

Philosophy of Science Meets Society

University of Salzburg

Dec. 2nd, 2024

Venue: HS. 104, Universitätsplatz 1, 5020 Salzburg

Program:

09:15-09:30 *Welcome and Coffee*

09:30-10:20 T.Y. Branch (Leibniz University Hannover): Science Communication and the Evolution of Philosophical Discourse on Values

10:25-11:15 Raimund Pils (University of Salzburg): From the Scientific Realism Debate to Public Decision Making

11:20-12:10 Denis Džanić (University of Graz): Optimism as an Agentive Attitude

12:10-13:45 *Lunch Break*

13:45-14:35 Bettina Bussmann (University of Salzburg): Skillful Philosophical Reflection and Epistemic Norms

14:40-15:30 Camilo Martinez (Central European University): Junk Norms

15:30-15:50 *Coffee Break*

15:50-16:40 Daniel Minkin (University of Wuppertal): Against Ignorance and Turf Battles – A philosophical plea for interdisciplinary research on conspiracy theories

Abstracts:

Science Communication and the Evolution of Philosophical Discourse on Values

T.Y. Branch (Leibniz University Hannover)

Science communication helps to structure the relationship between science and society. Descriptions and expectations of scientists, communicators and publics in science communication models, reveal assumptions about expertise and social responsibilities. These characterizations evolve with respect to norms and ideals for science, like the mid-twentieth century Social Contract Science, Value-Free Ideal for science and new alternatives. I argue that debate about the feasibility and desirability of values in science echoes calls for science communication models to structure science and its relationship to society differently. Beginning with the ever-resilient Deficit Model of science communication, then transitioning through the Dialogue Model to Public Participatory science communication and concluding with a special type of Citizen Science, I put forward that discourse around values in science manifests publicly in revisions to science communication. I conclude that conceptual and pragmatic changes in science communication are an integral part of understanding the broader relationship between science and society by revealing how scientists and publics are expected to interact.

From the Scientific Realism Debate to Public Decision Making

Raimund Pils (University of Salzburg)

The scientific realism debate is traditionally viewed as a theoretical discussion about the interpretation of scientific theories. This talk explores whether there is a rational link between one's view on the reality of unobservable entities and one's social behavior. The concern is with very tangible behavior such as whether there is a rational pathway from one's realist or anti-realist views on viruses and their transmission mechanisms to one's public health responses. The implicit received view suggests that no such link exists. It is based on the general agreement between realists and anti-realists regarding the

empirical adequacy of our best scientific theories. I argue, however, that this received view is wrong.

Optimism as an Agentive Attitude

Denis Džanić (University of Graz)

We routinely describe individuals, and sometimes even groups, as optimistic. Two questions arise here. First, what is optimism? Is it a disposition, a form of bias, an attitude, a habit-like trait, quirk of character, or something else entirely? Second, should it obey any normative constraints to help distinguish it from excessive confidence, delusion, and the like? My aim is to explore some ways of responding to these questions. First, I distinguish between several kinds of optimism, and argue that some of them entail a commitment to epistemic accuracy, insofar as they are responsive to evidence. I then proceed to distinguish optimism from several adjacent mental states such as hope, grit, and some forms of risk-sensitivity. I conclude with a brief discussion of some larger lessons we can perhaps draw from this analysis.

Skillful philosophical reflection and epistemic norms

Bettina Bussmann (University of Salzburg)

On a conceptual level philosophy and ethics education is faced with an unresolved problem: On the one hand it is required that philosophical questions should be analysed and reflected with empirical evidence included. On the other hand there don't exist methods, materials or rules that show how to integrate and reflect on empirical evidence. This conceptual problem has led to significant problems in teaching philosophy. Drawing on considerations from zetetic epistemology this talk wants to give an overview of the situation and introduce some domain-specific epistemic norms that foster skillful philosophical reflection. They need to be implemented in teacher education in order to fulfill international education requirements and minimize the risk of causing epistemic harm.

Junk Norms

Camilo Martinez (Central European University, Vienna)

Our lives are shaped by social norms. But why do we have the specific norms we do? Functionalism suggests that norms can be explained by the positive things they do for us. However, many norms seem resistant to this kind of explanation; they lack clear positive functions and may even be maladaptive. Examples include food taboos, conspicuous consumption, and wasteful gift-giving. I suggest a new way of accommodating non-functional norms within functionalism: these norms can be understood as “junk norms.” Just as much of our DNA is junk, meaning that it persists in our genome without enhancing fitness, many of our norms are junk, meaning that they remain in our culture without serving a positive social function. I begin by presenting a detailed account of functionalism, then examine the challenge posed by non-functional norms. After evaluating and dismissing several functionalist responses to this challenge, I conclude with my own proposal.

Against Ignorance and Turf Battles

A philosophical plea for interdisciplinary research on conspiracy theories

Daniel Minkin (University of Wuppertal)

In recent years, research on conspiracy theories has become increasingly complex. However, although representatives of the various disciplines ask the same or related questions, this research is hardly characterized by a fruitful interdisciplinarity. Instead, we find turf battles on the one hand and ignorance on the other. In my presentation, I would like to argue for an interdisciplinary approach in which different disciplines benefit from each other.

In the first part, I will propose a brief analysis of the current state of epistemological and interdisciplinary research by arguing that this research consists of three competing research programs (in Lakatos' sense). In a second step, I will try to show that these

research programs are hostile to each other and that this hinders a comprehensive and deep understanding of the nature and impact of conspiracy theories. In the final part, I will outline a new research program that integrates both epistemological and empirical work.