

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Testing Philosophical Theories Against the History of Science

A one-day workshop, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2015

Location: Oulu Centre for Theoretical and Philosophical Studies of History  
Faculty of Humanities  
University of Oulu  
Finland

An event combining:

- The Oulu Centre for Theoretical and Philosophical Studies of History  
<http://www oulu.fi/centreforphilosophyofhistory/>;
- The AHRC project 'Contemporary Scientific Realism and the Challenge from the History of Science'  
<http://community.dur.ac.uk/evaluating.realism/index.html>.

#### **Speakers to include:**

James McAllister (Leiden)

Helge Kragh (Aarhus)

Katherina Kinzel (Vienna)

Bart Karstens (Amsterdam)

This event is designed to bring together historians and philosophers of science, and abstracts are most welcome from both disciplines.

Abstracts of no more than 500 words should be emailed to [peter.vickers@durham.ac.uk](mailto:peter.vickers@durham.ac.uk), by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015 at the latest. Decisions will be made very soon thereafter.

Some of the travel/accommodation costs of accepted speakers will be covered, but speakers should expect to cover some of the costs through their home institution. Please email Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen [Jouni-Matti.Kuukkanen@oulu.fi](mailto:Jouni-Matti.Kuukkanen@oulu.fi) or [peter.vickers@durham.ac.uk](mailto:peter.vickers@durham.ac.uk) if you require further details.

#### Summary and themes of the meeting

Ever since philosophers first started formulating theories of science those theories have been compared with (reconstructions of) episodes in the history of science. The thought is that *descriptive* theories need to match 'what really happens' in science, and that even normative theories need to match up with what happens in *good* science. Such comparisons have led to a wide variety of different conclusions. At one end of the scale the reconstruction is taken to be 'accurate', and, since it speaks contrary to the theory of science put forward, the conclusion reached is that the history

*falsifies* the philosophy. At the other end of the scale the reconstruction is taken to be just *one* possible reconstruction amongst several others, such that how it bears on the philosophy is much less clear. It has also sometimes been suggested that the whole project of comparing philosophical theories with the history of science is misguided.

On this issue one finds heated discussion in the 1960s and 70s, when some sought to turn philosophy into a testable enterprise, with history taking the place of scientific experiment. Whilst the more radical interpretations of this idea quickly fell out of favour, more moderate versions are still very much alive today. Indeed, much philosophy of science is 'case study based', and thus premised on the idea that bringing history of science to bear on philosophy of science can teach us important lessons. But more recently Jutta Schickore (2011) has taken issue with this 'confrontation model', on the grounds that all history of science requires a perspective.

The purpose of this workshop is to bring this debate back to the table, assessing it in light of the fact that so many contemporary debates in the philosophy of science make implicit assumptions about how history of science can bear on philosophy of science. Key questions will be:

- (i) Which philosophical theories (if any) truly *can* be tested by the history of science?
- (ii) Under what circumstances is one reconstruction 'better' than another? How can we tell?
- (iii) What are we to make of a philosophical theory which is consistent with one reconstruction of a particular historical episode, but inconsistent with another?
- (iv) Is Schickore (2011) right to claim that the model of 'confronting' philosophical theories with historical data is "highly problematic and should be abandoned"?