

Workshop

Developing Talent: Conceptual, Empirical, and Ethical Perspectives

27-28 April 2023, Berlin

Human Abilities – Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities

Talents play an important role in many aspects of our personal and social lives. For example, the identification and development of our talents is central to educational, creative and sporting practices, while the way in which talents are thought to enhance or disrupt equality influences social and political policy. Our talents also have the potential to shape an individual sense of well-being and identity, and we may often use our talents as a basis for making important life decisions. As such, the topic of talents and their development has been studied from various disciplinary perspectives, such as psychology, sport science, pedagogy, politics, and most recently, philosophy. This workshop aims to bring together and develop new work on three important strands in relation to talents: conceptual, empirical and ethical.

First, given the array of research on talents, it is surprising that conceptual questions such as what talents are and how they relate to other concepts such as ability, skill, achievement and knowledge, are still underdiscussed. According to recent philosophical accounts, a talent is understood to be constituted by the potential for excellent development of a particular skill. This workshop aims to further explore the metaphysics of talent, questioning for example how talents relate to skills and abilities, the nature of the excellence involved in talent development, and the way in which talents manifest in individuals and groups.

Second, recent empirical experiments undertaken by psychologists point to talents arising from an iterated interaction between both genetic and environmental factors. During the workshop, we hope to arrive at a deeper understanding of this empirical research into how talents are acquired, developed, and maintained, as well as the different kinds of abilities specifically associated with talent development. Finally, the workshop aims to explore the ethical implications of both the conceptual and empirical work on talent. For example, how does being talented relate to the value of achievements and success? In which sense is the development of our talents directly conducive to our own flourishing, or the flourishing of others? How can we plausibly provide fair prospects for the development of talents in educational settings? If talents arise from an interaction between both genetic and environmental factors, and only manifest in the excellent acquisition of the skill under appropriate circumstances, does that strengthen or weaken the demand for equality of opportunity?

Conference Organizers

- Dr. Catherine Robb (Tilburg, NL / Human Abilities)
- Prof. Kirsten Meyer (Humboldt, DE / Human Abilities)

Invited Speakers:

- Dr. Ellen Fridland (Kings College London, UK) – metaphysics of skill
- Dr. Adam Carter (Glasgow, UK) – epistemology of knowledge and ability
- Prof. John Sloboda (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, UK) – psychology and music
- Prof. David Yun Dai (SUNY Albany, USA.) – psychology of gifted education
- Dr. Gwen Bradford (Rice, USA) – value theory and normative ethics
- Dr. Susan Niessen (Groningen, NL) – developmental psychology
- Dr. Tammy Harel Ben Shahar (Haifa, Israel) – political philosophy and ethics