johannes Steizinger, Bastian Stoppelkamp, Martin Strauss

Sponsors:

ERC-Project "The Emergence of Relativism" and Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna

13 -14 April 2018

Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna  
Universitätsstraße 7, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, lecture room 3D

#### Abstract

Although sociology emerged as a distinct discipline more than a hundred years ago, some basic questions about its foundations and scientific status have persisted to this day. Sociologists and philosophers have never stopped debating whether knowledge of human action and society can meet the standards set by the natural sciences. For instance, are (at least some of) the results of the social sciences "objective", "neutral", "replicable", or "law-like"? And if the answer is negative, how can sociological results be justified?

Given the prestige of the natural sciences in early-twentieth-century culture it was almost inevitable that they functioned as a model or foil for the social sciences. Today this issue is often discussed using the opposition between "naturalism" and "anti-naturalism". Unfortunately, this usage is often historically insensitive. It also tends to leave out the role of other reference points, such as philosophy, psychology, history and economics.

There are many other important concepts and distinctions, too, that are relevant for understanding the social sciences, and that call for a proper historical analysis of their changing uses and meanings: for instance, "humanities vs. the (natural) sciences", "explaining vs. understanding", or "holism vs. individualism".

We also need a better grasp of how epistemology interacts with politics: What follows politically from granting or denying sociological inquiry the status of a science? Early sociologists were keenly aware of this issue. They also asked whether political action can be based on social-scientific knowledge and what role this knowledge might play in political struggles.

This workshop aims to shed new light on the debates around 1900 and to meet some of the desiderata listed above. It will do so in a cross-cultural and international perspective.

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## PROGRAM

### FRIDAY, 13 April 2018

9:15-10:30: *Natàlia Cantó Milà* (Barcelona): Georg Simmel's Relational Approach to Sociology and Social Thought

10:45-12:00: *Martin Kusch* (Wien): The Development of Simmel's Social Theory (1892-1908): From Moral Science to Sociology

14:00-15:15: *Martin Strauss* (Wien/Paris): Simmel's contribution to *L'Année sociologique*. A transnational controversy on the status of sociology between psychology and philosophy.

15:30-16:45: *Wolf Feuerhahn* (Paris): An alternative cartography of German-speaking sociology (1875-1908)

17:00-18:15: *Elisabeth Nemeth* (Wien): Tracing Ernst Mach in Otto Neurath's attempt to re-define the object of economics

19:00: Conference Dinner

### SATURDAY, 14 April 2018

9:30-10:45: *Bastian Stoppelkamp* (Wien): Vienna Naturalism and the Austrian Roots of the Sociology of Knowledge

11:00-12:15: *Monika Wulz* (Zürich): Towards a Political Economy of Knowledge: Ernest Solvay's Energetic Sociology

14:00-15:15: *Caterina Zanfi* (Wuppertal): The social as a function of the vital. Bergson's answer to the debate on biological sociology

15:30-16:45 *Johannes Steizinger* (Wien): Society from the Perspective of Life: Erich Rothacker's Cultural Anthropology

16:45-17:30: General Discussion

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## ABSTRACTS

**Natàlia Cantó-Milà, UOC.:**

### **Georg Simmel's Relational Approach to Sociology and Social Thought**

This talk will present Simmel's major contributions to sociology, and to social theory, as he developed them in his *Soziologie* (1908) and his *Grundfragen der Soziologie* (1917). The talk will be divided in three interconnected parts: (1) Simmel's path to sociology – why was/is sociology relevant?, (2) Simmel's relativism, his turn to the philosophy of life, and its effects on his social thought; (3) Simmel's concepts of *Wechselwirkung* (reciprocal effects), forms of association, and the apriorities for society to be possible. Throughout these three parts I shall argue how Simmel's relational thought structures his sociology, and becomes his major contribution to this discipline, overcoming the dangers of relativism and at the same time escaping dogmatism, holism and methodological individualism. In the third part of the talk I will not only shed light on Simmel's key concepts of *Wechselwirkung*, forms of association and apriorities for society to be possible, but I shall also attempt to shed some light upon their interrelations, thus deepening into an analysis of Simmel's relationality within his own theoretical framework.

**Wolf Feuerhahn (CNRS, Centre Alexandre Koyré, Paris) :**

### **An alternative cartography of German-speaking sociology (1875-1908)**

Historians of the social sciences usually consider Germany as one of the main international birthplace of sociology around 1900. Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel and Max Weber are usually pantheonized as the German "founding fathers" of this new science. A bibliometric analysis of the titles using the word "Soziologie" between 1875 and 1908 allows to map a completely different cartography of German-speaking sociology. The main defenders, places and ways of making this new science are not the canonized ones. My contribution will try to describe and explain this alternative cartography of German-speaking sociology.

**Martin Kusch (Wien):**

### **Simmel on the Relationship between Philosophy and Sociology**

This paper investigates Simmel's three main models for conceptualizing the relationship between philosophy and sociology: the "replacement model" of the early 1890s; the "tight-coupling model" of 1900; and the "separation model" from 1908 onwards. The paper offers reconstructions of these models and investigates their origins and consequences.

**Elisabeth Nemeth (Wien):**

### **Tracing Ernst Mach in Otto Neurath's attempt to re-define the object of economics**

Otto Neurath thought of his economic work as being inspired by Ernst Mach, or, to put it more precisely: by the way in which Mach re-considered in his *Mechanics* the notions of movement, space, and time. While Ernst Mach's importance to Logical Empiricism in general goes without saying, the

role of his thought in Neurath's economics is less obvious. Neurath did not go into much detail about the influence he attributed to Mach. The only specific feature he mentioned was Mach's holism. This talk will try to show that there is much more of Mach's legacy in Neurath's economics. We will focus on what has been called Mach's "historical-critical method" and on Mach's notion of "elements". Both play crucial roles in Neurath's project to suggest a new conceptual framework of economics.

**Johannes Steizinger (Wien):**

### **Society from the Perspective of Life: Erich Rothacker's Cultural Anthropology**

Erich Rothacker claims that all knowledge about society has to be based on the acknowledgement of the "primary fact of life" (*Urtatsache des Lebens*). He regards "cultures as styles of life" (*Kulturen als Lebensstile*). Rothacker's cultural anthropology presents a typical critique of naturalistic and sociological approaches from the perspective of life: Rothacker demands a comprehensive concept of human life that considers its practical nature and its cultural aspects. He also emphasizes the historicity and particularity of societies. Since human life is organized into the life of particular groups and communities, anthropology has to study the "life laws of people" (*Lebensgesetze der Völker*). My talk sketches the key motifs of Rothacker's cultural anthropology. I will also take a closer look at two specific issues:

a) Rothacker develops a *völkisch* particularism. This view was and still is often regarded as relativistic. Rothacker attempts to block relativism by a realist kind of perspectivism which he calls "aspectual realism" (*aspektischer Realismus*).

b) Rothacker emphasizes the political consequences of his cultural anthropology throughout his writings. In his *Philosophy of History (Geschichtsphilosophie)* of 1934, he explicitly presents National Socialism as the political realization of his view. Rothacker is thus a prime case of the problematic political consequences of this kind of thinking about society.

**Bastian Stoppelkamp (Wien):**

### **Vienna Naturalism and the Austrian Roots of the Sociology of Knowledge**

The historical starting point of the modern sociology of knowledge as a scientific discipline is traditionally located within the "Outsider as Insider" culture of the Weimar Republic. In this connection Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim are often singled out as main proponents, who reacted against the then current crisis of political and scientific culture by putting its cognitive foundations under sociological scrutiny. For Mannheim as for Scheler the sociology of knowledge was seeking to "analyze the relationship between knowledge and existence" (Mannheim), between the diverse forms of knowledge production and their specific historico-social context. Against this background the prehistory of the sociology of knowledge – the genesis of its core theories, instruments and ideas – is commonly construed as a hybrid: as a wild mixture of thought traditions ranging far back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century: to philosophical movements like Marxism, Positivism or Historicism. The main problem with this "standard reading" of the modern sociology of knowledge is a certain explanatory gap: Instead of giving us a proper historical account of how and why specific aspects of the sociology of knowledge were traded and developed it creates a vast correlation between a few individual (and solely German) figures and a ragbag of highly abstract ideas. In my talk I will try to close this explanatory gap by developing a more local and micro-historical narrative that aims at bringing the history and prehistory of the sociology of knowledge in closer connection.

In my opinion one road to the modern sociology of knowledge can be traced back to naturalistic forms of thinking that occurred around 1900 as a critical reaction against the growing theoretical and institutional constrictions of academic philosophy. One clear example of this critical movement is a group of Austrian philosophers and scientist that circled around the Viennese thinkers Wilhelm Jerusalem, Rudolf Eisler and Rudolf Goldscheid. Most of the members of these "Vienna Naturalists"

were intellectually socialized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century atmosphere of scientific and social optimism. Their first philosophical contributions were influenced by the theories and methods of physiology, biology, voluntaristic psychology and early sociology. At the same time they engaged in a variety of social and social-political activities: ranging from the adult education movement to the Austrian social democratic party. From this naturalistic and activist stance these Viennese philosophers created in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a specific research agenda which played a formative role in the (pre-) history of the sociology of Knowledge: Firstly, they criticized the then dominant schools of Phenomenology and Neo-Kantian philosophy for their intellectualistic and foundationalistic conceptions of knowledge, that from the naturalistic point of view were blocking the way of scientific inquiry. Secondly, they developed thoroughgoing genetic theories of cognition, which made all forms of knowledge susceptible to psychological and sociological analyses: Telling examples are Wilhelm Jerusalem's sociology of cognition, Paul Szende's sociological analyses of abstraction as well as Paul Friedlaender's and Hans Kelsen's social theories of causality. Thirdly, they published and translated major works of the French Durkheim School and American Pragmatism which from that point on became integral parts in the relevant German-speaking discourses. In this way the historical role of Vienna Naturalism can be interpreted as an intellectual hinge. They picked up a variety of European thought- and research-traditions and transformed them into instruments of philosophical and social self-reflection. This strategic move is at the heart of the modern sociology of knowledge in its most radical and interesting form.

**Martin Strauss (Wien):**

**Simmel's participation in *L'Année sociologique*. Reconsidering an early transnational controversy on the status of sociology between psychology and philosophy**

Simmel's participation in *L'Année sociologique*. Reconsidering an early transnational controversy on the status of sociology between psychology and philosophy.

Georg Simmel figures prominently among the collaborators of the first issue of Émile Durkheim's *L'Année sociologique* (1898). But not only does his name disappear from the second issue. Only a little later Durkheim publishes a fierce critique of Simmel's "formal sociology", taking issue with the article that had appeared in his own journal. What led to this turnaround in their relationship and ended a transnational cooperation in early sociology? A considerable literature on this question has evolved in the last decades. The aim of my paper is twofold: First, I present an alternative account of the episode based on a re-examination of the available archival materials. This allows for a critique of several recurring "myths" in the literature. Second, I reconstruct the episode as a controversy on the relationship of sociology with psychology and philosophy. For this purpose, I will first consider the intermediate position of Célestin Bouglé and discussions on "collective psychology". Second, I will outline the divergent attitudes of Simmel and Durkheim towards Kantianism and the possibility of a sociology of knowledge. Putting the controversy in the context of the struggles associated with discipline formation shall ultimately help to avoid "internalist" as well as "externalist" accounts of the episode.

**Monika Wulz (Zürich):**

**Towards a Political Economy of Knowledge: Ernest Solvay's Energetic Sociologie**

In 1894, Ernest Solvay founded the *Institut des Sciences sociales* (in 1901 succeeded by the *Institut de Sociologie*) in Brussels. Based on empirical sociological research this institute aimed at developing measures against social inequality – for example a progressive inheritance tax with the purpose of providing equal educational opportunities. Arguing on the grounds of a scientifically understood social energetics, the sociological research at Solvay's institute had a double economic perspective: On the one hand, it relied on an economic understanding of mental processes that was at the same time

advocated by philosophers and scientists such as Wilhelm Ostwald and Ernst Mach; on the other hand, it aimed at devising an economic solution for the unequal socio-economic conditions of knowledge production at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Solvay was convinced that introducing an inheritance tax would reallocate the energetic resources and thus help to establish equal opportunities for intellectual work and scientific research. As a chapter in the history of sociology, Solvay's activities in the social sciences are not only remarkable since they involve one of the earliest political attempts of legally implementing inheritance tax; they also provide a peculiar case to study the intertwined scientific, epistemic, economic, and political agendas at the dawn of the discipline of sociology.

**Caterina Zanfi (Wuppertal):**

**The social as a function of the vital. Bergson's answer to the debate on biological sociology**

When Bergson faces social philosophy in his last work, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), he answers not only to the Durkheimian sociology, but also to a debate on the analogy between society and organisms which was very lively in France and in the rest of Europe at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which accompanied the crisis of Spencerism. Bergson's position unfolds the philosophy of *Creative Evolution* (1907) on the social level and offers a way to overcome the traditional dichotomy between nature and society through a reference to a non-naturalistic and non-spiritualistic idea of life.

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## SPEAKERS

**Natàlia Cantó Milà** is Associate professor in Social Sciences at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Open University of Catalonia; UOC) in Barcelona. Recent Publications: "Linking Emotions: Emotions as the invisible threads that bind people together". *Sociological Research Online*, 2016, 21(1)10. "ON THE SPECIAL RELATION BETWEEN PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE IN SIMMEL'S FORMS OF ASSOCIATION AND BEYOND", *The Anthem Companion to Georg Simmel*, 2016, 1, 81. N. Cantó Milà, Núñez Mosteo, F., Seebach, S. *Between reality and imagination, between you and me: Emotions and daydreaming in times of electronic communication*. New Media and Society. Sage 2015. *A sociological theory of value: Georg Simmel's sociological relationism*. transcript Verlag. N. Cantó Milà, S. Seebach: *Desired Images, Regulating Figures, Constructed Imaginaries - The Future as an Apriority for Society to Be Possible Current Sociology*. 2105. ISSN 0011-3921

**Martin Kusch** is Professor for Philosophy of Science and Epistemology at the University of Vienna. He is also Principal Investigator of an ERC Advanced Grant Project "The Emergence of Relativism" (2014-2019). His previous book publications include *Psychologism* (1995), *Psychological Knowledge* (1998), *The Shape of Actions* (with H. M. Collins, 1999), *Knowledge by Agreement* (2002), and *A Skeptical Guide to Meaning and Rules* (2006). He is currently writing books on epistemic relativism and on Simmel, and (co-)editing a volume on German-language debates on relativism (in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century), and the "Routledge Handbook on Relativism".

**Wolf Feuerhahn** is Chargé de recherche at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), member and deputy director of the Centre Alexandre Koyré at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris and director of the *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*. His research topics include the history of the organisation of knowledge in Europe (18th to 21st century), the history of the relationship between human and the environmental sciences and a historical and transnational pragmatics. Recent publications: (Ed.) *La politique des chaires au Collège de France*, Paris, Collège de France/Belles Lettres, 2017. (With Guillaume Blanc, Elise Demeulenaere) *Humanités environnementales. Enquêtes et contre-enquêtes*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2017. (With Rafael Mandressi, Antonella Romano) *Contextualiser : une pratique transdisciplinaire ?*, issue 30 of the *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*. "Les sciences humaines et sociales: des disciplines du contexte?", *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 30, 2017, 7-29. "Sciences de la nature versus sciences de l'esprit: un conflit allemand des facultés", in Vincent Bourdeau – Arnaud Macé (ed.), *La Nature du socialisme Pensée sociale et conceptions de la nature au XIXe siècle*, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2017, 291-305. "'Milieu-' Renaissance auf den Schultern von Leo Spitzer und Georges Canguilhem? Zum Nachleben der Sekundärliteratur in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte", in F. Huber & C. Wessely (ed.), *Milieu. Umgebungen des Lebendigen in der Moderne*, Paderborn, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2017, 18-34.

**Elisabeth Nemeth** is ao. Professor (since 2016 retired) at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. Publications related to the topics of the workshop: „Ein kritischer Blick auf Neuraths Bildstatistik: Lucien Febvre über ‚Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft‘“ in: Nemeth, E. & Bonnet, C. (eds.): *Wissenschaft und Praxis : Zur Wissenschaftsphilosophie in Frankreich und Österreich in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Springer, 127-149. "Visualizing relations in society and economics: Otto Neurath's Isotype-method against the background of his economic thought", in: *La peinture du symbole*. Béziau, J-Y. (Hrsg.). Editions Petra 2014, 259 – 296. "The Philosophy of the 'Other Austrian

Economics", in: *New Challenges to Philosophy of Science*. Andersen, H., Dieks, D., Gonzalez, W. J., Uebel, T. & Wheeler, G. (Hrsg.). Dordrecht: Springer 2013, S. 339 - 350.

**Johannes Steizinger** is a postdoctoral research fellow on the ERC project "The Emergence of Relativism" (PI: Martin Kusch) at the University of Vienna. His current research centers on the history of the "philosophy of life" (*Lebensphilosophie*): from its first systematic formulations in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, through its main forms at the turn of the twentieth century and in the Weimar Republic, all the way to its entanglement with National Socialism. Recent key publications are: (Ed.) *The Emergence of Modern Relativism: The German Debates from Herder to National Socialism*. Co-edited with Martin Kusch, Katherina Kinzel and Niels Wildschut, London/New York (Routledge), forthcoming. "The Significance of Dehumanization: Nazi Ideology and its Psychological Consequences." In: *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19:1 (2018), 1–19. "Politik versus Moral. Alfred Baeumlers Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation des Nationalsozialismus", *Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust* 20 (2016), pp. 29–48.

**Martin Strauss** is a PhD candidate and Uni:docs fellow at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna and at the Centre Maurice Halbwachs, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. His doctoral research focusses on the relations between neo-Kantian philosophies and emerging sociologies in the academic fields of France and Germany between the 1870s and the 1930s.

**Bastian Stoppelkamp** is a historian and philosopher of science. He is currently working as an assistant in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. His main research interests are among others the history and theory of naturalistic forms of philosophy in the late 19th and early 20th century. Recent publications: „Kant und der Wiener Kreis – Wer hat Angst vor dem synthetischen Apriori?“, in: Violetta Waibel (Ed.), *Umwege: Annäherungen an Immanuel Kant in Wien, in Österreich und in Osteuropa*, Göttingen 2015, 429-443. (With Fritz Stadler) „Die Universität Wien im Kontext von Wissens- und Wissenschaftsgesellschaft“, in: Katharina Kniefacz, Elisabeth Nemeth, Herbert Posch and Friedrich Stadler (Eds.), *650 Jahre Universität Wien – Aufbruch ins neue Jahrhundert. Band 1: Universität - Forschung - Lehre: Themen und Perspektiven im langen 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2015, 203-240. "War Humboldt ein Kapitalist? Über den Zusammenhang von Ökonomie und Autonomie in der österreichischen Hochschulgeschichte des mittleren 19. Jahrhunderts", in: Alois Kernbauer (Ed.), *Wissenschafts- und Universitätsgeschichtsforschung. Österreichisches Universitätsarchivkolloquium 14. und 15. April 2015*, Graz 2016, 29-44. „Einige Überlegungen zu Ernst Machs Antrittsrede ‚Über den Einfluss zufälliger Umstände auf die Entwicklung von Erfindungen und Entdeckungen‘ (1895)“, in: Thomas Assinger, Elisabeth Grabenweger, Annegret Pelz (Ed.): *Die Antrittsvorlesung. Wiener Universitätsreden der Philosophischen Fakultät*, Göttingen 2018.

**Monika Wulz** is historian and philosopher of science. She is postdoc at the Chair for Science Studies at the ETH Zurich and coordinator of the doctoral program "History of Knowledge" at the ETH & University of Zurich. Her research interests cover the history of economic and social epistemologies and the French philosophy of science. Publications: *Gaston Bachelard. Der Surrealismus*, Konstanz: Konstanz University Press 2017. Abstraction, dissociation, and mental labor: Paul Szende's social epistemology between physiology and social theory. In: *Studies in East European Thought* 2015, 67: 13-30. Gedankenexperimente im ökonomischen Überschuss. Wissenschaft und Ökonomie bei Ernst Mach. In: *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 2015, 38, 1: 59-76. "Technik im Wissen: Zur wechselseitigen Hervorbringung von Wissen, Technik, Geschichte und Gesellschaft in der französischen Wissenschaftsgeschichte und -philosophie". In: *Schlüsselwerke der Wissenschafts- und Technikforschung*. ed. Diana Lengersdorf, Matthias Wieser. Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2014, 67-83. The Material Memory of History: Edgar Zilsel's Epistemology of Historiography. In: *Studies in East European Thought* 2012, 64, 1: 91-105. *Erkenntnisagenten. Gaston Bachelard und die Reorganisation des Wissens*. Berlin: Kadmos 2010.



**Caterina Zanfi** is a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at Bergische Universität Wuppertal. She studies the anthropological and political implications of the philosophies of life in a transnational perspective (Germany, France, Italy). She is the author of *Bergson e la filosofia tedesca* (2013, translated in French and German) and *Bergson, la tecnica, la guerra* (2009) and co-edited *Die Philosophische Anthropologie in der deutsch-französischen Debatte der Gegenwart* («trivium 25», with T. Ebke and G. Plas, 2017) and *Das Leben im Menschen oder der Mensch im Leben?* (with T. Ebke, 2017).