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BSAP

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Workshop
UNDERSTANDING vs. KNOWLEDGE IN SCIENCE, FICTION AND ART
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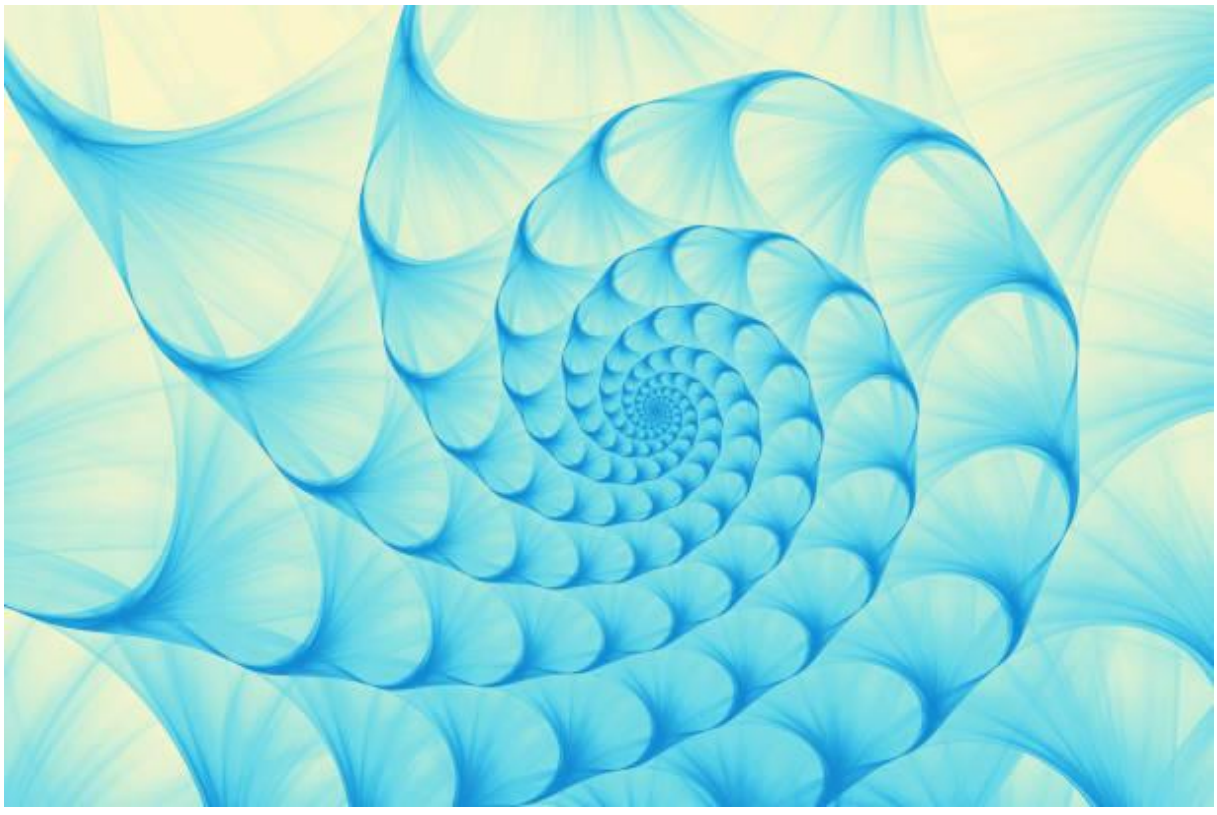
BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



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I Understand that I know Nothing: Perspectives of the Socratic Position in the Post-Truth Era

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This presentation will explore the relevance of the Socratic position in the contemporary "post-truth era," characterized by eroding norms of truthfulness and authority, particularly regarding public truth claims. Beginning with Socrates' famous assertion, "I know that I know nothing," I will interpret this as an expression of epistemological entropy, especially in the realm of values (primarily moral and political). Drawing on Kierkegaard's existentialist interpretation of Socrates, I will examine the philosopher's distinction between "objective" and "subjective" knowledge, interpreted as knowledge of facts and knowledge of values, to highlight how a misinterpretation of this distinction has contributed to the post-truth mindset. Ultimately, I will argue that the challenges faced by Socrates in his time and those confronting us today in combating post-truth are strikingly similar, despite the vast temporal and cultural differences.

Counterfactual Theories of Causation and Causal Explanation: A Case for Absences and Omissions

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Causal explanation is often regarded as a central and desirable form of scientific explanation. However, it remains contentious, particularly when it appeals to absences and omissions – so-called 'negative events' – rather than positive occurrences. This paper explores the role of negative events in causal explanation, from the perspective of Counterfactual theories of causation and their associated accounts of causal explanation. In presentation of this

framework, I aim to emphasize the importance of (causal) relevance, a notion that complements counterfactual dependence as a crucial component of theory of causal talk, especially in the context of causal explanations. The central thesis advanced here is that absences and omissions function in causal explanations in ways that are fundamentally analogous to positive events. Despite their apparent metaphysical challenges, negative events exhibit no substantial differences from standard events in contexts such as explanation, prediction, or manipulation. However, as this paper seeks to demonstrate, one key distinction remains: absences and omissions impose an additional requirement of relevance within the framework of causal explanation, a requirement that is absent in the case of positive events. This difference introduces an additional layer of contextual dependency to cases of causal explanation involving negative events, thereby adding an extra dimension of relativity. If plausible, this distinction may help explain why such causal explanations are often perceived as more problematic and undoubtedly more controversial than those involving only positive events.

Margaret Cavendish on Causation and Degrees of Matter

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By the middle of the seventeenth century a dominant approach to understanding and explaining natural phenomena had emerged in European science and philosophy. Spearheaded by figures like Galileo, Hobbes, and Descartes, natural philosophers largely settled on mathematical physics and mechanical philosophy as devices most apt for deciphering the book of nature.

Margaret Cavendish's dissenting position is notable, among other things, for its coupling of an original brand of vitalist materialism with anti-mechanism. On one hand, she unabashedly held the view that all of nature is entirely material. But this was not the inert matter of the mechanists: in Cavendish's view, matter is self-moving, perceptive, and rational. On the other hand, Cavendish did not find plausible, and criticized thoroughly, mechanistic explanations of transfer of motion, causation, sensation, and cognition. Crucially, she endorsed an occasionalist account of causation. Whereas the mechanical philosophy viewed causal interactions of bodies as cases of collisions of bodies and transfers of motion from one body to another, Cavendish defended the view that bits of matter never moved one another, but that each initiated its own