

## Invitation to T4Science Seminar & DK Guest Lecture

# Between Scylla and Charybdis: Can Climate Science be Ethical and Legitimate at the Same Time?

**Markus Dressel**

Institute of Philosophy, Leibniz University Hannover

**Thursday, 21 February 2019 | 12:30 to 14:00**  
**SR 56.11 (Brandhofgasse 5/ 1<sup>st</sup> floor)**

### Abstract

Climate scientists find themselves in a dilemma: On the one hand, their possession of climate-related knowledge implies an ethical obligation to help averting dangerous climate change. On the other hand, climate scientists are not authorized to prescribe policy. However, illegitimate prescription comes in degrees and includes, for instance, epistemic overconfidence. The trouble is that maximizing legitimacy by communicating only claims “beyond reasonable doubt” minimizes effectiveness, thereby undermining the climate scientist’s ethical obligations.

In this paper, I discuss three common reactions to this dilemma: The moralist strategy to subordinate democratic values to ethical ones; the decisionist strategy to subordinate ethical values to democratic ones; and the reconciliation strategy to serve both values by distinguishing between expert and citizen roles for scientists. I argue that, while the first two strategies are normatively inappropriate, the third strategy can only mitigate, but not resolve the dilemma. Ultimately, I argue, we have to accept the dilemma and interpret the climate scientist’s situation as what it is – a delicate balancing act between two evils. A beneficial consequence of this view is the prevention of unconscious biases towards either side of the dilemma.