

*Interdisciplinary Research Seminar in Philosophy and Economics:
Motivated Reasoning (180135-2)*

Time: Tuesdays, 13:30 – 15:00

Place: NIG [Hörsaal 2i NIG 2.Stock C0228](#)

Motivated reasoning

Purpose

This seminar serves to discuss “motivated reasoning” from various perspectives in philosophy and economics. The basic idea behind motivated reasoning is (in the words of Epley and Gilovich, JEP 2016) that “People generally reason their way to conclusions they favor, with their preferences influencing the way evidence is gathered, arguments are processed, and memories of past experience are recalled. Each of these processes can be affected in subtle ways by people’s motivations, leading to biased beliefs that feel objective”. The course addresses theoretical arguments and empirical evidence related to this claim and discusses potential practical implications for choices in the economic, political, and social sphere.

Requirements

A maximum of 15 students can be admitted.

1. Each student chooses a paper and presents (max 15 min.) it as scheduled (in the first session on March 11 – participation is required). Hand in your presentation and the questions intended to guide the discussion by the Sunday preceding your presentation the latest.
2. Each student provides a statement or questions for discussion in writing (max. 1 page) to at least 3 papers presented by other students. Deadline: Sunday before the respective seminar (best 3 count for grading).
3. Students actively participate in classroom discussion (must not miss more than 2 meetings).

Grading

20% presentation, 60% written comments and questions, 20% active participation.

Date	Topic
11.3.	Organization / introduction
18.3.	[1] Mele: Motivated belief and agency
25.3.	[2] Peels: Believing at will is possible
1.4.	[3] Paul: Doxastic self-control
8.4.	[4] Rinard: Believing for practical reasons
15.4.	easter break
22.4.	easter break
29.4.	[5] Roeber: Evidence, judgment, and belief at will

- 6.5. [6] Townsend: [Staying true with the help of others](#)
- 13.5. [7] Bénabou and Tirole: [Mindful economics](#)
- 20.5. [8] Cefala et al.: Sorting fact from fiction (unpublished Working Paper)
- 27.5. [9] Celniker and Ditto: [Of preferences and priors](#)
- 3.6. [10] Hagenbach and Saucet: [Motivated skepticism](#)
- 10.6. [11] Zimmermann: [The dynamics of motivated beliefs](#)
- 17.6. [12] Schwardmann et al: [Self-persuasion: Evidence from field experiments](#)
- 24.6. Summary, Wrap-up

Readings (in order of discussion)

1. Mele, A.R. (1998): [Motivated belief and agency](#). *Philosophical Psychology* 11(3): 353-369.
2. Peels, R. (2015): [Believing at Will is Possible](#). *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93(3): 1-18.
3. Paul, S.K. (2015): [Doxastic Self-Control](#). *American Philosophical Quarterly* 52(2): 145-58.
4. Rinard, S. (2018): [Believing for Practical Reasons](#). *Noûs* 4: 763-784.
5. Roeber, B. (2019): [Evidence, Judgment, and Belief at Will](#). *Mind* 128(511): 837-859.
6. Townsend, L.C. (2020): [Staying True with the Help of Others: Doxastic Self-Control through Interpersonal Commitment](#). *Philosophical Explorations* 22 (3): 243-258.
7. Bénabou, R. and Tirole, J. (2016): [Mindful Economics: The Production, Consumption, and Value of Beliefs](#). *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30(3): 141-164.
8. Cefala, E., Kartal, M., Kritzinger and Tyran, J.-R. (2024): Sorting Fact from Fiction when Reasoning is Motivated. Mimeo. Nov. 2024 (work in progress, draft is provided on Moodle)
9. Celniker, J.B. and Ditto, P.H. (2024): [Of Preferences and Priors: Motivated Reasoning in Partisans' Evaluations of Scientific Evidence](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Attitudes and Social Cognition* 127, No. 5, 986-1011.
10. Hagenbach, J. and Saucet, C. (2024): [Motivated Skepticism](#). *Review of Economic Studies*, forthcoming.
11. Zimmermann, F. (2020): [The Dynamics of Motivated Beliefs](#). *American Economic Review* 110(2): 337-361.
12. Schwardmann, P., Tripodi, E. and van der Weele, J.J. (2022): [Self-Persuasion: Evidence from Field Experiments at International Debating Competitions](#). *American Economic Review* 112(4): 1118-1146.

Preparatory background reading:

Epley, N. and Gilovich, T. (2016): [The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning](#). *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30(3): 133-140.

Williams, B. (1970): [Deciding to Believe](#). In: B. Williams, *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge Univ. Press.