



Filozofická
fakulta

Univerzita Palackého
v Olomouci

Katedra filozofie FF UP v Olomouci zve na přednáškový cyklus

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Umělecké centrum UP Konvikt
Univerzitní 3, 771 80 Olomouc

11:00-12:30

Why Weird Beliefs Thrive. The Epidemiology of Pseudoscience

We live in a world permeated with science. Although science literacy is higher than ever and science is generally held in high esteem in the educated world, public opposition against some scientific theories remains rampant. What makes pseudoscientific beliefs thrive in this day and age? I draw on cognitive research on the roots of irrational beliefs and the institutional arrangement of science, and explain the dissemination of beliefs in terms of their salience to human cognition and their ability to adapt to specific cultural ecologies. By contrasting the cultural development of science and pseudoscience along a number of dimensions, we gain a better understanding of their underlying epistemic differences. Pseudoscience can achieve widespread acceptance by tapping into evolved cognitive mechanisms, thus sacrificing intellectual integrity for intuitive appeal. Science, by contrast, defies those deeply held intuitions precisely because it is institutionally arranged to track objective patterns in the world, and the world does not care much about our intuitions.

14:30-16:00

Plus Ultra. Why Science Does Not Have Limits

Many of our best attempts to gather knowledge about the world are designated as "science". Are these mere accidents of history and etymology, or does "science" have identifiable limits, beyond which it cannot venture? Many philosophers have thought so. To overstep the boundaries of science, they argue, is to commit a sin called "scientism". In this talk, I will be searching for such limits, but come away mostly empty-handed. For a philosophical naturalist, science and philosophy and metaphysics are all enmeshed in the same web of knowledge, with many mutually reinforcing threads. Erecting fences around science is hard to justify epistemologically. Are there no instances then of science overreaching, overstepping a limit? I will defend one application of the term "scientism", which even a philosophical naturalist should be willing to accept. One is guilty of "scientism" if one believes that somehow science can achieve the impossible, for example, establishing objective moral facts (Sam Harris, Richard Carrier). By and large, however, the concept of the limits of science is misguided, and the notion of "scientism" is abused as a cover for anti-science more often than not. Science is not like a ship equipped for navigating some waters but not others, and reality is not like a geography map with strange, uncharted regions that are accessible only through some "other way of knowing." If there are any limits to human knowledge, they will coincide with the limits of science, broadly construed.

5. prosinec 2016

11:00-12:30

6. prosinec 2016

Disbelief in Belief. On the Cognitive Status of Supernatural Beliefs

Religious people seem to believe things that range from the somewhat peculiar to the utterly bizarre. Or do they? According to philosophers like Neil Van Leeuwen and Georges Rey, this may be mere appearance. Van Leeuwen claims that religious "credence" is nothing like mundane factual belief, but has more in common with fictional imaginings. Rey doubts whether anyone genuinely believes in the existence of God, because he finds the argument for theism so palpably preposterous. We argue that this startling thesis contradicts a wealth of data on religiously motivated behavior. By and large, the faithful genuinely believe what they profess to believe. Although many religions openly embrace a sense of mystery, in general this does not prevent the attribution of specific and definite beliefs to religious people. This may look like an abstruse philosophical dispute about mental states, but I will argue that it has real-world consequences. Many people living today, steeped in a thoroughly secularized environment, have become so alienated from religious faith that they struggle to take it seriously at all. They don't just find the doctrines implausible, but they find it even implausible that anyone would be insane enough to believe them. Such incredulity, as evinced by Van Leeuwen and Rey and others, could be termed "disbelief in belief." If you find yourself doubting whether anyone genuinely believes in an afterlife with 72 bashful virgins, or in a literal creation in six 24-hour days, you are a disbeliever in belief. I will argue that policy-makers adopting this attitude are ill-equipped to tackle the problems of religious fundamentalism today.



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