

Donnerstag, 12. Mai 2022
16:30 bis 18 Uhr
Gebäude 23.01
Hörsaal 3C

Charles Rathkopf, Ph.D.

On the Possibility of Decoding Beliefs from Neural Data

Today, multivariate methods in brain imaging are often described as providing access not only into the functional architecture of the mind, but also into the content of thought. In this paper, I try to work out whether such descriptions make sense: whether there could be a *neuroscience of content*. Various philosophical views about the nature of mental content provide reason to doubt it, but I argue that some version of the idea probably is coherent, despite philosophical reservations. I then focus on the distinction between representationalist and anti-representationalist theories of belief, and argue that anti-representationalist theories of belief place strong constraints on the kinds of thought that could in principle be decoded. Finally I assess the prospects for drawing on this comparison as a source of evidence to help us decide between representationalist and anti-representationalist views.

Charles Rathkopf earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Virginia in 2014, followed by a postdoctoral fellowship at the Graduate Center at CUNY. He then worked for three years as Assistant Professor at Iona College in New York, but recently moved to Germany to take up a research associate position at the Institute for Neuroscience and Medicine at the Forschungszentrum Jülich. He is interested in what minds are, how they evolved, and how we can learn about them. He is recipient of the *best article by a recent PhD award* from the Philosophy of Science Association, and has won major grants from the National Science Foundation, and from the American Council of Learned Societies. His work has been published in *Synthese*, *Biology and Philosophy*, and *Philosophy of Science*, among others.