

L'Université Bordeaux Montaigne is hiring

Call for Applications: PhD Position in Philosophy of Science in Practice

“Writing and Re-Writing the History of Autism: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Interplay of Clinical Histories, Social Representations, and Scientific Understanding”

Department of Philosophy,
SPH Laboratory (UMR(U) 4574 "Sciences, Philosophie, Humanités"),
University of Bordeaux-Montaigne, France

3-year contract

Full-time

Université Bordeaux Montaigne
Department of Philosophy
Pessac



The Project:

Objectives:

Each understanding of disease has a historical context, and these understandings still influence contemporary studies and clinical work. Making these connections and differences tangible, enables a more reflective approach to our current view of disease, and how these influence future perspectives. The medical history of autism, from the invention of the term by Bleuler in 1911, is fairly well documented (see for example Hochmann 2009 or Evans 2017). Yet it seems that medical history itself is not immune to the public controversies surrounding the recognition of autism, and then Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), as a distinct pathological entity since the 1980s. Moreover, alongside or in counterpoint to current scientific theories, the medical history of autism is an arena that tends to play a more or less indirect role in the development of clinical research or therapeutic strategies. From the first clinical descriptions of children with autism in the 1940s by Kanner and Asperger, through the influential psychoanalytic models of the 1960s and 1970s, the cognitive models of the 1980s (Frith 1989), to the current genetic, neuroscientific and environmental models of ASD, the way in which the history of autism is told, the way in which the clinical condition is framed in a historical narrative, and the way in which the personal experiences of patients are reported has changed profoundly. Over the past decade, the neurodiversity debate has received considerable academic and public attention and has influenced revisionist accounts of the history of autism. (See Silberman 2014 or Donvan & Zucker 2016). Drawing on Ian Hacking's reflections on looping effects (1999) and, more recently, Nick Haslam's work on concept creep (Haslam 2016; Haslam et al. 2021), the aim of this PhD is to develop a philosophical investigation of the interplay between clinical histories, social representations and scientific understanding.

**L'Université Bordeaux
Montaigne, université d'Arts,
Lettres, Langues, Sciences
Humaines et sociales :**



+ de 16 500 étudiants



+ de 1200 personnels



3 UFR et 2 instituts
(IUT Bordeaux
Montaigne et IJBA)



1 école doctorale



16 équipes de recherche



1 Cité des Langues
Etrangères, du Français
et des Francophonies
(CLEFF)

Expected Results:

One aim of the project will be to renew the methods and goals of the philosophy of science and, in particular, of historical epistemology in the field of medical historiography. Basic research in medicine claims to be objective and thus aims to be independent of ideology and narratives of the past. Yet it is inescapable that both scientists and patients are influenced by stereotypes, old cultural underpinnings and new moral demands. At the interface between the philosophy of science and the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), and in a fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration between philosophers and scientists involved in the TRANSCEND doctoral network, this PhD project aims to gain a better understanding of the subtle dynamics between current basic research and medical history through the specific study of ASD.

Planned secondments: During the 3 years formation, the PhD student will undertake a secondment at KUL with Dr. Kaat Alaerts (M6, duration 4 months) in more experimental and clinical psychiatry setting for ASD, and a secondment at UNIBI with Dr. Lara Keuck (M28, 4 months) to further broaden the philosophical scope of the project.

Place of employment

The PhD candidate will be affiliated with the SPH Laboratory (Science, Humanities, Philosophy) at Université Bordeaux Montaigne (UBM). The candidate will receive training from the Montaigne-Humanités PhD school and may be expected to contribute to the teaching activities of the Department of Philosophy at both undergraduate (Licence) and graduate (Master) levels. Depending on the specific courses, teaching may be conducted in either French or English.

Supervision

The principal supervisor will be Steeves Demazeux, with Lara Keuck as co-supervisor. The PhD student will also benefit from feedback from the international research network of the TRANSCEND project, which includes scholars from multiple disciplines, who have expertise in laboratory, clinical, epidemiological, and philosophical research to address these challenges.

About the TRANSCEND Project:

The TRANSCEND doctoral network (DN) aims to develop and evaluate a new transdisciplinary approach to translational research on two complex, neurological conditions, namely autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and multiple sclerosis (MS). In every project, and the collaborative and methodologically innovative structure of the DN as a whole, we seek to transcend reductionist approaches to unidirectional reasoning from bench to bedside, thereby practically exploring a new epistemology of translational medical research. We do so by combining philosophical assessments of the logic of new biomedical research approaches with the development and application of such new research designs within basic, preclinical and clinical research on MS and ASD. We focus on MS and ASD, which manifest in various forms and grades of severity, and have a high prevalence and therefore particular societal relevance in the EU, for three epistemic reasons: first, although they differ in pathophysiology and

aetiology, they share system-wide implications and multifactorial causes of condition development and symptomatology. Second, their pathologies concern immunology, neurology, psychiatry and psychology. Third, these complex conditions have a rich history of translational research with limited success. Simple, reductionist approaches have failed to improve diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of these conditions – especially when personalised patient-centred outcomes are considered. The TRANSCEND DN aims to advance translational research on these conditions by exploring how new research designs can transcend known limitations of traditional bench-to-bedside approaches. Moreover, the DN will propose more generalizable amendments to translational medical research by combining projects and educational activities in the biomedical sciences, neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy of science through an innovative mixture of interdisciplinary secondments within the individual projects, discipline-spanning work packages (WP), and transdisciplinary engagement with non-academic stakeholders in policy and industry. TRANSCEND doctoral candidates (DCs) will be uniquely equipped to expand beyond the status quo in the translational medical landscape and lead future efforts to involve important insights and methods from the humanities and social sciences into biomedical studies.

About the SPH laboratory in Bordeaux

This laboratory brings together twenty-five teacher-researchers and some 40 PhD students. It is attached to the UFR Humanities of the UBM, the UF Biology and the CHANGES (Social Sciences of Contemporary Change) research department of the Université de Bordeaux.

Our website <https://www.sph.u-bordeaux.fr/> provides more information on the members of the laboratory and the research we conduct.

Qualifications needed

Educational requirements:

To be eligible for the PhD programme, you must have completed a degree programme, equivalent to a French master's degree (180 ECTS/3 FTE BSc + 120 ECTS/2 FTE MSc) related to the subject area of the project, e.g., in history and philosophy of science.

Although the thesis may be written in English, a good level of French is highly recommended to facilitate integration into the SPH laboratory.

In any case, a B2 level in the French language will be required by the Montaigne-Humanités PhD School before the end of the first year of the thesis.

Applicants who have previously completed a PhD degree cannot apply for this position.

Mobility requirements:

As cross-border mobility is emphasized in this grant type, applicants must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in France for more than 12 months during the 3 years immediately preceding the start of the contract.

Terms of employment

Employment as a PhD fellow is full time during 3 years.

Responsibilities and tasks

- Carry through an independent research project under supervision at the host institution (70%)
- Research training activities in Bordeaux and in the Transcend Project (30%)
- During the 3 years contract, the PhD fellow will need to follow the PhD 60 hours training program of the Montaigne-Humanités PhD school, to which he/she will be affiliated. Each student chooses among a large variety of courses and conferences the ones which one to follow, save for the Scientific integrity course which is compulsory for everyone. Almost all courses are in French, hence the need for a B2 level in that language.

Application and Assessment Procedure

Your application including all attachments must be in English and submitted electronically at projets-recherche@u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr and steeves.demazeux@u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr

Please include:

1. Cover letter explaining your qualifications and research focus (max. one page)
2. Motivation detailing in particular why you want to participate in the TRANSCEND network and work on this project:
<https://biomed.au.dk/transcend-network> (max. two pages)
3. Curriculum vitae including information about your education, work experience (e.g., teaching), language skills, and other skills relevant for the position
4. A copy of original diplomas (Bachelor's and Master's degree or equivalent).
5. A writing sample (e.g., master's thesis or other relevant material)

Application deadline:

The deadline for applications is **October 31, 2025, 23:59 (GMT +1)**.

We reserve the right not to consider material received after the deadline, and not to consider applications that do not present all the above-mentioned requirements.

Process:

Academic assessment includes a review of the written application with members of the Transcend project and the 2 co-supervisors of the PhD.

Online interviews with selected candidates will be held, probably throughout the first weeks of November (3-14, 2025).

Questions

For specific information about the PhD fellowship, please contact Steeves

Demazeux: steeves.demazeux@u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr

General information about PhD study at Bordeaux is available at the PhD

School's website: <https://www.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr/fr/ecole-doctorale/decouvrir-l-edmh.html>

