

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Conference: The Philosophy of Epidemiology – conceptual issues in epidemiological methodology, population health policy, and the use of scientific evidence in law.

12-13 December, University of Johannesburg

Organised by Alex Broadbent and Kevin Brosnan

<https://sites.google.com/site/philosepi/events-1>

Invited speakers:

- Sander Greenland (Professor of Epidemiology and Statistics, UCLA)
- Christopher Hitchcock (Professor of Philosophy, California Institute of Technology)
- Alfredo Morabia (Professor of Epidemiology, Columbia and CUNY)
- Richard Wright (Distinguished Professor of Law, Illinois Institute of Technology Chicago-Kent College of Law)

**DEADLINE** for submitted papers: 1 August 2011. Abstracts c.250 words to [philosophy.epidemiology@gmail.com](mailto:philosophy.epidemiology@gmail.com)

Notification of acceptance within 2 weeks. Speakers may be invited to submit papers for publication in a special issue of a leading journal.

BURSARIES will be available for travel and accommodation.

Motivation:

Epidemiology is attracting increasing philosophical attention, even though most philosophers know very little about epidemiology, and philosophy of epidemiology is not yet a part of regular philosophy of science curricula. Epidemiology rewards philosophical study for several reasons, but particularly because it is such a poor fit for standard philosophical pictures of science. These pictures tend to place emphasis on explanatory theories and experiment as central features of science, yet neither is central to epidemiology. This fact prompts a recasting of the entire realism debate in philosophy of science, and means that many well-known positions on the nature of science do not apply to epidemiology.

The purpose of this conference is to offer an opportunity to philosophers of science to engage with epidemiology, and to encourage epidemiologists, statisticians, lawyers, social scientists, and others with relevant interests to explore the philosophical aspects of the discipline further.

Epidemiology attracts philosophical attention because epidemiologists deal explicitly with conceptual questions to a greater extent than scientists in many other disciplines. Working epidemiologists devote time and energy to publishing papers on the nature of causation, methods of causal inference, and the nature and role of statistical significance testing, for example. Epidemiology also raises important questions about the relation between general (population) and singular (individual) causal claims, nowhere more clearly than in the context of litigation. Epidemiology is often central to litigation because it deals with phenomena whose underlying mechanisms are not well understood. Thus there are circumstances where epidemiology provides the only evidence available to prove or disprove a causal link between wrong and harm. However, epidemiologists deal in generalities, and litigants are individuals (or classes thereof). It is both a philosophical and a legal question how evidence for a general causal claim relates to the attempt to prove singular causal claims.

We welcome papers on any philosophical problem connected with epidemiology, from philosophers, epidemiologists, lawyers, statisticians, and researchers in other disciplines. Topics might include: causation, especially general causation and its relation to singular; causal inference, especially in the absence of knowledge of underlying biological mechanisms; the role of statistics in causal inference; statistical significance testing; the nature of health and disease; the use of epidemiological or other statistical evidence in legal contexts; the attempt to quantify or apportion causal responsibility; relative and absolute measures of effect strength. This list is not exhaustive.

If you are interested you might want to look at <https://sites.google.com/site/philosepi/resources> for a short and eclectic bibliography.