

# INSTITUT FÜR PHILOSOPHIE HUMBOLDT-KOLLOQUIUM

For current information about the format of this event please visit:  
[fagi.uni-leipzig.de/colloquia-and-lecture-series/colloquium](http://fagi.uni-leipzig.de/colloquia-and-lecture-series/colloquium)



Katharina Nieswandt is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Concordia University in Montreal, specializing in moral and political philosophy. She is currently writing a book, tentatively entitled *The Good Life and the Good State*, which offers an Aristotelian justification of government and the design of political institutions. In addition, she is leading a multiple-year, quantitative study on the underrepresentation of women in philosophy.

## **Katharina NIESWANDT** Concordia, Montreal

### **DO CONSEQUENTIALISM AND RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY PRESUPPOSE THE HUMEAN PICTURE OF PRACTICAL RATIONALITY?**

Common sense morality, academic philosophers and social scientists alike largely understand practical rationality as the ability to conduct sound means-end reasoning. There is some end to be achieved, such as a good state of the world or the realization of a personal preference, and a rational action is one that takes the best means to that end. A rational agent, on this picture, is one whose actions combined maximize the total (expected) achievement of their ends. Some call this the “Humean picture of practical rationality,” crediting David Hume (*Treatise*, sections 3.1.1 and 2.3.3) as an important historical source of it.

Since the 1980ies, a growing number of philosophers have objected to this picture—including Anscombe, Foot, Quinn, Korsgaard, and Nagel. Strangely, a wider implication of these objections went almost unnoticed in the literature: Many of them apply to all theories that identify practical rationality with instrumental rationality. I shall argue that this is true of consequentialism and of rational choice theory. In particular, I argue that neither can make sense of motives such as revenge, gratitude, justice, kinship or solidarity. My argument also offers a new take on two important but largely forgotten ideas: Anscombe’s backward-looking and interpretative motives and Nagel’s logical ghosts.

**27. 1. 2021**  
**16:00 - 18:00**

**To be held online,**  
for link please email  
[martijn.wallage@uni-leipzig.de](mailto:martijn.wallage@uni-leipzig.de)