Wilfrid Sellars and Philosophy of Science

John Dougherty   WiSe 24/25

Meeting:	Fridays, 14:00–16:00 (s.t.)
	Ludwigstr. 31, Room 021
Office Hours:	Thursdays, 14:00–16:00
	Ludwigstr. 31, Room 131
Email:	john.dougherty@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

Description

Wilfrid Stalker Sellars (*1912; †1989) was an American philosopher known for his wide-ranging, dialectical, and systematic work; his promotion of analytic philosophy and logical empiricism in America; and his influence as a teacher of philosophy at Minnesota, Yale, and Pittsburgh. In this course we will read and discuss a selection of his writings on themes in the philosophy of science. Our goals will be (i) to understand how Sellars's views on these themes fit together and into his broader philosophical program and (ii) to understand the situation of his work in the history of the philosophy of science. We will focus in particular on the themes of modality, theoretical terms, and scientific realism.

Materials

The syllabus and list of readings for this course are available on LSF, along with the required readings. A thorough online collection of Sellarsiana is the website *Problems from Wilfrid Sellars* (https://www.ditext.com/sellars/) maintained by Andrew Chrucky.

Assessment

The evaluation for this course will be by means of a term paper submitted at the end of the semester. If you would like to submit a term paper, you must register through LSF during the registration period (20.01–31.01) and submit it to me by email by the term paper deadline (28.03.2025). Please note that extensions of this deadline are not up to me; if you need an extension, please contact Fabian Widerna (f.Widerna@lmu.de) at the Prüfungsamt für Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften (PAGS).

Your paper should be on a topic related to Sellars's work in philosophy of science. It might address a historical question about how some view of Sellars's fits into its historical context, an exegetical question about how some view of Sellars's is best interpreted, or a first-order philosophical question that might be addressed with reference to Sellars's thought. Near the end of the semester I will distribute a list of suggested questions and grading criteria. You may write your paper on topic not on that list; if you do, then I recommend speaking to me before writing the paper, so that I can advise on the topic and scope of your planned alternative. The term paper should be 3000 words for BA students and 6000 words for MA students. In either case, it should be written in 12pt font, with 1.5 spacing, 3cm margins on the left and right, and a standard academic typeface (e.g., Computer Modern, Times New Roman, Palatino, Calibri, etc.)

Resources

Questions about the administration of philosophy teaching at LMU should be directed to Thomas Wyrwich (`thomas.wyrwich@lrz.uni-muenchen.de`). The Erasmus coordinator for philosophy at LMU is Peter Adamson (`office.peter.adamson@lrz.uni-muenchen.de`). The list of women's representatives (Frauenbeauftragte) for the Philosophy Faculty can be found on the Faculty's webpage (`www.philosophie.uni-muenchen.de/fakultaet/frauenbeauftragte/index.html`); the representative for the MCMP is Vanessa Carr. Issues regarding the economic, social, and cultural aspects of student life—including studying with a child or studying with a disability—are the responsibility of the Munich Student Union (`https://www.studentenwerk-muenchen.de`).

Schedule and readings

All texts are by Wilfrid Sellars and are available on LSF.

Introduction

18.10 Autobiographical Reflections

Modality

***25.10** Inference and Meaning

01.11 NO MEETING (HOLIDAY)

08,15.11 Counterfactuals, dispositions, and the causal modalities

Theoretical terms

22,29.11 Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind

06.12 The Language of Theories

13.12 Some Reflections on Language Games

***20.12** Being and Being Known

Scientific realism

10.01 Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man

15.01 Induction as Vindication

24.01 Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism

31.01 Chapter V of *Science and Metaphysics*

07.02 Is Scientific Realism Tenable?