

Applied Epistemology Workshop

When: May 15, 2026, Friday

Where: Room 311, Chengjun Building 4, Zijingang Campus, Zhejiang University

Program:

9:00-10:20

What People Think about Conspiracy Theories May Surprise You

M R. X. Dentith (Beijing Normal University, Zhuhai)

There is a tendency to assume uniformity in the popular use of the term “conspiracy theory”, and many academics suggest that other scholars should adopt a definition that follows ordinary language lines. More often than not, the suggestion is that the folk understand the term “conspiracy theory” to refer to theories that are mad, bad, or dangerous.

In this paper I analyse the arguments made by philosophers who claim that, in ordinary language, people take it that conspiracy theories are typically taken to be exemplar bad beliefs. This paper has two parts. The first looks at a representative sample of 500 US respondents, where we (Martin Orr and myself) asked twelve “yes” or “no” questions, informed by the scholarly debate about the nature of conspiracy theories, to establish the conditions under which people think we should consider something a “conspiracy theory”. We discover considerable variation, far from a consensus, with the plurality of views offering a definition that does not take it that such theories are mad, bad, or dangerous.

The second part then connects our survey work to the work of philosophers like M. Giulia Napolitano, Keven Reuter, Romy Jaster, and Geert Keil, who have argued – also based upon empirical data – that people do take it that conspiracy theories are mad, bad, or dangerous. Can we square the circle between our findings and theirs? We argue we cannot, largely because we can show that their findings are based upon already assuming the truth of their conclusions.

10:30-11:50

A salience-shifting framework against epistemic oppression

Veli Mitova (African Institute for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, University of Johannesburg)

The notion of salience has recently cropped up in several apparently unrelated philosophical discussions. For instance, Paulina Sliwa (2024) analyses the practice of victim-blaming in terms of inappropriately making salient the victim's agency in the wrongdoing. Jessie Munton (2023, 2025) develops a framework of salience structures, on which prejudice against social identities is analysed as unduly making salient demographic (real or imagined) features of the social identity in question. And Catarina Dutilh Novaes (2025) points to the role such salience structures play in shaping our epistemic environments through narrowing down our second-order evidence. The aim of this talk is to harness some of the insights from these conversations into the beginnings of (what I will call) a salience-shifting framework for resisting epistemic oppression. The argument will have at least three important upshots for social epistemology. First, it will make a start on imagining the work that is needed to overcome epistemic oppression, especially of the third-order kind (Dotson 2014). Second, given the framework's ability to overcome such oppression, the arguments show that we have more responsibility for resisting hostile epistemic environments than the current literature allows (e.g., Levy 2021, Nguyen, 2023). Finally, it will give the literature on epistemic decolonisation (Mitova 2020, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018) some new conceptual tools.

13:30-14:50

Epistemic Limits on Superintelligence

Adam Marushak (South China Normal University)

Recent gains in the capabilities of artificial intelligence raise concerns due to the prospects of a so-called intelligence explosion: as AI agents get smarter, they can participate in the design of AI systems, leading to a positive feedback loop where smarter AIs design ever-smarter AIs. This paper proposes new constraints on intelligence explosion deriving from the epistemic position of an artificial agent. The argument proceeds from the idea that existing discussions of artificial intelligence run together two notions of intelligence with different epistemic features: reasoning ability versus practical knowledge. I argue that a minimal empiricism entails that gains in reasoning ability do not automatically translate into the type of practical knowledge relevant to both utopian and dystopian outcomes. The missing ingredient lies in the ability of an artificial intelligence to perform observations. But observations are costly in the relevant domains, and even when data is available, the practical upshot is unclear due to the threat of underdetermination. I provide a new model of intelligence growth that takes into account these epistemic limitations and I draw out the consequences regarding the likelihood of artificial superintelligence.

15:05-16:25

Epistemic Remembering as De Re Remembering

Changsheng Lai (Shanghai Jiaotong University)

What is the relation between remembering and knowing? On the one hand, remembering that p is ordinarily regarded as a way of knowing that p . On the other hand, recent studies reveal that remembering does not entail knowing simpliciter. This apparent tension necessitates a distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic remembering, with only the former entails knowing. This paper develops a novel account of epistemic remembering, according to which epistemically remembering that p is remembering that p de re of its truthmaker. I illustrate how this de re account explains or explains away counterexamples to the epistemic theory of memory. My proposal also offers new grounds for viewing memory as a generative epistemic source.

16:40-18:00

A pragmatically encroached probabilistic account of risk

Jie Gao (Zhejiang University)

According to standard probabilistic accounts of risk, the risk of a proposition p is just the probability of p . This account has difficulties explaining pairs of cases where degrees of risk are judged to be different despite identical odds (Pritchard 2015). In this talk, I propose a revised version of this theory. On this view, practical factors (e.g., stakes, salience of possibility) can influence rational subjective probabilities. Moreover, the degree of risk of a proposition depends on this pragmatically encroached probability. I argue that this new account of risk preserves several virtues of the standard probabilistic accounts while overcoming some of their difficulties, and that it can be at least as good as other promising non-probabilistic accounts of risk such as that proposed by Hirvela (2024).