

Editorial:

In honour of Rudolf Carnap – Central topics in epistemology

The following four articles were awarded the *Rudolf-Carnap-Essay Prize* during an international graduate conference we organized at Ruhr-Universität Bochum (Germany) in February 2008. We received many excellent submissions not only from graduate students in Germany and other European countries, but also from the USA and Canada. All submissions were subjected to a double-blind review process. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the scholars who supported us in this endeavour.

The graduate conference accompanied the first “Rudolf Carnap Lectures” , which were presented by Alva Noë (Berkeley) on “Perception, Action, and Understanding”, focussing on central issues in the philosophy of mind and epistemology. Rudolf Carnap was born in Wuppertal, which is part of the large *Ruhrgebiet* area in Germany, and he began his philosophical career in Germany before emigrating into the United States. We would also like to express our gratitude to Alva for his five very interesting and thought-provoking lectures as well as for giving us the opportunity to discuss his views in great detail. All participants considered this a wonderful event not only philosophically, but also due to the congenial atmosphere. The “Rudolf-Carnap Lecture Series” will be a regular event at the Institute of Philosophy in Bochum. We are pleased to announce that John Perry (Stanford) will be the next philosopher to present the lectures in spring of 2009.

The award papers offer original considerations on four central questions: 1. How can we deal with scepticism? 2. Is testimony a fundamental source of knowledge? 3. What is the epistemological warrant of logical laws? and 4. How can we adequately characterize a theory as good and as better in comparison to another?

One of the most central and also oldest epistemological issues is of course skepticism, since it threatens the very possibility of knowledge. Semantic externalism has been offered as a strong anti-skeptical strategy. However, intense debate has established that while it is successful at defeating standard brain-in-vat scenarios, it seems to be unsatisfactory in modified versions of this thought experiment. In his contribution Jochen Briesen (Humboldt-Universität Berlin) argues that an original combination of

externalism and inference to the best explanation can overcome these shortcomings and problems.

Another important epistemological question concerns sources of knowledge. Recently, social epistemologists have debated whether testimony should be considered an original source of knowledge like perception or whether it is merely one way of transmitting knowledge. In his paper, Joachim Horvath (Universität Köln) tries to retain the intuition that a knowledge-constituting testimonial chain must be anchored in some non-testimonial source of knowledge with regard to what is testified. Nevertheless, he offers an original counterexample showing that testimony is a fundamental source of knowledge.

Florian Demont's paper investigates the epistemology of logical laws. More specifically, he discusses the problem of how warrant is transferred from premises to conclusions in modus ponens. In this regard, he deals with Boghossian's (2003) "blind reasoning" approach, which he finds wanting, and presents an alternative he calls "pragmatic inferential externalism", placing special emphasis on the notion of a "common ground" (Stalnaker 2002) of knowledge among thinkers.

Finally, Peter Broessel (Universität Konstanz) addresses a question in the philosophy of science, namely, how we should decide whether something is a good theory or whether one theory is better than its rival, given a set of observational data. In his contribution he argues for an epistemological criterion. Following Olsson (2002) and Shogenji (1999), he favours a coherentist answer that meets the condition of favouring true theories over false theories and of favouring true and informative theories over true yet uninformative theories.

We would like to thank the editors of ABSTRACTA for enabling the timely publication of these prize-winning papers from the graduate conference, thereby making them readily available to a wider audience.

Albert Newen

albert.newen@rub.de

Tobias Schlicht

tobias.schlicht@rub.de

Ruhr-Universität Bochum