



Seminar

## ANGELA BREITENBACH

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Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Cambridge

### *Disorder, Pluralism, and the Unity of Science*

Tuesday, 2 May, 6:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT ANGELA BREITENBACH

Angela Breitenbach studied for a BA in Philosophy and a MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge. She completed her doctorate at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin with a thesis on Kant's philosophy of nature, for which she received the 2008 Humboldt Prize. She was a Junior Research Fellow at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, and a Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia. In 2012, she joined the University of Cambridge as a Lecturer in Philosophy and a Fellow of King's College. She has held a visiting position at New York University and has received major fellowships and grants from the Leverhulme Trust, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the British Society of Aesthetics.

Breitenbach's research focuses on Kant and the history of modern philosophy, philosophy of science and aesthetics. Her first book, *Die Analogie von Vernunft und Natur: Eine Umweltphilosophie nach Kant* (de Gruyter, 2009), develops a new reading of Kant's theory of living nature and draws out its implications for current debates in philosophy of biology and environmental philosophy. She has coedited a major collection on *Kant and the Laws of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), a special issue on laws of nature in contemporary philosophy of science (*The Monist*, 2017), and a special issue on aesthetics in mathematics (*Philosophia Mathematica*, forthcoming 2018). As a Pro Futura Fellow, she is working on her second book, *Ideals of Unity: Regulative Principles and the Norms of Enquiry*.

## ABSTRACT

Philosophical discussions of the unity of science have a long and distinguished history. They appear in many guises, from the Ancients to the present, often accompanied by visions of the elegant order, harmony, and lawfulness of nature. Recent challenges to this tradition – arguments that do not just reconcile us to, but positively celebrate the disorder or plurality of science – have come with their own companion views of nature as dappled or downright lawless. I address this debate with the intention of proposing an alternative conception of the unity of science, which takes off from the Kantian idea that the unity of science is a necessary regulative ideal. I argue that classic 20th-century conceptions of the unity of science are rightly criticised on empirical, epistemological, and pragmatic grounds, but that their pluralist competitors fulfil their promise only if they are bound by an ideal of unity. I suggest that we have good reason to adopt this ideal as guiding scientific enquiry.