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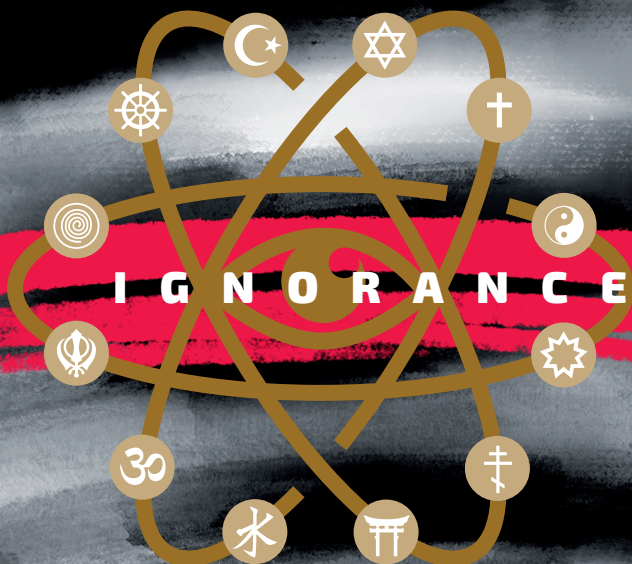
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**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

**CSH**  
CENTER FOR SPACE AND  
HABITABILITY

2ND CSH SCIENCE PHILOSOPHY  
AND RELIGION FORUM

# Reassessing Ignorance

07 – 09 June 2022



# Reassessing Ignorance. Its Varieties, Roles and Values in Science, Philosophy and Religion.

## Abstract

Knowledge is commonly taken to be one of the most important values, and the popular narrative that knowledge continues to grow is a key part in the self-understanding of modern societies. It is no surprise then that science, philosophy and religion pride themselves on possessing or advancing knowledge. But knowledge is always related to its counterpart, ignorance. New knowledge leads to new open questions and thus in a way increases ignorance. Further, in the history of science, new theories often replace what was taken to be knowledge before. During the last two decades, research in various fields has increasingly realized the intimate connection between knowledge and ignorance. In particular, ignorance has been proposed to stretch beyond mere lack of knowledge, and to form a phenomenon of its own that deserves closer analysis in agnotology.

The 2nd CSH Science, Philosophy and Religion forum thus uses ignorance to illuminate parallels, differences and mutual interactions between science, philosophy and religion. We ask: What is ignorance and what kinds of ignorance are there? Which strategies and policies are used to deal with ignorance in science, philosophy and religion? Do science and religion provide complementary perspectives on uncertainties and risks related to ignorance? Can we assign any positive value to ignorance? The CSH forum offers an interdisciplinary platform to discuss such questions.

# Speakers

**Melanie Altanian** is a postdoctoral research assistant at the University of Bern and at University College Dublin. Her Ph.D. project investigated the ethical and epistemological dimensions and implications of genocide denialism. She has published several journal articles and contributed papers on the topic, as well as taught courses on denialism, ignorance, epistemic injustice and genocide. Her most recent publication, *Remembrance and Denial of Genocide: On the Interrelations of Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice*, appeared in the International Journal of Philosophical Studies special issue on *Themes from Testimonial Injustice and Trust* (2021), which she guest edited with Maria Baghramian. Her book *The Epistemic Injustice of Genocide Denialism* is forthcoming with Routledge, Studies in Epistemology.

**Faisal Devji** is Professor of Indian History at the University of Oxford. He is interested in intellectual history and political thought of modern South Asia as well as in the emergence of Islam as a global category. He has written on negative categories of identification and negative notions of non-violence in South Asia, on cultural and philosophical meanings of violence and the emergence of non-violence as a political project. His recent work deals with efforts to think beyond the nation-state and the inheritance of anarchism in the post-colonial world. Two of his publications involve Muslim Zion: *Pakistan as a Political Idea*, and *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence*. Professor Devji has held faculty positions at the New School in New York, Yale University, and the University of Chicago, from where he also received his Ph.D. in Intellectual History.

**Luca Di Blasi** is Professor of Philosophy at the Theological Faculty of the University of Bern in Switzerland. He studied political economics at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, German literature, and philosophy at the University of Vienna and earned his Ph.D. in philosophy at the Catholic University of Eichstätt. In 2015, he habilitated in philosophy at the University of Bern. Since 2014, he has been Associate Member of the ICI Berlin. Luca Di Blasi's theoretical main interest revolves around the relation between philosophy and religion: theoretical approaches to religion and the religious dimension of philosophy. Other fields of research include modern continental philosophy, political theology, and cultural theory. His publications include: *Dezentrierungen. Studien zur Religion der Philosophie im 20. Jahrhundert*; *Der weiße Mann: Ein Anti-Manifest*; and *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini's Multistable Geographies, Subjectivities, and Traditions*.

**Nadja El Kassar** is Visiting Professor at Freie Universität Berlin in the academic year 2021/2022 and a lecturer at ETH Zürich. In August 2020, she completed her habilitation on the epistemology of ignorance at ETH Zürich. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Potsdam. She has published articles on ignorance and (collective) intellectual self-trust and a monograph *Towards a Theory of Epistemically Significant Perception* (DeGruyter 2015). Her current work focuses on issues in the epistemology of ignorance and social epistemology.

**Stuart Firestein** is the former Chair of Columbia University's Department of Biological Sciences where his laboratory studies the vertebrate olfactory system, possibly the best chemical detector on the face of the planet. Dedicated to promoting the accessibility of science to a public audience, Firestein serves as an advisor for the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's program for the Public Understanding of Science. At Columbia, he is on the Advisory boards of the Center for Science and Society (CSS) and the Presidential Scholars in Society and Neuroscience – both centers for interdisciplinary work between the sciences and the humanities. His book on the workings of science for a general audience called *Ignorance, How it Drives Science* was released by Oxford University Press in 2012.

**Paul Hoyningen-Huene** is Professor Emeritus of philosophy at the Leibniz Universität Hannover (Germany) and lecturer for philosophy of economics at the Department of Economics at the Universität Zürich (Switzerland). His main research interests are the dynamics of scientific theory change; the problem of incommensurability; the nature of science; reduction and emergence; the ethics of science; metaethics; the philosophy of logics, of physics, of biology, of history, of psychology, and of economics. He is best known for his books *Reconstructing Scientific Revolutions: Thomas S. Kuhn's Philosophy of Science* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), *Formal Logic: A Philosophical Approach* (Pittsburgh University Press, 2004), and *Systematicity: The Nature of Science* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

**Janet Kourany** is an Associate Professor of Gender Studies as well as an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. She is also a Fellow of the Reilly Center for Science, Technology, and Values. Her research areas include philosophy of science, science and social values, philosophy of feminism, and the new interdisciplinary area of ignorance studies. Her books include *Science and the Production of Ignorance: When the Quest for Knowledge Is Thwarted* (co-edited with Martin Carrier) (2020); *Philosophy of Science after Feminism* (2010); *The Challenge of the Social and the Pressure of Practice: Science and Values Revisited* (co-edited with Martin Carrier and Don Howard) (2008); *The Gender of Science* (2002).

**Rik Peels** is an Associate Professor in the Philosophy Department (Faculty of Humanities) and the Beliefs and Practices Department (Faculty of Religion and Theology) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His main research topic is the ethics of belief. He has developed a theory of responsible belief, studied ignorance, criticized scientism and developed a common sense alternative, explored the ethics of religious belief, and delved into the epistemic responsibilities of universities. He is currently leading an ERC Starting Grant named "Extreme Beliefs: The Epistemology and Ethics of Fundamentalism" (2020-2025). He is the author of *Responsible Belief: A Theory in Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford University Press), and *Ignorance: A Philosophical Study?* (Oxford University Press).

**Alessandra Tanesini** is Professor of Philosophy at Cardiff University. Her current work lies at the intersection of ethics, the philosophy of language, and epistemology and focuses on epistemic vice, silencing, prejudice and ignorance. She is currently a co-PI on a two-year multidisciplinary research project "Changing Attitudes in Public Discourse" which is dedicated to reducing arrogance in debate. She is the author of *The mismeasure of the self: a study in vice epistemology*, *Wittgenstein: A Feminist Interpretation* and *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies*. She is also the author of a reference work in the philosophy of language *Philosophy of Language A-Z*.

### Organisers:

Prof. Dr. Claus Beisbart

Dr. Maria Rebecca Birnbaum

Prof. Dr. Kevin Heng

Prof. Dr. Katharina Heyden

Dr. Vera Matarese

# Program

**Tuesday, 7th June (University of Bern),  
Hauptgebäude, Kuppelraum (501)**

<b>17.30 – 17.35</b>	<b>Welcome address</b>
<b>17.35 – 19.00</b>	<b>Stuart Firestein</b> (Columbia University): Scientific Ignorance as a Drive to Pluralism

**Wednesday, 8th June (Gurten), Ussicht&Wytsicht**

<b>09.50 – 10.00</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>10.00 – 11.15</b>	<b>Nadja El Kassir</b> (Freie Universität Berlin): Examining the Epistemic Productivity of Ignorance
<b>11.15 – 11.45</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>
<b>11.45 – 13.00</b>	<b>Paul Hoyningen-Huene</b> (Leibniz Universität Hannover): Ignorance in Science and its Dynamics
<b>13.00 – 14.30</b>	<b>Lunch break</b>
<b>14.30 – 15.45</b>	<b>Janet Kourany</b> (University of Notre Dame): Race and Gender: Toward a Proper Balance of Knowledge and Ignorance in Research
<b>15.45 – 16.15</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>
<b>16.15 – 17.30</b>	<b>Alessandra Tanesini</b> (Cardiff University): Group-based Ignorance
<b>18.30 – 20.30</b>	<b>Dinner</b>

## Thursday, 9th June (Gurten), Ussicht&Wytsicht

**09.30 – 10.45**      **Rik Peels** (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam):  
Varieties of Ignorance and Why They Matter

**10.45 – 11.15**      **Coffee break**

**11.15 – 12.30**      **Luca Di Blasi** (University of Bern):  
Guilt, Denial, Confession. Political-  
Theological Dimensions of Ignorance

**12.30 – 14.00**      **Lunch break**

**14.00 – 15.15**      **Faisal Devji** (University of Oxford):  
Gandhi, Non-violence, and the Critique  
of Knowledge

**15.15 – 15.45**      **Coffee break**

**15.45 – 17.00**      **Melanie Altanian** (University College Dublin,  
University of Bern):  
Active Ignorance, Cognitive Arrogance and  
Denial of Injustice

## **Contact**

**University of Bern**  
Center for Space and Habitability  
Gesellschaftsstrasse 6  
3012 Bern

Phone +41 31 631 85 34  
[www.csh.unibe.ch](http://www.csh.unibe.ch)

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