HOW TO BALANCE BALANCED REPORTING AND RELIABLE REPORTING

Date: Wednesday May 15, 2019
Time: 15.30 h.
Venue: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Main building, Room TBA

Invited speaker:
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The paper draws on philosophy of science to help resolve a tension between two central journalistic ideals: That of presenting diverse viewpoints (Balanced Reporting) and that of presenting the most reliable testimony (Reliable Reporting). While both of these ideals are valuable, they may be in tension. This is particularly so when it comes to scientific testimony and science reporting. Thus, we face a hard question:

THE QUESTION OF BALANCE
How should Balanced Reporting and Reliable Reporting be balanced in science reporting?

The present paper contributes substantive proposals in a manner that integrates philosophy of science with the recent empirical literature on science communication. Specifically, I articulate and evaluate strategies for balancing Balanced Reporting and Reliable Reporting. First, I provide a diagnosis of the conflict between them that is informed by philosophy of science. On this basis, I provide restrictions of both Balanced Reporting and Reliable Reporting. The restrictions are unified because they are inspired by similar reflections about the epistemic basis of science reporting – namely scientific justification. Moreover, I note some empirical work that supports the restrictions as well as some empirical work that indicates some limitations of them. Thus, the paper exemplifies how an empirically informed philosophy of science may bear on a question of societal concern.