Thick Concepts in the Philosophy of Science

Workshop, Hannover, Germany, 3.-4. Dec 2021

Keynote Speakers
Anna Alexandrova (University of Cambridge, online)
Catherine Herfeld (University of Zurich)

Call for Papers
The notion of thick ethical concepts, as originally introduced by Bernard Williams in 1985, has received growing attention in the philosophical literature, particularly in the fields of meta-ethics and the philosophy of language. According to Williams’s classic definition, thick ethical concepts combine descriptive and evaluative components such that they are simultaneously world-guided and action-guiding, without a clear way of separating or disentangling these components. While philosophical analyses of thick concepts have usually focussed on virtue and vice terms, such as brave, cruel, tactful, there has also been a recognition that these concepts seem to undermine the traditional fact/value-dichotomy and thus, to provide a further challenge to the value-free ideal of science. Accordingly, attention has been drawn to many scientific concepts, which seem to fit this pattern: well-being (Alexandrova 2017), risk and safety (Möller 2009, 2012), addiction (Djordjevic and Herfeld forthcoming), GDP and Unemployment (Reiss 2017), to name just a few.

While these concepts may not easily fit into the traditional category of thick ethical concepts, they raise interesting questions to the philosophy of science, for example:

- Do thick concepts threaten the ideal of value-free science?
- What are the epistemological consequences of using thick concepts in science?
- How can scientific claims containing thick concepts be objective?
- What methodological requirements can be discerned to the study of thick concepts?
- How should concepts that are thick in everyday language be operationalized in science?
- How can scientists give good scientific advice on issues involving thick concepts?

Submissions
Anonymized abstracts for work-in-progress presentations (max. 300 words, PDF) must be send to: workshop-thick-concepts@philos.uni-hannover.de. Please make sure that the e-mail to which the abstract is attached contains your name, institutional affiliation, and the title of the paper. The deadline for submissions is 31.08.2021; notifications of acceptance will be sent out by 15.09.2021. Members of groups which are underrepresented in philosophy are strongly encouraged to apply.

Organization:
Birgit Benzing (Leibniz University Hannover), Robert Frühstückl (Bielefeld University), Simon Hollnacher (Bielefeld University). This workshop is hosted by the DFG Research Training Group 2073 “Integrating Ethics and Epistemology of Scientific Research”. More details and updates on thickconcepts.wordpress.com.

Please direct any questions to workshop-thick-concepts@philos.uni-hannover.de.