



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

## SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

### **Freedom of research and public use of reason: developing critical thinking through four philosophical approaches**

2122-DOTT-MOD6

---

#### **Title**

**Freedom of research and public use of reason: developing critical thinking through four philosophical approaches**

#### **Teacher(s)**

Coordinator: Prof. Mario Vergani (University of Milano-Bicocca)

Teachers: Prof. Giorgio Bertolotti (University of Milano-Bicocca), Prof. Didier Contadini (University of Milano-Bicocca), Prof. Edoardo Datteri (University of Milano-Bicocca), Prof. Paolo Monti (University of Milano-Bicocca)

#### **Language**

English

#### **Short description**

The cycle of lectures is designed as an exercise of critical thinking, which improves reflexive and argumentative abilities.

What social and institutional conditions affect research practices? What effects in the political sphere and in the

context of public communication does the exercise of different knowledges have to deal with? This year, the seminar will provide PhD students with some philosophical approaches to analyse in depth this classical subject with reference to some issues of the current public debate.

Each lecture will start with a brief presentation of some fundamental theses and models of analysis of the topic by the speakers, followed by a discussion. The lectures are open to first, second, and third year doctoral students working in scientific, humanistic, and technological areas of research. The cycle of lectures is organized in the context of the PhD program "Education in the Contemporary Society", Department of Human Sciences for Education.

The speakers will provide the attendants short texts and/or video material to read before the lecture.

The lessons will be held in English.

**Target audience:** PhD students from all the courses offered in Bicocca

**Participants (min/max):** 5 - 30

## **CFU / Hours**

CFU: 1,5

Hours: 12

## **Teaching period**

1.February 16th 2022, 3 pm-5 pm Prof. Giorgio Bertolotti U6-34

Title of the lesson: Knowledge in the Age of Populism

**Abstract:** In this talk we shall tackle a topic that the pandemic crisis has brought in the forefront as never before, namely the relationship between the competence of experts and the democracy of opinion. We'll try to understand why knowledge and populism often find themselves in conflict with each other, and discuss some of the strategies that have been proposed to address the problem. Exactly what is at stake with this conflict? The social relevance of "truth", "facts", "evidence"? The authority of science as an undisputed normative instance? The link between reason, science/knowledge and emancipation as elaborated by the Enlightenment? And is it just a matter of lack of proper education and information? Is it the fault of the proliferation of the new social media? And even if it is, how are we to conceive of the use of reason – use that Kant famously distinguished into public and private – in our time?

2.March 10th 2022, 3 pm-5 pm U6-34

Prof. Paolo Monti

Title of the lesson: How do we justify restrictions on liberty? On citizens, experts and the erosion of public reason

Abstract: Democratic citizens are expected to recognize one another as free and equal moral agents. But how can we support policies that interfere with the freedom of others in a way that is respectful of their autonomy? Political theorists have argued for a requirement of public justification: coercion needs to be justified based on public reasons that the citizens could recognize as valid, encompassing public values, shared beliefs, but also conclusions of science and analyses from experts. Lately, this stance has been criticized on the basis of both (i) theoretical and (ii) practical difficulties:

(i) The idea of public reason has been accused of bypassing pluralism through a questionable “consensualist” strategy that unfairly marginalizes minorities and voices of dissent;

(ii) The digital disintermediation of the public sphere is eroding the position of expert communities of practice that preside over the establishment of shared knowledge, leading democratic societies to an epistemic crisis.

3.April 14th 2022, 3 pm-5 pm U6-34

Prof. Edoardo Datteri

Title of the lesson: The theory-ladenness of data and the acceptance of scientific theories

Abstract: Scientific theories are constrained by data. This apparently obvious statement may be regarded as implying that data precede scientific theories temporally (meaning that scientists acquire data before theorizing on them) and/or logically (meaning that, while theories can be accepted or rejected based on data, data are neither accepted nor rejected based on theories of any sort). Both claims are largely questionable, if not false, as they stand. Various arguments have been proposed by philosophers of science and cognitive scientists supporting the thesis that scientific data are theory-laden: the acquisition and acceptance of data depend, in a sense to be clarified, on the acceptance of background theories. Discussing the theory-ladenness of scientific data may help one properly interpret the thesis that scientific research is constrained by data, and identify the non-epistemic (social, political and cultural) factors determining the acceptance or rejection of scientific theories.

4.May 20th 2022, 3 pm-5 pm U6-36

Prof. Didier Contadini

Title of the lesson: Truth, truthfulness et similia: critical considerations on research ethics

Abstract: Freedom of research is a key issue for those working in higher education and in academia. Various ethical aspects are linked to freedom of research. I shall focus on two of them: the way research work is carried out and (self-)perceived; social context as a point of origin and point of fallout of research. A crucial point is the question of the “truthfulness” inherent to research and its results, which I shall discuss by drawing on Kant’s text on truthfulness and on Foucault’s discussion on parrhesia.

From here, I’ll approach the issue of FFP.

I will then consider some striking historical cases that problematise the meaning, limits, and content of freedom of research. This will shed light on the oft-neglected role of socio-economic aspects. These aspects characterise the different ethical positions of researchers, who must currently come to terms with what has been called their “moral illiteracy”.

---