



University of
Zurich^{UZH}

Institute of Philosophy

Doctoral Programme: "Philosophy – Language, Mind, and Practice"

Master Class

**The nature of the social world:
Foundations and applications**

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31st May & 1st June 2019

Synopsis

The claim that basic kinds and categories in the world are ‘socially constructed’ is perennially debated in philosophy and social theory. Over the years, lots of categories—races, genders, sexes, morality, commodities, corporations, and many more—have been put forward as cases of social construction. But what is the social world, and how are we to understand the various senses in which it is ‘built’ or ‘constructed’? In this course, we will discuss historical and contemporary approaches to the nature of the social world. Our main aim will be to understand and develop general theories of the social world, using a variety of examples to inform our broader theorizing.

Session 1 begins by introducing the topic and considering some general frameworks for understanding the building of the social world. We will also discuss the distinction between the ‘causal’ and ‘constitutive’ construction of entities. Session 2 introduces one important tradition, which largely arose from work in the social sciences aimed at ‘decomposing’ social entities into their parts. We will discuss debates over methodological individualism and ontological individualism, as well as questions of reduction in the social sciences. In section 3, we will discuss recent critiques of ontological individualism, as well as the variety of approaches to the ‘parts’ of social entities.

On the second day, we turn to a different tradition in the building of the social sciences, focused on the sources or ‘social construction’ of the social world. In session 4, we introduce this tradition and consider some widely discussed approaches to it. In session 5, we discuss the idea of ‘anchoring’ and the unified ‘grounding-and-anchoring’ model for the nature of social entities. And in session 6, we move beyond simplistic theories of social construction and consider the variety of factors involved in socially constructing or ‘anchoring’ the social world.

Registration: phd@philos.uzh.ch

Details: <http://www.philosophie.uzh.ch/doktorat/meisterkurse.html>

Venue: University of Zurich

Rämistrasse 59

8001 Zürich

Room: RAA-E-30 EV

No fees apply. Participants are expected to have read the texts.

PhD students at the UZH are required to book the module in order to get credit points.

Programme and Readings

Friday, 31st May 2019

9:30 – 12:30: Overview of social ontology, causation vs. constitution

- Epstein, Brian (2016). 'A Framework for Social Ontology'. In: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 46.2, pp. 147–167.
- (2018b). 'Social Ontology'. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2018. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. **Sections 1 and 2.**
- Haslanger, Sally (1995). 'Ontology and Social Construction'. In: *Philosophical Topics* 23.2, pp. 95–125.

14:00 – 16:00: The metaphysical parts tradition

- Epstein, Brian (2015b). *The Ant Trap. Rebuilding the Foundations of the Social Sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Chapters 1 and 2.**
- Kincaid, Harold (1986). 'Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism'. In: *Philosophy of Science* 53.4, pp. 492–513.
- Mandelbaum, Maurice (1955). 'Societal Facts'. In: *British Journal of Sociology* 6, pp. 305–317.
- Watkins, J. W. N. (1955). 'Methodological Individualism: A Reply'. In: *Philosophy of Science* 22.1, pp. 58–62.

16:30 – 18:30: Ontological individualism and its flaws

- Epstein, Brian (2009). 'Ontological Individualism Reconsidered'. In: *Synthese* 166.1, pp. 187–213.
- (2015c). *The Ant Trap. Rebuilding the Foundations of the Social Sciences*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. **Chapters 3 and pages 106–114.**
- (2018c). 'Social Ontology'. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2018. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. **Section 3.**

Saturday, 1st June 2019

9:30 – 12:30: The theory of anchoring

- Epstein, Brian (2015d). *The Ant Trap. Rebuilding the Foundations of the Social Sciences*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. **Chapter 4.**
- (2018d). ‘Social Ontology’. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2018. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. **Supplement to Social Ontology: History.**
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne (2000). *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books. **Chapter 1.**
- Hart, H. L. A. (1961). *The Concept of Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Pages 50–61.**
- Searle, John (1995). *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Free Press. **Chapter 1 and 2.**

14:00 – 16:00: The diversity of anchors

- Epstein, Brian (2015e). *The Ant Trap. Rebuilding the Foundations of the Social Sciences*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. **Chapters 5,6 and 7.**
- (2018a). ‘Replies to Hawley, Mikkola, and Hindriks’. In: *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 62.2, pp. 230–246.

16:30 – 18:30: The metaphysical source tradition

- Boyd, Richard N. (1999). ‘Kinds, Complexity and Multiple Realization: Comments on Millikan’s “Historical Kinds and the Special Sciences”’. In: *Philosophical Studies* 95.1/2, pp. 67–98.
- Epstein, Brian (2015a). ‘How Many Kinds of Glue Hold the Social World Together?’ In: *Perspectives on Social Ontology and Social Cognition*. Ed. by Mattia Gallotti and John Michael. Dordrecht: Springer.
- (2018e). ‘Social Ontology’. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2018. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. **Section 4.**
- Millikan, Ruth G. (1999). ‘Historical Kinds and the “Special Sciences”’. In: *Philosophical Studies* 95.1-2, pp. 45–65.