

Improving the Quality of Empirical Research— A Dialogue Across Social Science Disciplines and Research Methods

Inaugural Conference of the Diligentia Foundation

29. April 2016, 09:00 – 17:00

Rotonda Business Club, Pantaleonswall 27, Köln, Germany

Founded in 2015, the Diligentia Foundation is devoted to supporting empirical research in the social sciences. The Foundation's inaugural conference brings together leading representatives and academic practitioners of different empirical research methods to discuss opportunities and challenges for ensuring and further improving the quality of empirical research in the social sciences.

The conference will gather contributions from a wide-ranging spectrum of social science disciplines and research methods in order to foster dialogue and mutual learning across what have often become silos of particular methodological and (sub-)disciplinary approaches. While methodological and disciplinary specialization has its benefits, it seems important also to recognize the limitations and missed opportunities that such specialization entails. Perhaps there are important lessons that can be learned from other social science disciplines and methodological approaches that can help further to improve the quality of empirical research in any given specialization. The conference seeks to provide opportunities for examining this potential for cross-disciplinary and cross-methodological reflection and fruition.

Invited *keynote speakers*, who are leading representatives of particular methodological approaches in their respective disciplines, will provide stimuli for discussion. Conference participants are invited to form *discussion roundtables* that take up these stimuli with the aim of further exploring the particular opportunities and challenges of applying and further developing particular research methods in their respective disciplines. Brief presentations of *theses* summarizing the discussion results of each roundtable will bring the conference to a close.

You may register for the conference online at: <http://www.stiftung-diligentia.com/veranstaltungen.html>. All conference attendees must register to attend. Deadline for registrations is 31. March, 2016. The conference fee of €30,00 (€20,00 for non-tenured academics) covering lunch and refreshments is payable upon registration. Cancellation with full refund is possible until 15. April 2016. Please transfer the conference fee to the following account: Diligentia-Stiftung, Sparkasse KölnBonn, IBAN: DE 29 3705 0198 1932 5382 65, BIC: COLSDE33.

Prof. Dr. Mark Ebers, Prof. Dr.h.c. Norbert Szyperski
Members of the Board of the Diligentia Foundation, Köln

Improving the Quality of Empirical Research— A Dialogue Across Social Science Disciplines and Research Methods

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

29. April 2016, Rotonda Business Club, Pantaleonswall 27, Köln

09:00 – 09:15 Welcome and Introduction

09.15 – 10:00 **Matthias Sutter (University of Cologne): Lab- and field-experiments on the provision of credence goods**

Generally speaking, credence goods have the characteristic that although customers can observe the utility they derive from the good or service ex post, they cannot judge whether the quality of the good they have received is the ex ante needed one. Moreover, customers may not even be able to observe ex post the quality they actually received. The informational asymmetries between sellers and customers can generate several types of fraud that bring with them large efficiency costs and have been receiving a lot of public attention. Prime examples of credence goods are health care services and repair services. In the US, for instance, health care services accounted for 17.9% of GDP in 2012; repair services (such as for cars, office machines and computers) are also a billion dollar industry.

In this talk, I present a series of experiments that are intended to measure the consequences of asymmetric information on the provision of credence goods. The focus of the talk is on the different advantages – and potential disadvantages – of using laboratory, respectively field, experiments for studying this question. Both methods allow for a controlled analysis of provision behavior, thus identifying the mechanisms through which sellers exploit their superior information. It should, however, also become clear that both methods complement each other.

10:00 – 10:30 Discussion

10:30 – 10:45 *Coffee Break*

10:45 – 11:30 **Bernhard Kittel (University of Vienna): Experimental Sociology: Scientific Oxymoron or Promising Avenue?**

While experiments have become a respected method of inquiry in economics, psychology, and political science, mainstream sociology has been much more reluctant to add the approach to the toolbox. Quite to the contrary, experimental work still tends to confront outspoken hostility. In the presentation, I will reflect on some potential reasons for this state of affairs. First, the introduction of the experimental approach to sociology, albeit early in the history of the social sciences, occurred reluctantly and even proponents have aired various misgivings about its potential. This lack of assertiveness on the part of experimental sociology has certainly contributed to its marginalization within the discipline. Second, different factions in experimental sociology obtain their inspiration from different neighboring disciplines, in particular from social psychology and economics. In consequence, sociologists replicate methodological conflicts between these two disciplines within their own discipline. Third, behavioral economists have started to explore research fields that have traditionally been core areas of sociological expertise, thus provoking a defensive attitude by sociologists. Fourth, fundamental epistemological problems of the social sciences challenging basic assumptions of the experimental approach, in particular with respect to the external validity of experimental results, are considered to be more consequential in sociology than in neighboring disciplines. Finally, ontological differences, most notably the role of the group as compared to individual behavior, generate more serious problems for sociological and socio-psychological research questions than for economic and other psychological ones. Despite these challenges, I argue that experimental sociology has to contribute important insights to sociology in particular and the social sciences in general.

11:30 – 12:00 Discussion

12:00 – 13:15 *Lunch*

13:15 – 14:00 **Eric T. Meyer (Oxford University): Finding Answers or Finding More Questions? What we know about social data science and what social data scientists know about all of us**

The phrase “social data science” can be understood in three ways, all of which will be addressed in this talk. First, it refers to data science where the data relates to individual and social behaviour. Second, it can be read as social science with generation and analysis of real-time transactional data embedded at its centre. Third, it can be understood as the science of social data. The social sciences (along with the sciences, business, government, organizations in the health sector, and many others) have been heavily involved in the rush to engage with big data. While many social scientists were trained in an age of research-driven data (e.g. surveys, interviews, experiments), this recent rush toward data-driven research opens up both new possibilities for research and new possibilities for cracks to appear in the façade of our methods, of our ethical protections, and of our understanding of what constitutes rigorous research. In this talk, Meyer will use original data from several recent studies conducted by faculty at the OII and elsewhere to start a conversation about the role of computational approaches in the social sciences, the challenges and opportunities of multi-disciplinary research organizations, and the big questions emerging for social data science.

14:00 – 14:30 Discussion

14:30 – 14:45 *Coffee break*

14:45 – 15:30 **David Henderson (University of Nebraska at Lincoln): Epistemic Norms as Social Norms**

At any given time, we individually have some general normative sensibility concerning how to form beliefs. This sensibility is not readily or fully articulable. In connection with specific cases, one recognizes certain beliefs as epistemically fitting and well-produced—or as not. One might then articulate in some general and incomplete way, aspects that make the belief epistemically fitting or problematic. A given individual’s epistemic normative sensibilities are “trained up”—they change in ways that reflect past courses of successes and frustration in the individual’s biography. However, they are also significantly shaped by observing others and being instructed by others—and thus by successes and frustrations within the wider community. Philosophical practice has traditionally been to reflect on one’s own individual epistemic normative sensibility—responding to various hypothetical cases—and trying thereby to regiment the results so as to trace a priori “the concept” of *epistemic warrant*, or *objective justification*, or of *knowledge*. But I am interested in a different approach—one in which we explore the implications of thinking about epistemic sensibilities as something on the order of social norms. The idea is that epistemic norms might be more or less reasonable more or less shared normative sensibilities arising in the course of coordinating our individual and joint epistemic lives. Let us start with a traditional epistemic good to be gotten and shared within our epistemic community—the veritistic good of true beliefs, and the avoidance of false beliefs. Let us recognize that we are deeply epistemically dependent on each other. Then let us explore how we might come to have epistemic sensibilities that allow us to regulate our own epistemic practice and that of those on whom we selectively rely. Here I want to take some inspiration from the interdisciplinary research (in philosophy, anthropology, and economics) on how humans manage to coordinate and cooperate in the pursuit of public and individual goods. I begin by fashioning a truth-hunt game modeled loosely on the familiar stag-hunt game. An alternative model might be an epistemic goods game modeled with significant modifications on public goods games.

15:30 – 16:00 Discussion

16:00 – 16:15 *Coffee break*

16:15 – 16:55 Roundtable discussions

16:55 – 17:00 Good-bye

SPEAKERS

David Henderson, Robert R Chambers Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, U.S.A.



David Henderson works in the philosophy of social science and in epistemology. His work in the philosophy of social science initially centered on the relations between interpretation and explanatory understanding. Here he criticized overly robust rationality assumptions. More recently, he has written on social norms. In epistemology he has been concerned with a realistic naturalized understanding of how humans can pursue their epistemic ends. In *The Epistemic Spectrum*, he and Terry Horgan argue that warranted belief requires an ongoing modulation of one's cognitive processes by extant information, and that such modulation can be managed in a cognitively tractable way. Humans can be sensitive to inarticulate and only piecemeal articulable information, which nevertheless can serve to flag important information for more articulate processing. Contrary to traditional epistemology with its fixation on what is internalistically accessible to reflection, Henderson and Horgan write of an "iceberg epistemology" in which much epistemically important cognition is necessarily below the surface. Iceberg epistemology is understood as a contemporary virtue epistemology. Most recently, Henderson's interests in social norms and epistemology are being pursued jointly. He has attended to respects in which there is significant contextual variation in what is required by our epistemic norms—in what it takes to know some claim. He argues for a "gate-keeping contextualism" in which the variation in what our epistemic standards require is due to the way in which we seek to participate and regulate various broader or narrower epistemic communities. We find more variation in what is sufficient for knowing in various practically engaged communities, where stakes may differ significantly. However, we find more uniformity in what might be termed "general purpose source communities" that seek a stock of true beliefs on which various others can freely draw (think scientific communities). His present work is focused on ways in which models of various economic games and associated norms can be used to understand important features of "the epistemic game" and our epistemic norms. In this, he seeks to draw on work in economics, anthropology, and psychology.

Bernhard Kittel, Professor of Economic Sociology, University Vienna, Austria



Bernhard Kittel is professor of economic sociology and Head of the Department of Economic Sociology at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Vienna. His main research interests cover experimental group decision making, in particular distributive justice in networks, comparative welfare states, and youth unemployment. He is currently directing a project in the DFG Research Group FOR2104 "Needs-Based Justice and Distribution Procedures" (<http://bedarfsgerechtigkeit.hsu-hh.de>), he is involved as a principal investigator in the FP7 Consortium Cultural Pathways to Economic Self-Sufficiency and Entrepreneurship (<http://cupesse.eu>). He also reflects on methodologies of social science research. Most recent publications include articles in the *Economic Journal*, *Research and Politics*, and the *Journal of Applied Mathematics*. He has co-edited with Rebecca Morton and Wolfgang Luhan "Experimental Political Science: Principles and Practices" (Palgrave-Macmillan 2012) and co-authored with Karin Gottschall et al. "Public Sector Employment Regimes: Transformations of the State as an Employer" (Palgrave-Macmillan 2015). Previous appointments include a fellowship at the Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne, a junior professorship at the Graduate School of Social Sciences at the University of Bremen, a professorship in social science methods at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, and a professorship in methods of empirical social science research at the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Oldenburg. From 2006 until 2015 he has been academic convenor of the ECPR Methods School.

Eric T. Meyer, Professor of Information Science, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK



Eric T. Meyer has been at the Oxford Internet Institute since 2007. The Oxford Internet Institute is a multi-disciplinary department within the social sciences division of the University of Oxford, established in 2001 to better understand life online and the societal impact of the Internet. Meyer's work focuses on shifts in work, knowledge creation, and interactions when digital technologies replace their previously non-digital counterparts. His research in this area has included studies of data sharing in dementia research, the use of digital images in biology, digital information practices in the sciences and humanities, and uses of data for public policy. His research, involving over 20 projects, has been funded by a range of organizations including the Sloan Foundation, the Health Foundation, the UK's ESRC, Jisc, Nesta, and others.

Matthias Sutter, Professor of Economics: Design and Behavior, University of Cologne, Germany



Matthias Sutter is Professor of Experimental Economics at the University of Cologne (since January 2015) and part-time professor at the University of Innsbruck. Previously he was at the European University Institute in Florence (2013-2014), at the University of Innsbruck (2006-2013), the University of Cologne (2005-2006) and the Max Planck Institute of Economics Jena (2003-2005). He got his PhD in economics (1999) from the University of Innsbruck where he also finished his habilitation (2002). From July 2007 to June 2013 he was also Professor (part-time) at the University of Gothenburg. His research focuses on the experimental analysis of team decision making and on the development of economic decision making with age. He has published his work, among others, in *Science*, *Econometrica*, *American Economic Review*, *Review of Economic Studies*, *Management Science*, or *PNAS*. He is currently Associate Editor of "*Management Science*", of "*European Economic Review*" and of "*Economics Letters*", and Editorial Board Member of "*Experimental Economics*" and of "*Journal of the Economic Science Association*". He was Associate Editor of "*Journal of Economic Psychology*" (2006-2010). His work earned him several prizes, among others the Science Prize of the State of Tyrol (2009), the Honorary Prize for Science of the State of Vorarlberg (2008) and the Oberbank Science Prize (2004). In 2014 he published a popular book ("*Die Entdeckung der Geduld*") about the importance of patience for health and economic success and made it into the Best-seller-lists in Austria.