

IUC Summer School

“Relativism in Philosophy and Politics”,

Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik, July 15th to 22nd.

Course Directors:

Prof. Martin Kusch, Univ. of Vienna

Prof. Jure Zovko, Univ. of Zadar and Zagreb

Teaching staff:

Dr Natalie Ashton, Univ. of Vienna

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Prof. Martin Kusch, Univ. of Vienna

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Course description:

Relativism has been a central topic of philosophical debate throughout the twentieth century, and it continues to be important and controversial in the twenty-first. And yet, precisely because relativism has been important in many different contexts, it can be difficult to form a comprehensive view of its many variants and versions. The purpose of this summer school is to bring together discussions concerning relativism in several subfields of philosophy – e.g. epistemology, metaphysics, ethics. An additional aim is to reflect on political uses of relativistic themes.

We shall discuss questions like the following: How does – or: how should – relativism feature in feminist philosophy? Can relativist views make sense of moral progress? What are

defensible versions of metaphysical or epistemic relativism? Can one motivate epistemic versions on the basis of the underdetermination of theory by observation? How should we theorize political uses of relativism? How does relativism compare with its competitors when it comes to making sense of perspectival expressions? What is the relationship between pragmatism and relativism?

This is the third IUC Summer School organized by the Vienna ERC Advanced Grant Project "The Emergence of Relativism: Historical, Philosophical and Systematic Issues" (2014-19) in co-operation with Croatian and other colleagues.

Here are brief descriptions of the different topics:

- "*Relativism in Feminist Epistemologies*" (Ashton): The relationship between relativism and feminist epistemologies is debated fiercely, but often only briefly, both by feminist epistemologists and their opponents. This session will introduce and evaluate a number of different takes on this relationship in an attempt to clarify and build on the existing debate.

- "*Relativism in Ethics and the Philosophy of History*" (Sodoma & Wildschut): The loss of a stable notion of progress is often taken to be one of the dangers associated with relativism, both in the history of philosophy and in contemporary debates. But what philosophical assumptions are necessary in order to defend a conception of progress? And do these assumptions really rule out relativism? We will investigate these questions in the context of classical philosophy of history as well as discussions of relativism in contemporary analytic moral philosophy.

- "*Relativism in Metaphysics*" (Belleri): This session will be devoted to the presentation and critical discussion of forms of relativism in metaphysics: for instance, relativism about facts or about what exists. Formulations of the view vary in strength, going from the controversial idea that different points of view make up different worlds, to the more moderate thought that incompatible descriptions are true of the same reality. The proposals of authors like Goodman, Quine, Putnam, Rorty and, more recently, Hirsch and Button, will be examined.

- "*Relativism in Epistemology*" (Koch & Kusch): Over the last decade, a number of influential Anglophone epistemologists have developed a new interest in defending or refuting

relativistic positions. Central in this trend are (Wittgensteinian) “hinge epistemology”, reflections on epistemic circularity, theorizing the relationship between epistemic relativism and skepticism, or attempts to make sense of “pragmatic encroachment”. This session will review these developments.

- “*Relativism in Philosophy of Science*” (Kusch): The philosophy, sociology and history of science have been important breeding grounds for a wide range of relativisms: epistemic, metaphysical and semantic. In this session we will review some of the classical positions – Carnap, Kuhn, Feyerabend, Bloor, Barnes – before homing in on some recent debates focused on underdetermination, incommensurability and “conversion”.

- “*Relativism in Politics and Political Philosophy*” (Steizinger): The philosophical debate on relativism has political significance. We examine the political aspect of relativism from both a historical and a systematic perspective: First, we look at an exemplary political debate. We explore the significance of relativism in the context of National Socialism. Second, we turn to contemporary political theory. We discuss the relativistic tendency of Raymond Geuss’ political realism and confront this position with the concerns of the anti-relativists.

- “*Relativism in the Philosophy of Language*” (Zeman): In recent years, relativism has seen a revival both in philosophy of language and in linguistics, especially in connection with perspectival expressions. These are expressions that require interpreters to appeal to perspectives (points of view, standards etc.). In this session, we will situate relativism in the logical space of contemporary positions, present its main versions and discuss the most important arguments in its favor. We will also discuss new and promising directions of research.

- “*Dewey’s Reception of Plato’s Philosophy*” (Zovko): This session will focus on relativism and politics in the context of pragmatism. We will consider why Dewey suggested returning to Plato as a philosopher of education. Dewey justified his return to Plato by saying that the latter’s “highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn...” Dewey was struck by Plato’s idea that the stability of the state is achieved by educating citizens, and that the goal of education was to make citizens experts in their specific jobs.

The course is open to Master and PhD students. The language of instruction is English. The

number of participants is restricted to 25. Pending approval of participants' home university, it is possible to earn 5 ECTS credits through attending the course and fulfilling the course requirements (preparatory reading, regular attendance, active participation in the discussions, oral presentation, and a final paper of around 5000 words).

The course fee is €60. Successful applicants will normally have to cover the costs of their travel, hotel and meals, though financial assistance might become available for students of the University of Vienna.

Applications should be sent (electronically) to:
Martin Kusch <martin.kusch@univie.ac.at>

The deadline for applications is March 15th, 2017.

The application should contain copies of degrees, a transcript of marks, a letter explaining motivation, and one letter of recommendation. The latter should be sent directly to the above email address and should reach us by March 15th. Successful candidates will be informed by April 15th.