Call for Applications:

PhD position (100%) in philosophy of climate science

University of Bern

We are pleased to advertise a PhD position in the project "Is More Always Better? The Future of Climate Change Science", funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The starting date for employment is February 1st, 2026 or soon thereafter.

Scientific context of the project:

In current climate science, there is a strong push towards more detailed and powerful computational models to address the challenges posed by current climate change. However, are bigger models always better? Which epistemic purposes can be reached with higher resolution and new machine-learning methods, and which not? How can the scientific understanding of the climate system be deepened with computational models? How is it related to providing decision-relevant climate change information? Our research project takes current discussions in climate science about the future of the discipline as an opportunity to examine its epistemic foundations with a special focus on values. For a summary of the project and its subprojects, please consult this webpage.

The project group will consist of the PhD student, Prof. Beisbart, and Prof. Lam. The PhD student is expected to develop their own PhD project within the subproject on value management within climate science (B1).

We are looking for applicants with:

- an excellent master's degree in philosophy, ideally philosophy of (climate) science, to be completed by December 31st, 2025 (we also consider applicants with an excellent master's degree in climate science with a demonstrated strong interest in philosophy of science);
- a strong interest in current climate science;
- the willingness and ability to interact with climate scientists;
- the willingness and ability to contribute to the project's research outputs (peer reviewed publications and conference presentations);
- the readiness to contribute to collaborative research;
- excellent mastery of English (German is not required);
- the willingness and ability to contribute to the organisation of research activities

related to the project.

We offer:

- the opportunity to work on a Ph.D. in philosophy of science in an internationally oriented and stimulating research context;
- attractive working conditions in a highly collaborative philosophy department;
- exchange and collaboration with top researchers about climate change in the Oeschger Centre of Climate Change Research;
- many opportunities to present and discuss one's PhD research in colloquia and workshops;
- the possibility of shaping the agenda of the research project by co-organising events;
- funding for travel to relevant conferences.

The salary is competitive (SNSF salary for a PhD student in Bern).

We value diversity and encourage applications from groups that are underrepresented in philosophy.

We kindly ask you to apply by submitting an electronic dossier including (i) a letter of motivation, (ii) a C.V., (iii) academic certificates, (iv) a short sketch of a project proposal for your dissertation (about 500 words; it should fit the aims of the project and contribute to subproject B1; no full disposition is required; we just want to learn about your interests and ideas) (v) a writing sample (e.g. chapter from master thesis; about 7.500 – 12.500 words); and (vi) a list of at least two academic references. Please send your dossier in one PDF file to Claus.Beisbart@unibe.ch and Vincent.Lam@unibe.ch by September 20th, 2025.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with any of the PIs if you have further questions!

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Dr. C. Beisbart, Institute of Philosophy, University of Bern, Claus.Beisbart@unibe.ch.
Prof. Dr. Vincent Lam, Institute of Philosophy, University of Bern, Vincent.Lam@unibe.ch.

Link:

https://www.philosophie.unibe.ch/forschung/forschungsprojekte/is_more_always_better_the_future_of_climate_change_science/index_ger.html

Project description

Climate science and climate modelling are central to understanding and addressing the climate challenge. On a global level, they have been highly successful: attribution claims about the anthropogenic cause of global warming or claims about global long-term trends for climate variables such as temperature are extremely robust. However, essential regional projections for certain climate variables remain highly uncertain because of fundamental inadequacies and biases in the models. At the same time, in the face of the increasingly devastating impacts of climate change, there is a pressing need for climate change information at the regional and local scales, particularly in view of adaptation. Accordingly, a strong push exists to develop ever more complex, higher resolution climate models, exploiting ever-increasing computational power and ever more sophisticated data-driven machine learning tools. However, this 'More is Better' (MIB) strategy raises fundamental epistemic questions: How far can high-resolution modelling and data-driven techniques be pushed? How can their uncertainties be handled appropriately? And which types of information and models are most relevant for addressing the climate challenge? By addressing these issues, this project aims to provide a systematic picture of the epistemic foundations of climate science and climate modelling, including their value-laden and normative dimensions.

To achieve this purpose, the project is structured into two main parts. Part A will articulate the MIB strategy's fundamental epistemic strengths and weaknesses in three main steps (A1-A3), taking state-of-the-art climate modelling initiatives implementing the MIB strategy as case studies. In the first step, the various purposes of the MIB strategy (such as understanding or decision-making relevance) will be disentangled, and their corresponding epistemic requirements and challenges will be identified (A1). The project will then address the extent to which these goals can be achieved, given the nature of the complex non-linear systems involved (A2) and the opacity of the deployed machine learning tools (A3).

Part B takes a more constructive stance on the MIB strategy. Its overarching question is how the MIB strategy could fruitfully be implemented in climate change science. Our fundamental premise is that every implementation of the MIB strategy is entangled with specific value-laden and normative dimensions. In a first step (B1), we will articulate these dimensions in detail and show how the planetary ambitions of the MIB strategy in climate modelling raise new challenges for the management of values in science. We'll also assess existing proposals for value management in view of climate science and the MIB strategy. In a second step (B2), we will examine to what extent the novel approach to climate change information in terms of physical climate storylines can improve the integration of value-laden and normative dimensions while counteracting some of the epistemic issues of the MIB strategy.