

KU LEUVEN

PHILOSOPHY IN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Institute of philosophy | 15-16 december 2022



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

INTRODUCTION

The Value of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Research

The scientific enterprise, currently organised in a variety of more or less independent disciplines, faces increasing calls to promote interdisciplinarity. It is often argued that scientific problems and societal challenges are more than ever multi-faceted, and too complex to be tackled from one single discipline alone. Reductionism towards this or that disciplinary perspective fails to do them justice, and limits science's striking power. This is exemplified by the ongoing environmental crisis. Understanding and tackling environmental problems requires the integration of, among other, biological, geological, sociological, economic and legal perspectives. Or by the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic, which has proven to be a medical, political and economic challenge at the same time.

Arguably, this reflection on interdisciplinarity raises an opportunity to rethink the place of philosophy in the architecture of the sciences. It raises some evident questions: if cooperation between multiple disciplines is required, does this include philosophy or not? What can philosophy offer to the other sciences? And do traditional philosophical problems then also require interdisciplinary solutions? Or is philosophy inevitably interdisciplinary? Moreover, it could be argued that philosophy has a role to play in bridging between scientific disciplines, by providing the necessary conceptual tools and services needed for scientific unification. Perhaps the aspiration of philosophy to be a foundation for the sciences is not entirely dead.

We are pleased to welcome speakers to answer these questions, in general terms or through discussion of particular problems related to philosophy and interdisciplinary science.

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KEYNOTE

Navigating normative paradigms for interdisciplinary research

Udo Pesch | Kardinaal Mercierzaal, Thursday, 10.00-12.00



Problems like the climate crisis, political radicalisation, big data surveillance, the exploitation of human and ecological resources in the Global South confront us with the question about what kind of world we want to live. A question that above all has a moral character, but cannot be answered by philosophy and ethics alone, as it involves scientific uncertainties and societal and technological complexities that need to be understood as well. In other words, we need interdisciplinary approaches that help us to understand of the full extent of these problems. However, in the development of interdisciplinary research, the roles of philosophy and ethics have been lagging behind. While philosophers and ethicists are reluctant to engage with other disciplines, researchers from other disciplines tend to deny the intrinsic existence of their normative assumptions. In this presentation, I will talk about my personal journey through different disciplines and explore the implicit normative paradigms of these disciplines, so to identify gaps and overlaps and to come to suggestions about how to effectively embed moral reflection within empirical research and vice versa.

PRESENTATIONS 1A: BIO-ETHICS AND LAW

Chair: Lien de Proost | Kardinaal Mercierzaal, Thursday, 13.00-14.30

Profound disability and the “moral status” debate: putting practice into theory

Simon van der Weele - University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht

People with profound disability (PD) are individuals with “significant cognitive difficulties, with little or no apparent understanding of verbal language, [and] little or no ability to care for oneself” (Mietola et al. 2017, 265). People with PD have intensive and complex care needs, but caring for them can be challenging. Not only are their care needs hard to interpret; the apparent absence of growth, development, or reciprocity can lead caregivers to doubt the purpose of their care. As Hans Reinders (2008, 23) puts it: ‘there is no “growing into” any kind of activity, so why bother?’

Reinders’ question is meant to be rhetorical; for him, the purpose of caring for people with PD is not a question. Yet for several decades now, moral philosophers have in fact hotly debated the question of ‘why bother’. They do so in terms of “moral status”, which, in the words of Alice Crary (2020, 451), denotes the extent to which people with PD merit ‘consideration or solicitude of some kind’ in light of their particular capacities (see also Wasserman et al. 2017; Vehmas and Curtis 2021). Some philosophers deny people with PD full moral status (Singer 1996; McMahan 2002); others vehemently defend it (Kittay 2005; Vehmas and Curtis 2017). Although their differences are immense, these philosophers have in common the assumptions that moral status can (and must) be justified philosophically, and that its justification must be grounded in some aspect of a creature’s being.

Cora Diamond (1978; 1991) criticizes the terms of the moral status debate. She argues that our solicitude to people with PD is not merited by some metaphysical property, but is an effect of our concept of them as human, which is itself an amalgam of various moral practices. Yet this argument has received scant attention in the debate on moral status. In this paper, I seek to lend credence to Diamond’s position, but not through philosophical argument. Rather, I offer an ethnography of professional care for people with PD, in which I describe and make sense of their care practices as implicit responses to the question of ‘why bother’. As I will argue, it is precisely such an ethnography for which Diamond’s Wittgensteinian position asks: her argument implies a deep entanglement of moral philosophy and ethnography.

In this way, the paper offers two contributions: first, a reconsideration of Diamond’s intervention in the moral status debate by means of ethnography; and second, an argument for (and demonstration of) for what Mol, Moser, and Pols (2010) call ‘putting practice into theory’: for “doing” philosophy through social-scientific work. The suggestion is that philosophy, if it is to bear on practice, must take practices into account, for example through ethnography. In this way, the paper offers one interpretation of Wittgenstein’s (1953, §66) adage: ‘Don’t think, but look!’

Interdisciplinary conceptual engineering in the philosophy of technology: bridging the gap between philosophy and the law

Samuela Marchiori - TU Delft

Technological innovation has socio-technical repercussions that extend far beyond the intended scope of application of the technological artefacts being designed, developed, and deployed. Among such (unintended) areas of influence is the biolegal field. Specifically, a fascinating line of inquiry within the biolegal field is the study of when and how legal concepts should evolve in response to the advent of new technologies.

A paradigmatic example in this sense is the legal concept of “birth” in the Italian legal system, according to which natural persons acquire legal capacity upon birth (article 1, Italian civil code), where “birth” is identified as autonomous lung respiration. It follows that, in order to ascertain whether a subject was still-born or death occurred after birth, a distinction with extremely relevant consequences for family law, it is necessary to establish whether the lungs have breathed. This leads to complications when one considers the existence of mechanical ventilation technology, i.e., devices for the artificial respiration of the lungs, which can sensibly extend a patient’s existence.

From a biolegal standpoint, the presence of such technological artefacts would seem to make the current concept of “birth” obsolete. As a result, legal scholars are confronted with the necessity to rethink legal concepts such as “birth” to assess whether they remain adequate representational devices of the society to which the legal system refers and applies. That is to say, as technological innovation brings new (medical) possibilities, thus giving rise to unprecedented legal issues, should legal concepts change to accommodate them?

For all intents and purposes, such an activity can be characterised in terms of applied conceptual engineering, intended as the assessment of legal concepts, as well as the study of how such concepts should be improved, applied to the (bio)legal domain (Burgess et al., 2020). Nevertheless, legal scholars very rarely, if ever, explicitly address similar investigations in terms of them performing conceptual engineering. This seems to create a rather sharp distinction between philosophy and the law, despite some of their inquiries significantly overlapping (Cappelen, 2018).

In this research, I investigate to what extent, if any, interdisciplinary collaboration between philosophers and legal scholars may lead to mutual benefits while contributing to the advancement of the discipline of conceptual engineering. I claim that, on the one hand, philosophy can provide sophisticated tools and strong methodological foundations for the investigation of legal conceptual change in relation to (new) technologies. On the other hand, legal scholars can contribute to the further exploration of applied conceptual engineering, while also providing pragmatic examples of how to successfully bridge the implementation challenge that characterises conceptual activism, intended as the effective implementation of ameliorative strategies.

Being denied from a concept: epistemic injustice as a motivation for conceptual engineering

Caroline Bollen - TU Delft

Concepts are the building blocks of thoughts, devices for thinking. The concepts we hold enable our thinking, and crucially, the ones we don't hold, limit it. As such, concepts are critical in having and creating knowledge. Concepts have power. Fricker (2007) (and other thinkers from feminist and other critical traditions) demonstrated how social power structures have historically influenced what concepts we have, and how these concepts in turn uphold these same inequalities, to which she refers as a form of epistemic injustice. From this perspective, a relevant exercise in conceptual engineering would actually be conceptual reverseengineering. How did a concept come to be? Who had a say in this? What normative preferences and biases underlie the very concepts we hold?

In a recent paper, Jorem and Löhr (2022) argued for a shift of focus from representational features of concepts to inferential features. I would go even further and suggest that, in those cases of epistemic injustice, we should approach conceptual engineering from a pragmatic perspective. Take as a starting point not what concepts do (or should) represent or infer, but what concepts do. Asking not just what does it mean, but what does it do when you are denied from the concept?

In the talk, I want to expand on this suggestion by going into two examples relating to autism. Neurominorities have historically been (and still often are) excluded in educational and academic institutions, and as such in knowledge creation. The concepts flourishing (Chapman & Carel, 2022) and empathy (Bollen, forthcoming) are often conceptualized in ways that excludes autistic experiences a priori. As a result, autistic flourishing and autistic empathy are considered to be inherently contradictory. Such experiences are either denied as true flourishing or empathy, or the diagnose is put into question. In principle, one could accept that these concepts exclusively refer to non-autistic experiences. However, these concepts have strongly normative inferential properties, which makes this exclusion problematic. Interestingly, in the case of empathy, some scholars suggest that it is actually those normative properties that need revision (Bloom, 2017; Prinz, 2011). This seems to be a fair solution at first glance. As argued by Jorem and Löhr (2022): when the representational properties do not match its inferential properties, one or the other needs to change to make up for this discrepancy. While both options are equally valid theoretically, in such a case I would suggest that a pragmatic approach is required. What does it do to be denied from a concept such as flourishing or empathy? Implications range from unwanted interventions (Bovell, 2020), to societal stigma and exclusion (FletcherWatson & Bird, 2020; Welch, Cameron, Fitch, & Polatajko, 2020), to absence of appropriate healthcare and other facilitations to promote wellbeing (Chapman, 2020). The impact of these cases of epistemic injustice require urgent action. A pragmatic perspective provides a compelling argument to favor revising the intensions of these concepts to include autistic experiences over trying to adjust its inferential properties. Conceptual engineering is not merely a philosophical exercise. It has the power to change lives.

PRESENTATIONS 1B: INFORMATICS AND AI

Chair: Nynke Van Uffelen | Room N, Thursday, 13.00-14.30

How atomistic simulations contribute to scientific explanations

Julie Schweer - Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

Obtaining scientific explanations is a demanding task – especially if the addressed phenomena are very complex. Given that computer simulations have become a crucial tool for studying the characteristics of complex systems, it is important to understand how they contribute to scientific explanations.

Although the role of computer simulations for scientific explanation has recently sparked considerable interest among philosophers of science, examinations that pay close attention to actual scientific research cases are still rather rare. Based on my experiences in a setting in which philosophy of science is part of an interdisciplinary research training group, I suggest that the explanatory role of computer simulations can fruitfully be approached by looking at concrete explanatory practices in which they are used.

In the paper, I deal with a simulation study in which atomistic simulations have been employed to explain the surprising behavior of certain ions in atmospheric aerosols.

I investigate how precisely atomistic simulations have been involved in the search for an explanation of the respective phenomenon. Drawing on a counterfactual account of explanation, I outline four relevant regards in which atomistic simulations can contribute to explanation.

Firstly, they help scientists exceed previous limits of scale and experimental accessibility, thereby broadening the scope of the phenomena that are to be explained. Secondly, atomistic simulations can act as particularly powerful tools for studying counterfactual scenarios as they help explore how the respectively investigated system would behave under conditions that are difficult or impossible to achieve in experimental settings. In the investigated case, this is illustrated by explanatory reasoning that resulted from simulation runs for fictitious ions with an artificially inverted charge sign. Thirdly, atomistic simulations can grant epistemic access to the ‘right variables’. As emphasized recently by Batterman, tackling complex systems typically requires both a systematic reduction of degrees of freedom and a reference to variables that mediate between lower and higher-scale properties. As is illustrated by the case study, atomistic simulations can be valuable tools to get rid of vast amounts of explanatorily irrelevant micro-level details while at the same time including factors that fail to be captured appropriately through the lens of higher-level continuum approaches. Fourthly, atomistic simulations provide resources for a quantitative treatment of complex systems. This matters for explanation because in the case of complex systems, it is often expected that the delicate interplay of various factors rather than a single determining factor gives rise to the phenomenon or behavior to be explained. Hence, atomistic simulations can contribute to scientific explanation precisely by helping scientists estimate and compare the degree to which various factors affect the explanandum.

I conclude by offering some suggestions as to how the lessons learned from the case study shed light on the contributions of computer simulations to scientific explanation more generally.

Philosophical thinking in computer science, engineering, and medicine

Lukas J. Meier - University of Cambridge

What can philosophical thinking achieve in cross-disciplinary collaboration? In this talk, I will try to approach this question by presenting the inner workings of an interdisciplinary research project that took place in the preceding months at the Technical University of Munich and the University of Cambridge: the development of the world's first ethical advisory system for clinical application (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15265161.2022.2040647>).

Ever since the advent of computers, the tendency to delegate tasks to machines has been prevalent in medicine. Artificial intelligence already helps medical staff with a multitude of different tasks, including precision dosing, predicting long-term therapeutic outcomes, and interpreting medical images. Genuinely ethical tasks have so far been excluded from automation. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic the need for making thousands of morally relevant decisions within short time frames has arisen. Could artificial intelligence help with this?

To realise such a complex endeavour, one requires expertise from at least four disciplines. Thus, a computer scientist, an electrical engineer, a medical doctor, and I – a young philosopher – joined forces. Philosophical input was required at several project stages. First, for setting up the conceptual basis of the algorithm: should it proceed by utilitarian, deontological, or virtue ethical principles? Neither medicine nor computer science could answer this question. Secondly, when dealing with the issue of how different input values ought to be balanced to reach a certain moral recommendation; finally, when the algorithm's moral advice needed to be ethically validated. Often, philosophical reasoning acted as the glue binding together the wildly differing perspectives of the other three disciplines partaking in the project.

The exchange was, of course, not monodirectional. Philosophy, too, benefits enormously from cross-disciplinary work with the sciences. The focus on practical applicability, for instance, forces one to sharpen philosophical concepts and to make explicit one's heretofore tacit assumptions. I learned much from discussions with the doctor on our team: real-life dilemmas in the clinic are often far more complex and nuanced than our classic text-book trolley cases; I also benefited from working with the computer scientist and the electrical engineer: not everything that makes sense in theory is also feasible in practice, I had to accept; but I was also thrilled to find how instructive tinkering with technological solutions can be for theory formation, uncovering conceptual inconsistencies and revealing blind spots. Putting our philosophical accounts and convictions to practical tests by applying them to other disciplines thus prompts one to get out of the armchair and to see our subject in a very different, but highly fascinating, light.

Not least due to its interdisciplinarity, the project has received considerable international attention and has since been sparking off both positive and negative commentaries. I aim to present it in a way that facilitates a more general discussion about what philosophy has to offer to other disciplines, and why – not despite our times being increasingly dominated by technology, but because of it – philosophical input may be more valuable than ever.

Phenomenology's application to health care: what happens to the patient objectification in teleconsultation?

Māra Grīnfelde - University of Latvia

The global crisis of Covid-19 pandemic has considerably accelerated the use of teleconsultation (consultation between the patient and the doctor via video platforms). While it has some obvious benefits and drawbacks for both the patient and the doctor, it is important to consider – what is the possible impact teleconsultation has on the quality of the patient-doctor relationship? I am proposing to approach this issue from the perspective of phenomenology, including insights from both phenomenological philosophy and phenomenologically informed qualitative research study about the patient experience of teleconsultation. Both aspects are combined in my research project on the patient experience of teleconsultation, in which I am relying on methodological approaches Phenomenological Interview (Høffding & Martiny, 2015) and Phenomenologically Grounded Qualitative Research (Køster & Fernandez, 2021). These approaches use phenomenological philosophy's concepts to ground qualitative research, in order to generate new knowledge about the various dimensions of human existence.

In this paper I will be focusing on the following question: if and how does the video medium contribute to the objectification of the patient in teleconsultation, and what kind of impact it has on the quality of patient-doctor relationship? The theoretical background against which I have situated this question is discussions within the field of the phenomenology of medicine about the objectification of the patient and the consensus about the negative impact it has on the quality of the patient-doctor relationship (Toombs, 1992; Carel, 2016; Svenaeus, 2022).

I will start the paper by briefly referring to the phenomenological distinction between the lived body and the object body and by classifying the possible sources of objectification within the clinical encounter. Afterwards, with the help of the results of my phenomenologically grounded qualitative research study, I will ascertain if the objectification of the patient is present in teleconsultation and how its presence or absence impacts the quality of the online clinical relationship. I will argue that it is the patient's lived body and not the object body which is at the center of teleconsultation for the most part, leading to the increased sense of patient's agency (control and responsibility) and the transformation of the patient-doctor relationship. I will also show that these results have implications for the improvement of the quality of health care both online and in person.

PRESENTATIONS 2A: JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

Chair: Vinsent Nollet | Kardinaal Mercierzaal, Thursday, 15.00-16.30

Equilibrium meets social science: an approach to exploring stakeholder's conceptions of justice in smart energy systems

Christine Milchram and Michael Schmidt - Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

This paper explores the combination of empirical qualitative social science research and John Rawls's method of Wide Reflective Equilibrium (WRE) to integrate normative reasoning and situational conceptions of fairness in the context of smart energy systems.

The ethical implications of smart energy systems have inspired researchers to explore the systems' impacts on energy justice. Despite the normative commitment of these studies, and indeed the entire energy justice literature, there has been little engagement with philosophical theories of justice. Work has focused on identifying what the benefits and harms of smart energy systems are, rather than developing principles how to distribute them in a just way. The latter requires both theory-led ethical reasoning and deliberative decision-making involving affected stakeholders and the wider public.

The WRE might be useful to achieve such integration of normative reasoning and empirical insights in reflexive design processes of smart energy systems. In applied ethics, it is one of the most prominent approaches to finding morally justified courses of action in situations which are characterized by value contestation and conflicts. However, the WRE has rarely been applied in empirical settings. Therefore, we investigate how it can aid in mapping moral intuitions (obtained empirically) about the justness of design choices, facilitating stakeholder deliberation to form justified judgments, and integrating those judgments in design decisions.

Our study builds on 34 in-depth interviews with stakeholders involved in smart energy systems in the Netherlands. Interview partners reflected on principles of justice related to energy policies and regulation (e.g., smart energy subsidies, electricity tariffs) and design choices within the scope of their project (e.g., cost-benefit distribution, data governance and algorithms).

With this paper, our intention is to inspire interdisciplinary exchange between social scientists and philosophers working on just energy transitions.

“They changed the rules during the game”: why the epistemic controversy about UGS Grijpskerk and Norg is actually about energy justice

Nynke Van Uffelen - TU Delft

Many energy controversies nowadays are framed in the public space as disagreements about facts, such as disputes about risk analyses and safety. However, societal conflicts about energy issues are often not merely about knowledge, but about ethics, values and justice. Yet, assessing whether renewable energy technologies, systems and policies are just or not is no easy task. This is because many normative uncertainties are involved: there is often disagreement about how to interpret justice in specific contexts, as different stakeholders often adhere to different normative assumptions.

To study justice in energy contexts, energy justice scholars have developed a methodology for analysing justice in energy controversies that revolves around a tenet-based energy justice framework that distinguishes distributive, procedural, recognition and restorative justice. However, this practice is currently being criticised on two fronts. First, the tenets of justice are treated in the analysing phase as separate and independent entities, which does not allow a holistic understanding of justice related to the energy technology, system or policy at hand. Second, tenets of justice are often taken to be unambiguous principles of justice, ignoring that philosophical and social disagreement (e.g. normative uncertainty) often exists about different interpretations of tenets. As such, the additional step of touching upon the core of the justice controversy requires analysing the principles and assumptions that underlie claims of justice of different parties that oppose each other in the conflict.

This paper aims to strengthen the applicability of energy justice for energy policy whilst at the same time doing justice to the philosophical complexity within and between the tenets of justice. To do so, a single-case study is chosen that poses in society as an epistemic conflict, yet one that is a conflict of justice at its core: the conflict about underground gas storage (UGS) Norg and Grijpskerk in the Netherlands. A qualitative analysis of the claims of injustice shows that (1) each core concern pertains to multiple tenets of justice at the same time, yet in different constellations; (2) conflicts arise due to different ways that the tenets are interpreted by different stakeholders; and (3) adhering to one conception of justice – in this case one that reduces the conflict to an epistemic dispute – delegitimizes other conceptions of justice, and this might lead to escalation of the conflict in the future. These insights contribute to the methodological and philosophical rigour of the energy justice scholarship, which in turn contributes to the main aim of the scholarship: making energy systems more just.

An Interdisciplinary Solution to the Puzzle of Recalcitrant Emotions: suggestions from philosophy, psychology and human sciences

Giulio Sacco - University of Turin

The study of emotions is one of the fields which shows better the close relationship between philosophy and psychology. For this reason, it is highly paradoxical that there has been no dialogue between these two fields in addressing the problem (pivotal in contemporary literature) known as «recalcitrant emotions», i.e., the phenomenon whereby someone feels an emotion contrary to their explicit beliefs. (For instance, one may be afraid of flying and nevertheless claim not to believe that it is dangerous.)

Emotional recalcitrance has been commonly conceived as an objection to strong cognitivism (Nussbaum 2001), according to which emotions are based on the subject's beliefs. For—the critics argue—, comparing recalcitrant emotions to contradictory beliefs, it would force us to ascribe to the subject an excess of irrationality, violating the so-called «principle of charity» (Greenspan 1980; Majeed 2022; Grzankowski 2020). In my speech, I will show how empirical results from psychology, behavioral economics and sociology of communication provide us with tools to account for this phenomenon in terms of a cognitive theory.

First, starting from Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's (1982) inquiries about the so-called «framing effect» and «inversions of preferences», I will argue that we are not perfectly rational decision makers. Rather, psychological evidence shows that we can sometimes fall into contradictions and cohabit with inconsistency, especially in conditions of uncertainty. Hence, we should not take a regulative ideal (the total coherence in our belief systems) as something that we always fulfill. Secondly, I will hold that the wide literature on heuristics and cognitive biases can help us to explain how it is possible to be afraid of an event, such as a plane crash, even knowing it is highly improbable (Sunstein 2002).

Finally, I will confront the objection according to which, if emotions really lay on our beliefs, then it should be easier to change them (for example, it should be easier to overcome a recalcitrant fear of flying). I will argue that distinguished studies in political communication (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Klepper 1960) show that it is not so easy to get rid of particularly internalized beliefs.

PRESENTATIONS 2B: PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY OF BIOLOGY

Chair: Ana Van Liedekerke | Room N, Thursday, 15.00-16.30

Kinds of mind. On the interdisciplinary study of consciousness in nature

Yamina Venuta - Universität zu Köln

Recent years have seen a surge of interest in questions related to the origins of consciousness and its distribution in nature. Discussions about pan- and biopsychism are undergoing a revival [1,2]; moreover, a new generation of scholars inquiring into the experiential life of other species has announced the birth of a new field, the “philosophy of animal minds” [3,4].

This vast research area perfectly exemplifies the necessity for collaboration between philosophy and the natural sciences. Two elements lie at its heart: a Darwinian conception of consciousness as a natural and evolved phenomenon and the recent “embodied turn” in philosophy of mind and cognition, which stresses the role of the living body in shaping our experience.

I will introduce the key questions that arise when we try to determine whether there is something it’s like to be a particular organism. These questions are mainly conceptual (how should we define our object of investigation, namely consciousness?) and epistemological (what sort of evidence might be required to determine whether a particular species is minded or not?), but also concern the history of consciousness on our planet and the relationship between mind and matter.

Once the embodied nature of consciousness is recognized, it becomes clear that no exploration of subjectivity can proceed purely a priori. If we want to know more about the particular ways of experiencing of other species, we need to observe their physical makeup and rely on empirical data [5].

The challenge, then, is that of identifying the scientific disciplines relevant to this research project. I will mention a few, beginning with biology, and I will discuss the role that philosophy must play if these different disciplines are to work together despite differences in methods and ontologies.

Finally, I will present a different challenge, asking what sort of philosophy should guide this interdisciplinary research. At present, the “philosophy of animal minds” is firmly rooted in the analytic tradition. However, it seems natural to believe that phenomenology, with its rich descriptive analyses of experience, might contribute to a cross-species study of phenomenal consciousness.

I will argue that the current neglect of the Husserlian tradition is due to a misunderstanding: the idea that phenomenology is incompatible with any form of naturalism (and therefore with scientific research). Once this misconception is clarified [6], possibilities for collaboration emerge. The thorniest question remains how to incorporate empirical evidence in an investigation of non-human minds without falling prey to naïve scientism or epistemological circles.

Philosophy in science: lessons from the case of biological taxonomy

Vincent Cuypers - KU Leuven/UHasselt

A (new) movement exists in the world of philosophy of science, that pleads for doing ‘philosophy in science’, and not only ‘philosophy of science’. The basic tenet is that philosophers of science should not only study science in pursuit of their own agenda of philosophical problems, but also have a role to play in mobilising philosophical tools to solve scientific problems, i.e., any problem on the agenda of scientists outside the world of philosophy themselves. Should such philosophical services to science prove relevant, they can be a valuable return of philosophy to the broader academic world, and might help to build a case for public investment in philosophy.

Here, I explore the potential value of ‘philosophy in science’ by illustrating its potential role in biological taxonomy. By discovering unknown biodiversity, and by classifying that nearly endless diversity in a manageable system of species, genera, and other taxa, taxonomists provide vital services to the broader biological community. However, they are hampered in doing so by many enduring disagreements, both about the general principles of their work, and about several particular classificatory issues. For example, the four major global checklists of bird species disagree in about 25% of the cases about which groups exactly to recognise as species, obviously confusing the many users of these taxonomies. It has been shown that many of these disagreements originate either in the divergent use of concepts, for example of what a species is, or in working with divergent values, for example relating to biodiversity conservation. As philosophers are used to working with concepts and values, and have a long tradition of problematising the epistemology of classifications, they might play a useful role in clarifying such issues, and in structuring taxonomic work, so as to optimise its services to biology as a whole, and, of course, to nature conservation.

Building on actual experiences in working with taxonomists, I will argue that for such a philosophical contribution to be maximally successful, the main challenge is to find a balance between a critical, Socratic stance, making the concepts and values used in science explicit and criticising them where needed, and a more positive stance, contributing to find the best possible concepts, for example in the spirit of conceptual engineering, and helping to guide value debates to their best possible outcome. Excessive criticism of scientific methods and activities lead to a breakdown of scientific work and disappointment, and fails to recognise the practical aims and urgency of science. Successful ‘philosophy in science’ manages to integrate science’s own objectives, with its own normative and critical power as philosophy.

Interdisciplinary individualisation science

Anton Killin - Bielefeld University

Individuals differ. The processes that underlie this basic fact are of significant interest to a wide range of disciplines, from ecology, evolutionary biology and cognitive science, to sociology, economics, public health and medicine. An interdisciplinary perspective stands to facilitate cross-disciplinary synthesis and comparative data analysis, furthering knowledge of these processes. This is the goal of the Joint Institute of Individualisation in a Changing Environment, a scientific research centre spanning two universities in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany (Bielefeld and Münster), and specifically its research programme entitled “InChangE”, Individualisation in Changing Environments. Affiliated scholars are concerned with, firstly, processes that lead to changes (often increases) in individuality, understood in terms of individual differences. The central question of this focus is how do individual differences arise or change over time? And secondly, its scholars are concerned with processes for the modification of knowledge, material resources, and commercial products to suit individual needs or desires. Central question: how do sciences respond to individualisation within (human) populations? A third concern is of “individualisation” as a normative term of art in the social sciences: the process whereby “rapidity of social change and greater uncertainty force individuals to spend more time and effort deciding what choices to make in their daily lives, and where they have to accept greater individual responsibility for the consequences of those choices”. Central question: How does social change influence individual responsibility, autonomy, and freedom? Finally, individualisation – in a sense which also gets called “individuation” – in terms of personal psychology and personal identity, in which individualisation is the process whereby a person can be distinguished from a numerically identical but qualitatively non-identical “person” at a different time. That is to say, how their “personal identity” has changed (qua goals, beliefs, desires, who they take themselves to be, etc.). Central question: how do changes that occur over one’s lifetime affect one’s psyche, sense of self, and personality?

The above-described research programme comprises an interdisciplinary cluster of experts in behavioural and chemical ecology, genetics, theoretical biology, evolutionary biology, ethology, animal welfare science, epidemiology, geoinformatics, sociology, economics, psychology, mental health, public health, business and technology, ethics and practical philosophy, and philosophy of science. A major aim of philosophy of science’s contribution is conceptual: analysis of different disciplinary perspectives on individualisation (including identifying similarities and differences), undertaking first steps towards developing a unified theoretical basis for cross-disciplinary research into individualisation, identifying points of potentially fruitful exchange, and identifying conceptual, methodological and theoretical challenges for the project that are priorities for future research.

This talk will provide a birds-eye view of the InChangE project, and will place a spotlight on these given aims of its philosophers of science as it contributes to ongoing research developments. In particular, the talk will provide a philosophical analysis of the epistemic-conceptual practice of the various disciplines, with respect to notions of individualisation. The aim is a way to navigate the conceptual landscape of scientific practices concerned with elucidating individualisation.

PRESENTATIONS 3A: LAW AND ECONOMICS

Chair: Vincent Cuypers | Kardinaal Mercierzaal, Friday, 09.00-11.00

Should states withdraw subsidies?

Tarun Gidwani - King's College London

Subsidies are economic instruments that countries use to protect producers of a certain commodity against disadvantageous impacts of international trade. For instance, in 2018, the US added a tariff on foreign steel imports to allow local steel producers to sell cheaply. The tariffs added extra costs to foreign steel producers that local producers do not have to pay. Generally, subsidies make it difficult for foreign producers of the same commodities to compete. Mainstream accounts of ethics of international trade claim that states generally have an obligation to not provide subsidies. Risse (2007) argues that states have an obligation to first consider other economic instruments to protect producers—such as helping them find work in another industry.

Risse's (2007) argument against subsidies is premised upon the following core economic proposition—subsidies impede national and global economic growth. Let's call this CEP. CEP is then coupled with the claim that economic growth increases and/or sustains the well-being of people. Together, this generates an obligation upon states to not institute subsidies unless competing obligations trump this obligation. Similar arguments have been put forth by other philosophers concerned with international trade (Bres, 2016). I critically assess this argument in two steps.

First, I assess the normative force of CEP. The critique I offer is in addition to the empirical issues that economists have discussed with regards to CEP. I show that it seems impossible to delineate what kinds of state interventions constitute a subsidy. The principles based on which only certain kinds of interventions are referred to as “subsidies” themselves seem to depend upon contested normative assumptions. Therefore, the moral force of any argument premised upon CEP is too weak to offer satisfactory assessments of subsidy policies.

Secondly, the argument, even if assumed as sound, generates a general pro-tanto duty that cannot respond to the specific situations in which subsidies are considered. Imagine that a country subsidizes wheat production to avoid food insecurity. *Prima facie*, let us assume, that the obligation to feed its citizens trumps the obligation to grow. Risse's (2007) account can only bolster that broad intuition. It is insensitive to the fact that subsidies come in degrees. A state can grant higher or lower subsidies. Further, existing accounts also ignore the normative difference among various kinds of producers. It might be that food growers have a greater or lesser moral claim over subsidies than other kinds of producers (service workers, for instance). These accounts similarly assume binaries where there are morally significant varieties. If this is true, the mainstream philosophical case against subsidies is, at best, weak. In fact, when we engage with the rich normative universe that international trade creates, I will show, that there are situations where even when intuitively strong competing obligations are absent, states have a duty to subsidize instead of using other economic instruments to protect producers of certain commodities.

Legal epistemology in the time of budget cuts

Hylke Jellema - University of Groningen

Legal epistemology is concerned with the rationality of legal proof. For instance, when is it reasonable to doubt the defendant's guilt and how do we determine the probative value of evidence? Legal epistemologists have recognized that the field should respect human cognitive limitations and the limitations that follow from the law. This has resulted in a close cooperation with psychology and legal scholarship. However, another significant limitation for legal proof has received far less attention from epistemologists. In many legal systems investigators, judges and others have exceedingly little time and resources when making decisions. In this talk I argue that epistemology should be attentive to this limitation as well, if it wants to be an adequate method of studying legal proof.

I examine how legal epistemologists may contribute to understanding proof in situations with insufficient time and resources by focusing on a specific aspect of legal proof: investigative decisions in criminal cases. First, how should it be determined whether a case warrants an investigation at all? Second, if a case is investigated, how should it be decided when the investigation ends? This includes the questions whether more evidence should be gathered and which and how many of the available hypotheses should be looked into. Both questions are crucial for police investigators, as they cannot investigate every case, nor can they investigate indefinitely. I argue that these questions offer the possibility of fruitful epistemological research. Furthermore, I suggest that this research should involve a continued engagement with psychologists and legal scholars. I end my talk by sketching what this interdisciplinary cooperation may look like.

Unilateral executive power: what is it and what is wrong with it?

Sonia Cruz Dávila - King's College London

This paper is the result of a research project at the crossroads between constitutional law, democratic theory, and political philosophy. It aims to address a particular way in which a head of government may abuse its power, namely, by making decisions and performing acts unilaterally. I conceive of unilateral executive power as a form of power that is exercised exclusively by the head of government and that is not meaningfully constrained by the constitution or its laws (which, in turn, means that it is also not meaningfully limited by any other political actor or institution). This form of arbitrary power allows the head of government not only to use its authority in an autocratic, despotic, and unrestrained way, but also to make decisions and perform acts based on random choice or personal whim, instead of on any reason or system. Starting from the case of emergency measures in exceptional circumstances, I analyse the concepts of 'legal black holes' (i.e., circumstances in which there is no law regulating the exercise of power by the head of government or the law that exists either explicitly exempts the head of government from the requirements of the rule of law or explicitly excludes judicial review of executive action) and 'legal grey holes' (i.e., circumstances in which there is the façade or form of the rule of law instead of any substantive protection of the rights and liberties of individuals). Having done so, I argue that the problem with legal black and grey holes is not that they are not governed by a substantive conception of the rule of law, as David Dyzenhaus suggests, but rather that they are not governed by a procedural conception of the rule of law. Whereas a substantive conception of the rule of law requires that the actions and decisions of the head of government are constrained in a way that protects the rights and liberties of individuals, a procedural conception of the rule of law requires that the exercise of power by the head of government complies with the constraints of due process and is subject to judicial review. Moving away from legal holes, I examine the concept of 'fuzziness', namely, a situation under which a façade or form of legality masks the absence of substantive limitation of power. Drawing on Margit Cohn, I identify five forms of fuzzy law that may grant the head of government the power to make decisions and perform acts unilaterally (i.e., emergency measures, decree authority, the royal prerogative, delegated legislation, and discretionary powers). Finally, I conclude that the fundamental problem with unilateral executive power is not that it threatens the basic rights and civil liberties of individuals, but rather that it undermines the principles of participatory and deliberative democracy and the procedural conception of the rule of law.

Detained children and positive duties

Tyra Lennie - McMaster University

What duties do we owe to migrant children in the context of detention? Current philosophical discussions of immigration generally focus on the right to leave one's state and settle somewhere else rather than the period where individuals are detained while awaiting processing. Arguments for open borders rest on considerations such as common ownership of the earth, equality of opportunity, or a general right to movement. I will diverge from these justifications and motivate the question of what duties we owe to children by utilizing accounts of children's well-being and autonomy. Making this move is necessary because existing explanations do not capture the status of children as non-autonomous agents, and there is currently heavy focus on the right to immigrate and limited focus on the realities of detention. Determining the duties that we owe to migrant children in the context of detention is a pressing task for several reasons. First, examining these duties is essential because children's well-being is heavily impacted by detention. Second, discerning this duty is integral because children occupy an incredibly vulnerable and non-autonomous status throughout the process of immigration. Third, this work is theoretically novel since little work exists that connects children's well-being to the global justice literature. Finally, this work is practically essential—as demonstrated by the lived experiences of detained children across the globe.

My paper will open with a description of the conditions on the island country of Nauru in previous years and the impacts of detention on children. Next, I will examine some of the more common justifications for open borders and explain why these arguments do not capture the unique position of migrant children in detention. In section three, I will describe how extant views of children's well-being and autonomy can prop up our intuitions about the duties we owe to detained migrant children. Finally, I provide a list of positive rights and corresponding duties owed to children informed by children's well-being and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Ultimately, this paper argues that because migrant children occupy a particularly vulnerable and non-autonomous status in the context of detention, they are owed exceptionally weighty positive duties that are not captured in the current literature.

PRESENTATIONS 3B: PHILOSOPHY OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY; PHILOSOPHY OF LITERATURE

Chair: Ana Van Liedekerke | Auditorium B, Friday, 09.00-11.00

The philosophical core of interdisciplinarity

John Lundy - Eastern Oregon University

Beyond a disciplinary expertise, what is it that an individual researcher or participants in collaboration brings to the table vis á vis their interdisciplinary expertise? In answering this question I explore a tension between two conceptions. The first, sees the interdisciplinarian as a multi-disciplinarian, able to move deftly between and integrate various disciplines. Their contribution consists in combining specific disciplinary perspectives. While they are uniquely situated to achieve the best grasp of a multifaceted problem or question, this understanding comprises their individual disciplinary understandings. The second conception, views the interdisciplinarian as a kind of meta-disciplinarian, working one step removed from disciplines themselves, functioning primarily as a big-picture, systematic thinker, who provides a meta-disciplinary framework to scaffold and direct the inquiry. Here, grasping these big-pictures is not simply a function of adding up discrete disciplinary pictures.

I argue that the interdisciplinarian's integrative and big-picture thinking—the site of their substantive contribution—partially overlaps with the disciplines but also extends into a space beyond them. But what is this meta-disciplinary space? I suggest it corresponds, largely, to the traditional domain of philosophy. If this is correct, philosophy has a special significance for interdisciplinarity. Philosophy would not simply contribute on par with other disciplines, as one specific disciplinary frame or by focusing on one specific subject domain.

I then investigate how two prominent strands of thought in interdisciplinarity have understood their most significant contribution to be a radical and uniquely philosophical innovation. First, I consider systems theory (ST), with its twin origin in cybernetics and general systems theory (GST). Second, I consider critical theory, (CT) rooted in the interdisciplinary research program of the Frankfurt School.

ST takes systems thinking to be something fundamentally different from the distorting reductionism associated with conventional thinking. Ludwig von Bertalanffy's original formulation was unambiguously presented as a revolutionary new philosophy that would replace the mechanistic conception of life and mind and provide an alternative basis for a unification of the disciplines that would resolve many of the perennial problems of philosophy. Similarly, if not more philosophically, Cybernetics sought an overarching theoretical perspective that would structure a vast spectrum of previously distinct disciplines.

CT has similarly radical philosophical ambitions, understanding itself as fundamentally distinct from what it calls traditional theory. CT has not sought to displace existing disciplines but to provide a broader philosophical context for the systematic assessment of their contributions and limitations.

I maintain ST lacks of many of the critical, philosophical, and especially moral-political resources necessary to realize the meta-disciplinary aspect of interdisciplinarity. Ultimately, as a form of traditional theory, many of its philosophical assumption remain implicit and unexamined. This leads it to reproduce a disciplinary model, which follows research agendas that appear inherent to disciplines themselves without asking the broader questions: Why use this approach? Who benefits from this research? Who gets to set the questions and define the problems? An approach inspired by critical theory offers a more adequate philosophical basis for interdisciplinarity and I briefly outline a model for how it could operate.

The interdisciplinary mathesis of Gilles Deleuze

Andrej Jovicevic - KU Leuven

(1) Interdisciplinarity is hardly a foreign notion in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Moreover, it is one of the most recognizable traits of this philosophy, and one of the extolled virtues of the philosopher's collaboration with the militant psychiatrist Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus (ATP)* begins with a call for as many connections as possible, and it is filled with references to artistic and scientific domains that are, strictly speaking, foreign to philosophy; their final collaborative work, *What is Philosophy? (WP)*, underpins theoretical discussions of the relation between philosophy, art, and science. Such a presentation might lead one to believe that Deleuze's work before his meeting with Guattari contained no interdisciplinary potential; this conjecture is supported by the often repeated trope that this meeting led to contamination (for better, or worse) of the purely academic, philosophical concern of the early Deleuze.

(2) However, my claim is that Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition (DR)* and the texts immediately associated with it contain the most profound testament to the interdisciplinary outlook of this prolific thinker. Besides the interest that such a claim might hold for the history of philosophy and scholarship surrounding Deleuze, I also claim that the implicit theory of interdisciplinarity exposed in *DR* accounts for the conditions of possibility of any interdisciplinarity, and shows why interdisciplinarity is necessary as the base state of all scientific-artistic-philosophical inquiries. More to the point: the theory of the communication and coexistence of problematic Ideas on the virtual plane (arguably the centerpiece of Deleuze's doctoral dissertation), along with the continuation of this theory by means of the concepts of anexact science and vague essence in *ATP*, expound the immanent condition of all interdisciplinary thinking. Such coexistence and communication make possible the immanent distribution that allows whichever point of whichever scientific inquiry to be immediately grasped in a state that is not specific to the considered science and extended indefinitely so that it can be used in any other (scientific, artistic) inquiry, without metaphor. The upshot of such a perspective would be a shift in our perception of interdisciplinary practice: interdisciplinarity is not a posterior exteriorization of a self-sufficient and well-delimited scientific inquiry, but a base communicative state from which specific scientific inquiries can later be abstracted. Such a conclusion also leads to a different conception of problems in our everyday lives: namely, not as problems of a specific discipline "resolvable" only through it or with the help of the intrusion of another, but as situations immediately invoking a myriad of problematic traits to which each discipline can respond.

In my fifteen-minute talk, I intend to briefly present the notion of interdisciplinarity as it is seen in *ATP* and *WP* and thereby lay the stakes for the problem of conditioning (1). Then, I intend to on how Deleuze makes this communication of disciplines possible, mainly through the communication of Ideas in *DR* and the conception of the interdisciplinary mathesis universalis thereby invoked (2).

Modern novelists and artists "are not doing applied mathematics, or employing a mathematical or physical metaphor. Rather, by establishing that 'science' or universal mathesis immediately in each domain, they make the work a process of learning or experimentation, but also something total every time, where the whole of chance is affirmed in each case, renewable every time" (*DR* 257/199).

From “Black American Socrates” to the “Digital Counterpublic”: Appropriations of James Baldwin in contemporary philosophy

Remo Verdickt - KU Leuven

The work of African American novelist, essayist and civil rights activist James Baldwin (1924-1987) has seen a critical and popular renaissance since the turn of the century (McBride 1999; Miller 2000). Baldwin's 21st century career has both transcended and expanded upon the literary sphere, as he is presently regularly cited in think-pieces, tweets and visual popular culture – most often within the context of social justice discourse. This very discourse is marked by issues of moral integrity, philosophy of law, and ethics and has undergone major transformations with the advent of social media and the Black Lives Matter movement (Hill & Brewster 2022).

Baldwin's prominent position within contemporary activism has thus become intertwined with philosophical concerns – and with the philosophers that voice and practice them. My proposed presentation would function within my PhD project at large, in which I trace Baldwin's 21st century career through a variety of vectors – including visual media, translations, acts of affiliation, and values of geography – that contribute to Baldwin's world literary value. In this presentation I would trace the (re)appropriations of Baldwin's philosophical thought through a few strategically chosen contemporary thinkers and developments: African American pragmatist philosopher Cornel West, French queer and subjectivation specialist Didier Eribon, and ‘nouveau philosophe’ Pascal Bruckner.

In turn, these thinkers have championed Baldwin as a ‘Black American Socrates’ (West 2004), a fellow investigator of working class shame and guilt (Eribon 2009) and, controversially, as an idiosyncratic ally from beyond in the grave in the fight against ‘white guilt’ and ‘cancel culture’ (Bruckner 2020). The central argument of this presentation would be two-fold. First and foremost I want to discuss how and why these particular contemporary philosophers engage with Baldwin in their respective, vastly different projects. Secondly, I want to reflect on how these appropriations can help us understand Baldwin's literary oeuvre and its world literary value. Here I will also briefly include reflections on Baldwin's posthumous presence on Black Twitter, what Hill and Brewster call “the digital counterpublic,” and which they contrast with an understanding of Twitter as a Habermasian public sphere. Philosophy – or, to be more precise, contemporary philosophers' appropriations of and acts of affiliations with Baldwin's literary oeuvre – thus becomes part of inherently interdisciplinary research, intersecting with world literature studies, sociology of literature, reception studies, and media studies, to name but a few.

Morbid yet firm. Hamlet as a Hegelian skeptic

Suzanne Kappé - University of Amsterdam

In his *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel presents a surprising interpretation of the character of Hamlet. Firstly, because he does not take Hamlet to be a character marked by hesitation. According to Hegel, hesitation is a result of ‘weakness and immaturity’, while Shakespeare gives us the ‘finest examples of firm and consistent characters’. Secondly, because what he understands Hamlet’s supposedly firm character to be marked by instead is morbidity. According to Hegel, we can feel reconciled in Hamlet’s death due to a correspondence between external circumstances and the inner nature of Hamlet’s character: ‘death lay from the beginning on the background of [his] mind’, such that he was ‘almost consumed already by inner disgust before death comes to him from the outside’. Hegel’s interpretation thus faces us with two ‘interpretative riddles’. On the one hand, it is unclear how – if not as hesitation – Hegel explains Hamlet’s seemingly endless procrastination of the murder of Claudius. On the other hand, it is unclear how Hamlet can be a firm character for, while at the same time being a disgustful and morbid man. In my view, both ‘interpretative riddles’ are solved if Hegel took Hamlet to be a skeptic. This provokes the more general hypothesis – which will be the subject of my paper – that Hamlet can be interpreted as a skeptic in the sense in which Hegel understood those. I will argue for this hypothesis in three steps. First, I will argue that Hegel himself regarded Hamlet as a skeptic. On the one hand, I will show that the *Aesthetic* provides a characterization of Hamlet that manifests what Hegel elsewhere describes as typically skeptical traits. On the other hand, I will show that if Hegel conceived of Hamlet as a skeptic, both of the ‘interpretative riddles’ are solved. Second, I will establish a parity between Hamlet’s character and Hegel’s account of what true skeptics are like. I will do so by showing how Hegel’s understanding of the skeptic’s *epoché* (his suspension of judgment), *azetetos* (what is beyond his skeptical inquiry) and *ataraxia* (his imperturbability) accord with and elucidate various aspects of Hamlet’s story. Lastly, I will clarify what Hamlet’s Hegelian skepticism amounts to by comparing it to Christoph Menke and Stanley Cavell’s interpretations of Hamlet *qua* skeptic, and show that my interpretation is new in the sense that it is not wholly compatible with those. All in all, my paper aims to make Hamlet and the Hegelian skeptic correspond, in the double sense of showing how they are one and the same tragic character, while also having Hamlet ‘say something’ about the Hegelian skeptic and vice versa. As such, it will form an example of how literature and philosophy are both inseparable and mutually informative.

PANEL DISCUSSION

The future of philosophy in interdisciplinary research

Kardinaal Mercierzaal | Friday, 10:30-13:00



Carinne Elion-Valter

Erasmus



Erik Schokkaert

KU Leuven



Sylvia Wenmackers

KU Leuven



Maartje Schermer

Erasmus

Chair: Lien De Proost

Moderator: Ana Van Liedekerke

Descartes was the first to correctly explain the operation of the rainbow, Pascal demonstrated the existence of a vacuum. Yet philosophers dare to believe that they are more interdisciplinary oriented than ever before. In any case, the demand for interdisciplinarity is getting louder and louder. Contemporary challenges such as the climate crisis and technological evolutions confront researchers with an intensely interwoven network of questions and problems.

Four panelists will debate the role that philosophy plays, can play or should play in interdisciplinary research. Why involve philosophy as a discipline or method in research in other fields? In what ways can or should this be done? What does the current interdisciplinary research landscape look like today, and what can change? Should the future philosopher know statistics and apply conceptual knowledge to the solution of concrete problems? Or is philosophy inevitably interdisciplinary?

The panelists approach these questions from different disciplines. Maartje Schermer is Professor in Philosophy of Medicine at the department of Medical Ethics, Philosophy and History of Medicine, at Erasmus MC in Rotterdam. Erik Schokkaert is Emeritus Professor of Economics at KU Leuven. Carinne Elion-Valter is lecturer at the Erasmus School of Law of Erasmus University Rotterdam. Sylvia Wenmackers is a BOF Research Professor at the Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science (CLPS) of the Institute of Philosophy, KU Leuven. All use philosophy to deepen and enrich research in other fields and to address issues at the boundary between domains.