

## Section 2

### Relativism in Epistemology

**Organizer:** Robin McKenna (University of Vienna)

**Participants:** Anne-Kathrin Koch (University of Vienna), Natalie Ashton (University of Vienna)

#### Abstract:

This symposium is about epistemic relativism, understood as a metaphysical view about the nature of justification, rather than as a semantic view about the semantics of sentences involving epistemic vocabulary. We have two aims. The first aim is to reassess standard objections to epistemic relativism. While these objections are common in the literature, we will focus on their influential articulation by Paul Boghossian in his *Fear of Knowledge*. The second aim is to situate epistemic relativism within new and broader contexts. In particular, we explore the connections between relativism, scepticism, epistemological naturalism, feminist epistemology, and the history and philosophy of science.

#### Titles and Abstracts of the talks

1.

Anne-Kathrin Koch: From Skepticism to Relativism and Back Again

In this talk, I will explore the ties between epistemic relativism (ER) and skepticism. A widespread view on this issue is that skepticism -in the form of radical skepticism- becomes relevant for ER when ER must make use of it in order to present itself as a potential cure for it. This is then often said to be unsuccessful, and ER is said to collapse into radical skepticism. I will argue that instead of thinking of epistemic relativists as unsuccessful anti-skeptics in a picture that only recognizes one form of skepticism, we should think of them as potential allies to Pyrrhonian skepticism.

2.

Robin McKenna: Relativism and Naturalism

A standard objection to relativism about normative domains is that it is unable to account for normativity. The relativist says that justification is relative to something, e.g. a moral framework, an epistemic system. But this transforms something normative (being right, being justified) into something non-normative (being right relative to a particular framework, being justified by the lights of a particular system). In this talk I argue that this is just an instance of a more general worry about *naturalistic* accounts of normativity. Whatever the force of this problem, it isn't just a problem for relativism.

3.

Natalie Ashton: Epistemic Advantage and Relativism

Feminist Standpoint Theorists (FSTs) tend to resist the claim that their views are forms of epistemic relativism (E.g. Hartsock, Harding). The main reason FSTs offer is that their epistemic advantage thesis (or EA, which ranks some justificatory standpoints over others,) is incompatible with relativism. In this paper I will show that this claim is mistaken - a recent

account of EA (due to José Medina) is compatible with relativism. As this account is also more plausible than traditional ones, and as the other reasons that FSTs have offered for avoiding relativism don't apply to it, this leaves room for an attractive, relativist version of FST.