

Rhein-Main-Neckar Epistemology Meeting 2026

16.01.–17.01.2026, HS 02 Neue Universität

Speakers:

Heidelberg: Mathias Böhm, Tobias Wilsch

Mannheim: Nadja Mira Yolcu, Marc Andree Weber

Köln: Thomas Grundmann, Paul Silva

Frankfurt: Roman Heil, Andreas Müller

Friday, 16.01.2026

14.00–15.30: Roman Heil, Frankfurt

Title: Nobody Cares? Collective Instrumentalism, Trivial Beliefs and the Balance of Epistemic Interests

Abstract: Instrumentalism about epistemic normativity has trouble explaining the categoricity of epistemic norms. According to the too few reasons problem, there are cases in which individuals ought to believe p , given their evidence, even though they lack the goal of wanting to find out whether p . In response, some instrumentalists have recently gone social (Dyke, 2021; Chrisman, 2022; Wei, 2024; Fleisher, 2025; Hannon and Woodard, forthcoming), arguing that epistemic norms are categorical because they are instrumental to furthering the collective epistemic goals of the epistemic community. A problem with this view is that it in turn struggles to explain why individual believers have reason to comply with epistemic norms so specified. In my talk, I will propose a solution to this problem by arguing for a conception of epistemic norms as being grounded in a proportional balancing of individual and collective epistemic goals. I will argue that the resulting view – Proportional Instrumentalism_E (PIE) – allows instrumentalists to have their cake and eat it, too: PIE avoids the categoricity problem and, by giving due weight to individual epistemic goals, explains why individual believers have reasons to comply with epistemic norms. I will also show that PIE provides a novel treatment of the recalcitrant problem of trivial beliefs (Harman, 1986).

15.30–15.45: Coffee break

15.45–17.30: Mathias Böhm, Heidelberg

Title: Ellsberg with Precision? (co-authored with Sven Neth, University of Pittsburgh)

Abstract: Making sense of the Ellsberg preferences is a key motivation for imprecise credences. Usually, the Ellsberg options are understood as certain kinds of Savage acts, which are functions from states to outcomes. We show that if we model the relevant options in a different way and use a non-standard decision theory, we can accommodate the Ellsberg preferences while holding on to precise credences.

17.35–18.05: Thomas Grundmann, Cologne

Title: The Myth of the Liberal Media Bias: A Normative Critique

Abstract: Currently, many people believe that public and mainstream media in Western democracies tend to represent liberal rather than conservative positions and thus are politically biased. This observation typically comes in a package with strong criticism of public and mainstream media.

In my talk, I will briefly analyze the underlying political categories and present relevant data about public news coverage. Although this data is generally mixed, a profound recent study suggests that there is indeed a slight tendency towards the left in public as well as private German news. But even if this is true, further arguments are needed to show that the identified tendency amounts to a bias in the pejorative sense. Such a bias involves the violation of genuine norms (Kelly 2022).

In the main part of my talk, I will first articulate the epistemic norms that apply to journalism. On my view, journalists epistemically ought to do two things: (i) report reliably and (ii) present opinions in a balanced way—but *only in so far as these opinions are reasonable*. Concerning the second norm, there is a substantial difference to the norm that applies to the interaction among scientists. In contrast to gatekeeping journalists, scientists should disclose any piece of relevant evidence, any available argument, and any considered hypothesis to one another. I will then argue that the range of *reasonable* opinions leans towards the left. In support of this view, I present three arguments (the historical argument, the educational argument, and the argument from expertise). If these arguments point into the correct direction, there is nothing normatively wrong with the media's turn towards the left.

18.05–18.15: Short break

18.15–19.45: Nadja-Mira Yölcü, Mannheim

Title: Expressing Epistemic Reasons

Abstract: We ordinarily take ourselves to have reasons for our beliefs. But what are these operative (motivating) reasons? Anti-psychologism holds that a person's motivating reason for acting or believing is not a mental state but a non-psychological item – typically a fact or proposition – that they take to count in favour of their action or belief. A central motivation for this view is the argument from first-person reason-giving: when someone explains their belief with a “because”-utterance (“I believe that *p* because *q*”), the embedded *q* seems to identify their motivating reason.

This talk re-examines the first-person reason-giving argument for anti-psychologism. Extending Freitag's (2024) non-descriptivist account of practical reason-giving to the epistemic domain, I propose that the reason-giving use of “because” introduces an intensional context, linking expressive contents – the attitudes expressed – rather than relating non-psychological propositions. Reason-giving acts are not descriptions of explanatory relations between propositions but expressions of basing relations between attitudes. I show that this is supported by syntactic tree representations of reason-giving “because” (Krifka 2023, Frey 2023). Instead of supporting anti-psychologism, the linguistic data seem to favour a psychologistic ontology: motivating reasons are psychological states.

From 19.45: Dinner

Saturday, 17.01.2026

9.00–10.30: Tobias *Wilsch*, Heidelberg

Title: Schroeder on Basic Perceptual Reasons

Abstract: In *Reasons First*, Mark Schroeder defends an *attitude view* of basic perceptual evidence: when we see that p, the resulting evidence is the (putative) fact that we see that p. He contrasts this with a *content view*, on which the very same perceptual episode provides p as evidence. Schroeder raises three objections to the content view: that it cannot adequately explain epistemic defeat, that it fails to account for the epistemic gain in multimodal cases of perceiving that p, and that it cannot handle epistemic bootstrapping. I argue that the content view can meet the defeat and multimodality challenges, and that the attitude view does not fare any better than its rivals with respect to bootstrapping. Since there are independent reasons to prefer the content view, Schroeder's defense of the attitude view remains unconvincing.

10.35–12.05: Paul *Silva*, Cologne

Title (probable): On Certainty

Abstract (probable): I'll talk about different conceptions of certainty, and defend a view on which certainties are what is guaranteed by facts.

12.05–14.00: Lunch & excursion (Philosophenweg)

14.00–15.30: Andree *Weber*, Mannheim

Title: On Ignorance

Abstract: Ignorance is lack of knowledge – or so dictionaries and standard theories in epistemology say. In recent years, however, some epistemologists have suggested deviating accounts that view ignorance, for instance, as lack of true belief (Rik Peels) or as lack of true belief or knowledge that issues from the violation of a duty to inquire (Duncan Pritchard). Against all these approaches, I will argue for a conception of ignorance that is both more useful for philosophical purposes as well as sufficiently close to the everyday meaning of 'ignorance' to earn the name. According to my conception, ignorance regarding a proposition is the lack of any justified doxastic attitude towards that proposition. Unlike its rivals, this conception of ignorance reflects a more nuanced understanding of suspension of belief, allows for a more internalist framework due to its emphasis on justification rather than truth, and is a more appropriate basis for deliberating normative aspects of ignorance. Moreover, it can easily be extended to an account of degrees of ignorance.

15.35–17.05: Andreas *Müller*, Frankfurt

Title: TBA.

Abstract: TBA.