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Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)

Karl-Otto Apel

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The explanation versus understanding debate was important to the philosophy of the social sciences from the time of Dilthey and Weber through the work of Popper and Hempel. In recent years, with the development of interpretive approaches in hermeneutics, phenomenology, and language analysis, the problematic has become absolutely central. The broad literature to which it has given rise, while still split along "analytic" versus "continental" lines, shows increasing signs of a reunification in philosophy. G. H. von Wright's important book, Explanation and Understanding, originally published in 1971, is a good example of this trend.In Understanding and Explanation, Karl-Otto Apel takes von Wright's work as a point of departure for a rigorous, penetrating analysis of the issues involved. After reviewing the failure of earlier discussions to resolve these issues, Apel develops his own approach in light of the turn from logico-semantic to pragmatic analysis of language in post-Wittgensteinian philosophy. In doing so, he constructs bridges that reach back to themes and positions of the German tradition of the Geisteswissenschaften, but from strikingly new angles.Karl-Otto Apel holds the chair for social philosophy at the University of Frankfurt. His book is included in the series Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought, edited by Thomas McCarthy.

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