

Nähere Informationen / Kontakt:
<mailto:iz1@uni-wuppertal.de>

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On doing things with science: Political and Epistemic Controversies about 'Performativity of Science'

Jakob Ortmann
(Hannover)

Philosophy and sociology of science have spent decades analysing epistemic and political issues that arise from the fact that scientific social practices do not operate in a vacuum. Scholars working on 'values in science', for instance, have placed much emphasis on the real-life risks that come with asserting potentially false claims. As a nascent scholarship on the so-called 'performativity of science' argues, however, matters get even more convoluted when science is not just used to explain, inform, or predict, but when phenomena are brought into being or shaped by way of disseminating scientific concepts or predictions. Consider, say, self-fulfilling prophecies, such as when an economist asserts they think a bank run is likely, thereby rendering it more likely. Cases range across economics, psychiatry, biology, medicine, and more, and thinking through the implications of those arguments draws a dire picture: they are epistemically awkward, scientists might be forced to act much more paternalistically than widely thought, and on a global scale. This talk gives an overview of those debates, where I think they should be headed, and why they are of interest to philosophers, sociologists, and historians today.

BUW | Campus Griffenberg
Raum K.12.20
Gaußstraße 20
42119 Wuppertal

