C5.9 Philosophy of the Humanities and the Social Sciences
ABSTRACTS

Memory, Reification and Methodology
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An important strand of the recent critical literature on the appeal to memory in historiography questions it on ontological grounds of methodology, and specifically on the grounds that it unwittingly takes for granted or somehow presupposes certain methodologically unwarranted reifications. Key among these are the reifications of the collectivities and group identities that are the agents of memory, as well as the reification of memory itself understood as a precise set of manifestations somehow providing a privileged epistemic access to an event or collectivity, such as museums and memorials. On the other hand, an emerging strand in the recent literature on memory seeks to overcome these objections by somehow blurring the bounds between different collectivities as well as between different sets of paradigmatic memory manifestations. In this presentation I will seek to question, on very general methodological grounds, both the motivations of the critics and of the writers forming this emerging strand. Both kinds of reactions are unmotivated, I will claim. The critics of the appeal to memory on account of supposedly inadequate reifications, I will argue, ultimately presuppose a “nihilistic” approach to concepts on which the vagueness and/or indeterminacy of theoretical notions disqualifies them for historiographical purposes; however, concept vagueness and indeterminacy are simply unavoidable, and objections formally analogous to those of these critics could be leveled against just any kind of concept use in historiography. On the other hand, the emerging strand of defenders of memory is thus seen to be guilty of conceding just too much to the critics. By seeking to dereify the agents of memory and certain constructions of memory itself, they will in any case have to reify other agents and other constructions of memory. But, more importantly, I will argue that in doing so they will unavoidably miss important, intuitively true accounts and explanations of historical phenomena requiring appeals to concepts for traditional collectivities and sets of memorial manifestations.

The 'looping effect' and the specificity of the social sciences
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Ian Hacking's concept of 'interactive kind' is supposed to capture certain specific properties of the classifications in the human and social sciences. More precisely, the 'looping effect' (LE), which characterize interactive kinds, refers to a specific kind of interaction between a category and people who are classified as belonging to this category: the first arc of the loop is one in which the individuals being categorized react to being categorized and act accordingly; this response on the part of the categorized individuals causes social scientists to revise and adjust their original categorization, prompting thereby the second arc of the loop. Moreover, the concept of LE is supposed to have an explanatory relevance: it refers to the mechanism underlying social phenomena, and therefore corresponds with a specific causal trajectory. It must enable us to make inferences about the social agents' behavior.

Nevertheless, why would LE peculiar to the social sciences? It is indeed possible to consider that our classificatory practices result in feedback that alters not only human kinds but also some natural kinds. Hacking's response to this objection is that feedback loops occur in a particular way: subjects must become aware of the way in which they are categorized. However, Hacking's notion of 'awareness' is ambiguous. Why would awareness be a necessary feature of the phenomenon of interactive kinds? I want to show that we face a dilemma. If we want to preserve its specificity, we must think that LE is reasons-based: the awareness of the categorization must not only play a
causal but a normative role in the history of the behavior of individuals. Nevertheless, if we adopt this view, this criterion of demarcation between natural and social sciences loses its originality because it consists in applying the famous distinction between Erklären and Verstehen to the problem of categorization.

Utopia and Scientism: Neurath and Social Planning
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This paper presents some proposals for social science advanced by Vienna Circle member Otto Neurath. We shall focus on the idea that one of the tasks of social scientists is to formulate utopias, that is, ideals of social, political, and economic arrangements. Neurath took part in social projects which can be understood as production and application of utopias. Even some Vienna Circle projects were seen by Neurath in utopian form, as proposals for social improvement by means of implementing certain schemes. An example is the encyclopedia proposed by Neurath in the 1930s as a way to unite those who adopt the scientific world-conception, meaning the scientific attitude towards problems. The production of such an encyclopedia would bring scientific-minded people together, creating a network of discussion about science, and constituting a political force against obscurantism. The work, once published, would disseminate the idea that science can help solving life’s issues, which is the core of the scientific world-conception. Neurath’s concept of scientific utopias is close to some literary utopias, particularly those by H.G. Wells, an author read and admired by Neurath. Both Neurath’s philosophy and Wells’s fiction sustain that science is the main source of tools for planning social transformation. Such an idea is strongly criticized in philosophy of science by Paul Feyerabend, and in literature by Aldous Huxley. Those authors claim that imprudent scientism is harmful to society. This paper intends to show that Neurath prevents this imprudence by taking a pluralist and fallibilist stance, considering that there are no perfect plans to be implemented, as expressed in his well known metaphor: we are like sailors who must rebuild their ship on the open sea, without ever being able to dismantle it in dry-dock and reconstruct it out of the best components.