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Truth in Science

Autumn semester 2024, Wednesdays 12-14, L208, SE MA2a/MA5a

https://wuthrich.net/teaching/_MA2_Truth_2024.html

Program:

18 Sept	Introduction: From logical positivism to scientific realism Carnap (1928): Pseudoproblems in philosophy
25 Sept	Conceptions of truth: pragmatism James (1907). Pragmatism's conception of truth
2 Oct	Conceptions of truth: correspondence theories Russell (1910): On the nature of truth and falsehood Russell (1912): Truth and falsehood
9 Oct	Conceptions of truth: approximate truth Leplin (1981): Truth and scientific progress
16 Oct	van Fraassen (1980): <i>The Scientific Image</i> , Chapter 2
23 Oct	Hacking (1981): Do we see through a microscope?
30 Oct	Elgin (2017): Chapters 1-2
6 Nov	<i>No class (semaine de lecture)</i>
13 Nov	<i>No class (Philosophy of Science Association meeting)</i>
20 Nov	Elgin (2017): Chapter 3
27 Nov	Potochnik (2017): Chapter 2
4 Dec	Potochnik (2017): Chapter 4
11 Dec	Khalifa (2020): Understanding, truth, and epistemic goals
18 Dec	Stegenga (forthcoming): Justifying scientific progress

Course description:

It is widely assumed that science aims at truth and is sometimes successful in this quest. Time and again, philosophers, historians and sociologists of science have called these assumptions into question. In this seminar, we will discuss some recent challenges as well as attempts of defending the traditional view. Among other topics, we will discuss the view that science should aim at empirically adequate theories, because truth is not justifiable. Another approach to be critically examined takes the widespread practices of idealization as a point of departure for arguing that the goal of science is to provide understanding, which does not require truth. Of course, we will also consider what sorts of entities (e.g., theories, models, causal hypotheses) can be said to be true or perhaps approximately true.

This seminar will be conducted in English. The readings will be made available on moodle.