



Wageningen School
of Social Sciences

Politics and ethics in science: Revisiting the ideals of 'value-free' and 'critical' science

Conveners: Henk van den Belt & Kees Jansen

8, 15, 22 January, 2013

**Course organised by the Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS),
Wageningen University**

Introduction & objectives of the course

Discussions about the politics of science are saturated with soul-searching questions. Do you as a scientist just seek a well-paid career, want to satisfy your curiosity and extend the frontiers of knowledge or do you want first and foremost to contribute to making the world a better place to live? If you think that your scientific contribution can help create a more just, more free, more healthy, more friendly or more sustainable society, does it tell you anything about the kind of science you will have to develop? Do you think it is legitimate to have such commitments as a scientist? Wouldn't it endanger the "objectivity" of your work? Should you be open and transparent about your commitments? Even if scientists claim their work to be value-free, the results of their work will probably be used in certain ways. Are you willing to assume responsibility for the uses to which the knowledge you create will be put? Scientists are expected to take nothing for granted and to adopt a critical attitude toward all kinds of prejudices, preconceptions and received views. But shouldn't they also take a critical stance towards existing social and political arrangements?

Quite a number of social scientists actually subscribe to some ideal of a critical social science. Claims about the power-laden nature of science are frequently and easily made. The premise of this course, however, is that we (including the conveners of this course) are very often not exactly clear about what the reasonable basis is for the ideal of a critical social science. In this seminar series we will discuss whether the reasons for a critical social science are sufficiently persuasive and attractive to follow as an ideal.

An old debate continued

The above series of questions are not entirely new. They have been raised since the conduct of (social) science first offered the possibility of an occupational career. A clear response to all these questions was given by the classical doctrine of the 'value-freedom' of science. This doctrine makes a sharp distinction between the spheres of facts and values and holds that science is only competent to judge about facts. Hence it is not legitimate, according to this doctrine, for scientists to pass any 'value judgments' on the desirability and acceptability of particular policies or states of affairs (at least not in their role of researchers or lecturers). The ideal of 'value-freedom' found an eloquent defender in the German economist and sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) and was also supported by positivist schools in science. It was strongly opposed, however, by representatives of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.

In recent years, new openings in this old debate have been made by the American philosopher of science, Heather Douglas, and the British social scientist and philosopher, Andrew Sayer. Both reject the ideal of 'value-free' science, but do it in different ways and with different arguments. They also provide different guidelines to researchers about how to responsibly incorporate values in their scientific work. Both agree that researchers should generally make more work of justifying their ethical commitments. While Douglas sticks to the traditional distinction between facts

and values, Sayer takes the even more radical step of challenging this very distinction. He also tries to lay the foundation for what he considers a genuinely critical social science.

Structure and aims of the course

In this course we will read and critically discuss several central texts on science and values from Max Weber, Michael Buroway (who links Weber with contemporary social science), Heather Douglas and Andrew Sayer. Participants are expected to prepare sessions by providing summaries and formulating questions and points for discussion. They will also be encouraged to link up the issues discussed in the literature with problems they encountered in the course of their own work. The aim is to collectively search for ways of dealing more satisfactorily and fruitfully with such problems.

Texts

Max Weber (1964 [1919], 'The vocation of science', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 129-156.

Henk van den Belt, 'Science and values: the views of Weber, logical positivism and critical rationalism' (an introduction to the classical doctrine of 'value-freedom'), manuscript.

Michael Buroway (2012), 'From Max Weber to Public Sociology', in: Hans-Georg Soeffner (ed.), *Transnationale Vergesellschaftungen*, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, pp. 741-755.

Heather Douglas (2007), 'Rejecting the Ideal of a Value-Free Science', in Harold Kincaid, John Dupré and Alison Wylie (eds.), *Value-Free Science: Ideals and Illusion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 120-139.

Andrew Sayer (2009), 'Who's afraid of critical social science?', *Current Sociology* 57 (6): 767-786.

Target group and learning outcomes

PhD and other researchers with a reflexive mind regarding the critical potential of research.

Assumed prior knowledge

Basic knowledge of one of the social sciences and carrying out a social science research project (includes interdisciplinary research projects with substantial social science elements).

Course fees

For PhDs of WASS there is a fee of 100 euros. For all other participants and for staff members (fellows/post docs), there is a fee of 200 euros for the whole course.

Session Times/Course Schedule

8, 15 & 22 January, 15:00-17:30

Teaching methods

Seminar

Requirements and ECTS

Participants should be present at all three sessions and can obtain 1.5 ECTS

Participants are expected to prepare sessions by providing summaries and formulating questions and points for discussion.

Location

The sessions will be held in building “De Leeuwenborch”, Hollandseweg 1 in Wageningen, The Netherlands. The exact rooms will be announced later.

Registration

Registration is possible electronically via the WASS courses page:

<http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Education-Programmes/PhD-Programme/Graduate-Schools/Wageningen-School-of-Social-Sciences/Courses/Registration.htm>

The maximum number of participants is set at 16, the minimum at 10.

Please make sure that you provide the most recent contact details so that in case of any changes you will be notified promptly. After your internet registration you will receive a short notification that your name has been registered. At least two weeks before the course you will receive a confirmation about the location and the schedule. WASS will also send an invoice to the address indicated in the registration form.

Please e-mail to Marcella.Haan@wur.nl in case you have not received the second confirmation two weeks before the course.

Cancellations

Cancellations may be made free of charge until 1 month before the start of the course. Cancellation fee of 100 % applies if participants cancel the course less than 1 month prior to the course. The organisers have a right to cancel the course not later than 1 month before the course starts. The participants will be notified of any changes at their e-mail addresses.

Further information

On course content please contact one of the course organisers Henk van den Belt (henk.vandenbelt@wur.nl) from the Philosophy group or Kees Jansen (kees.jansen@wur.nl) from the Knowledge, Technology and Innovation group.

On WASS: www.wageningenur.nl/wass

For details about the logistics, accommodation, registration, fees, study materials, etc.
please contact

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Contact addresses:

Wageningen School of Social Sciences

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6706 KN WAGENINGEN

The Netherlands

Useful information on accommodation for participants from outside Wageningen

Wageningen International Centre,
 Hof van Wageningen: 75 euro for 1 person
 room, 98.50 euros for 2 persons room (including
 breakfast) <http://www.hofvanwageningen.nl/>

Hotel de Wageningseberg: 62.50 euro 1 person
 room, 97.50 euro for 2 persons room (including
 breakfast) www.wageningseberg.com

Hotel Nol in 't Bosch: 83,50 euro for 1 person
 room, 110 euro for 2 persons room, also
 including breakfast; <http://www.nolintbosch.nl/>

Hotel de Nieuwe Wereld (Hotel School): 50-60
 euro for a 1 person room.
<http://www.denieuwewereld.nl> (only in Dutch)

Bed&Breakfast De Heksenpeeltuin:
 25 euro for a 1 person room
 Einthovenstraat 15, 6706JA Wageningen
 Phone: +31 317-418161
 E-mail: callyd@zonnet.nl
www.heksenspeeltuin.nl

Villaria Bed en Breakfast:
 32-38 euro for a 1 person room
 Nassauweg 21, 6703CG Wageningen
 Phone: +31 317-419636
 Email: villaria@hari.demon.nl

Ons Bakhuus Bed & Breakfast:
 25 euro for a 1 person room
 Dolderstraat 64, 6706 JG Wageningen
 Phone.:+31 317-411994
 E-mail: janny.wijbo@chello.nl

Knollywood Bed & Breakfast:
 35 euro for a 1 person room
 L. Roggeveenstraat 39, 6708 SL Wageningen
 Phone: +31 317-420970
 E-mail: Knollywood@hetnet.nl

De Herbergh Bed & Breakfast:
 45 euro for a 1 person room
 Generaal Foulkesweg 8, 6703 BR Wageningen
 Phone: +31 317-410747
 E-mail: glindenbergh@wanadoo.nl

Het Torentje Bed & Breakfast:
 60 euro for a 1 person room
 Nassauweg 19, 6703 CG Wageningen
 Phone: +31 (0)6 55 802 865
 e-mail: info@het-torentje.nl
 website: <http://www.het-torentje.nl>

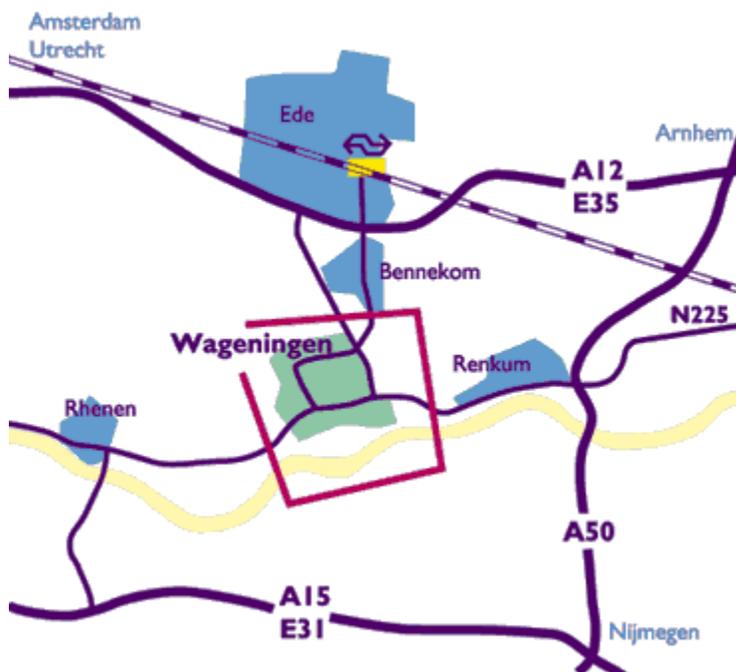
From Schiphol Amsterdam Airport to Wageningen

At the Airport you can buy a train ticket in the 'arrivals' area by the baggage claims. You will see the sign "Train tickets" near the exit. Then follow the signs 'Nederlandse Spoorwegen' (NS) or 'Trains and busses' to the railway station.

Purchase a one-way ticket to the Ede-Wageningen train station, this will cost € 14,10 (plus a service charge if you buy the ticket at the ticket counter). It is also possible to buy the ticket from the ticket vending machines in the station.

There are direct connections from Schiphol Amsterdam Airport to Ede-Wageningen every 30 minutes. Additionally, twice an hour there is a connecting service from Schiphol to Ede-Wageningen where you have to change trains in Utrecht. The destination boards on the platform will indicate the different stations where the train will stop. Check for the names Ede-Wageningen or Utrecht and board the train and when necessary change in Utrecht. The trip from Schiphol to Ede-Wageningen takes you a bit more than one hour.

For Dutch train connections use www.ns.nl, www.thalys.com, www.db.de



The train station is not located directly in Wageningen. This lack is fully compensated by fair means of transportation by buses and taxis. From railway station Ede-Wageningen you can take a taxi (approx.15 min.). Taxis leave at the north side of the station. You can also come by bus: line 52 (direction Wageningen/ Arnhem) departs from the north side of the station or bus line 88 (Valleilijn, direction Wageningen) leaves from the south side of the station. You have to purchase a ticket from the driver in the bus, which will cost about 2 euros.