



CEPDISC highlights 2020

Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of Discrimination,

Aarhus University (2020—2026)

2021 was CEPDISC's first full year. It has involved continued focus on forming a vibrant interdisciplinary research environment, expansion in terms of personnel, collaborations, projects, administrative procedures and research infrastructures.

A number of grants strengthened the Centre, two of which we highlight here: Professor Thomsen's ERC grant to investigate which relational principles (e.g., reciprocity, prior possession, effort, closeness) will organize the distribution of scarce resources. Also, Professor Bang Petersen received the Fritz Kauffman's Award for his contribution during the Covid-19 pandemic with "crucial data and knowledge about the Danes' behavior and attitudes" in the HOPE-project. It is the first time a researcher outside the natural sciences receives the award.

Workshops and Conferences

In August, the center held its first international conference on discrimination, in a hybrid format. CEPDISC has also (co-) organized several workshops e.g.: 1) a workshop on evidence on implicit bias and the replication crisis with Alex Madva, Jules Holroyd and Mikkel Gerken, 2) a workshop on paternalism, health and discrimination with Jessica Begon and Thomas Schramme, 3) a book manuscript workshop with Andrew Mason, and 4) an Oxford University - CEPDISC workshop on discrimination and applied ethics.

Conceptions of Discrimination

Guest professor Holtug published his book "The Politics of Social Cohesion: Immigration, Community, and Justice" (Oxford University Press) which he has been working on during his stay at CEPDISC. The book considers the impact of immigration on social cohesion and egalitarian redistribution. Basically, it is argued that the effects of immigration on social cohesion do not undermine acceptance of core principles of social justice and liberty. Acceptance of these principles, according to Professor Holtug, suffice to produce social cohesion.

Philosophical objections to discrimination

Social egg freezing is when healthy and fertile women freeze their eggs in order to preserve fertility and delay childbearing for non-medical reasons. Many countries (including Denmark) have restrictions on social egg freezing, but not on medical egg freezing. Only some of those countries have similar restrictions on social sperm freezing. This asymmetry gives rise to the question of whether law on this point is discriminatory against women. In an article published in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2022), Assistant Professor Pedersen argues that restrictions on social egg freezing are discriminatory against women compared to men, and against healthy women compared to women with reduced fertility. According to an influential disrespect-based theory of wrongful discrimination, discrimination is disrespectful when it involves unjustified differential concern for people's interests. Based on this account, Pedersen argues that asymmetric treatment of men and women do not give equal weight to women's interests in prolonging fertility for non-medical reasons in a way, which according to the disrespect-based theory, qualifies as disrespectful.

In a 2021 article published in *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Professor Lippert-Rasmussen scrutinized the idea that there is a duty not to benefit innocently from historical injustice be that colonialism, slavery, discrimination, or past greenhouse gas emissions. In the article, Lippert-Rasmussen demonstrates that several prominent arguments for such a duty prove more than its defenders want to prove. Specifically, they prove (if anything) that victims have a duty to accept and retain goods that putative duty holders renounce to comply with the alleged duty not to innocently benefit from past injustice. Few believe, however, that there is such a duty and, thus, for most people accepting it will in effect commit them to an inconsistent set of claims. In the light thereof, Lippert-Rasmussen explores the plausibility of several ways of revising this set of beliefs.

Psychological sources

In an experimental multi-study on discriminatory applications and sanctions of freedom of speech, Thomsen et. al. (*Cognition*) demonstrates not only that people across the political spectrum are more prone to discriminate against the freedom of utterances of those with whom they disagree ideologically, but also that people believe they are unbiased and seek to adjust for any such bias as soon as they become aware of these biases.



CEPDISC'21 Conference on Discrimination.
Photo: CEPDISC

Outreach

Invited talks:

Lippert-Rasmussen: "A puzzle on disability and old age" (May) (*Journal of Applied Philosophy*) and "Poverty Discrimination" (November), Rutgers University, Center for Population-Level Bioethics.

Thomsen: "The basic building blocks of social life". Social Lunch Talk, Department of Psychology, Harvard University

Media:

BBC One/BBC World - World Business Report: Interview on how a vaccine tax could ensure a more equitable global vaccine distribution during the pandemic (16.11.21).

Politiken: "Is artificial intelligence better than human?" (18.08.21, Klem Thomsen)

Berlingske: "The Danes' knowledge of immigration and integration. Facts or post-rationalization?" (21.12.21, Sønderskov).

Atlantico: "Mélénchon/Zemmour: who is the true ethnicist?" (13.12.21, Garner)

Think, Philosophy for Everyone (CambridgeCore): "Alzheimer's and the value of relationships" (13.01.21, Godman)

About CEPDISC

Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of Discrimination (CEPDISC) explores the nature of discrimination from the perspective of experimental philosophy.

CEPDISC initiated its activities at Aarhus University on 1. August 2020. Presently, CEPDISC consists of 21 researchers, of which 3 are PhD students, with backgrounds in social and political psychology, on the one hand, and philosophy and political theory, on the other hand.

The Centre asks three main research questions in relation to discrimination:

- 1) What is discrimination?
- 2) What are the main grounds for objecting to discrimination and how do these grounds relate?
- 3) What can and should be done to counteract discrimination?

CEPDISC's primary objective is to address these questions from an experimental-philosophical perspective.

CEPDISC's vision is to demonstrate how an experimental-philosophical approach can shed light on some of the important issues of relevance to research and society in relation to discrimination.

