

International Workshop, September 28-29, 2009

Since the early 1970s, “interdisciplinarity” has become a popular label ascribed to innumerable research programs. Interdisciplinarity is driven by expected benefits of solving problems collaboratively across the boundaries of traditional disciplines and, from a different perspective, by ethical and societal problems at the intersection of science, technology and society. These problems led to the establishment of technology assessment, global change studies and sustainability research. There is a broad practice of interdisciplinary activities all over the globe. Interdisciplinarity projects are supported, funded, and evaluated as a matter of course.

There are, however, also many conceptual and practical problems with interdisciplinary research. We believe that these problems are ripe for the development of a “philosophy of interdisciplinarity.” To develop such a philosophy of interdisciplinarity in the traditions of philosophy of science and philosophy of technology, we invite you to a small but intense workshop that focuses on the discussion of questions such as:

What exactly is the meaning of “interdisciplinary research” in contrast to “disciplinary research”? How to demarcate interdisciplinary from disciplinary research, theories, and methodologies?

What are the problems of interdisciplinarity that can be addressed from a philosophical point of view, and what might be specifically philosophical solutions of these problems?

Are there significant differences between “interdisciplinarity,” “transdisciplinarity,” “cross-disciplinarity,” “post-disciplinarity,” and similar concepts? Would one of these concepts be better suited—with regard to specific purposes—than the traditional one of interdisciplinarity?

How to measure degrees of interdisciplinarity?

How to evaluate the quality of interdisciplinary research?

What could be a good indicator of successful interdisciplinarity?

How can we secure the quality of interdisciplinary research projects?

How to deal with conflicts that are based on varying normative standards as they are developed in traditional scientific disciplines, conflicts that result, for example, from disagreements about what counts as a problem, what counts as a justification of a scientific claim, or what counts as an acceptable method?

Are there disciplinary differences regarding the representation of knowledge and the framing of problems, and how to deal with them if they exist?

Do we need an interdisciplinary “meta-language” to improve communication, or how to translate between disciplinary languages?

Is disciplinary research determined by values that could cause conflicts in interdisciplinary settings?

How could a theory of interdisciplinarity look like?

The purpose of the workshop is both to provide an opportunity for intensive discussion and to initiate a long-term collaboration across the Atlantic. Our goal is to form an international network of scholars working in interdisciplinary contexts and/or philosophy. The workshop will be hosted by the School of Public Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, USA. Registration details are yet to be arranged.

We expect approximately 12-15 short talks in an open discussion structure on topics like the ones listed above. We intend to publish a book based on revised versions of the talks given. This book is supposed to provide the foundations of a philosophy of interdisciplinarity. It should be a valuable contribution to philosophy of science, sociology of science, research and technology studies, cognitive science, public policy, evaluation studies, and others.

If you are interested in presenting a paper (or just participating), or if you want to sign up for an e-mail list “interdisciplinarity network,” please contact:

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Please forward this invitation to colleagues who might be interested.