

Forum Basiliense Annual Theme 2027:

Errors! Mistakes, Deceptions, and Corrections

At some point, it inevitably becomes part of every work process and every scientific problem: the occurrence of the first major mistake. To err is human, as the Latin proverb goes. The duo of trial and error is one of the best-known and most successful methods for modern advances in technology and science. Yet by no means is every kind of mistake made with good intentions, inevitable, or even legitimate. Over time, every relevant social practice is infiltrated by malicious attempts at deception and fraudulent schemes, which in turn raise questions about the effectiveness of warning systems and control mechanisms. Yet despite the enormous significance of the ever-present forces of error, mistake, deception, and the like, it becomes clear: It is surprisingly rare to find systematic, interdisciplinary reflections on the concept of error in terms of its historical dimensions, manifestations, and social consequences.

This is where the Forum Basiliense's 2027 annual theme comes in. The Forum invites young scholars from all disciplines (natural sciences, humanities, medicine, psychology, theology, law, and economics) and from a wide variety of regions and contexts to contribute their questions and projects to a collective reflection on mistakes and errors, deceptions and corrections. Spanning two semesters during the 2027 academic year, two groups of junior fellows and senior guests will explore the diverse aspects of error research through their individual projects, as well as through public colloquia, a lecture series, and other activities.

A broad, interdisciplinary debate can compare different types and categories of errors, describe the respective "logic" behind past mistakes, misjudgements, and missteps, and draw insights from them that are useful for a focused, innovation-driven exploration of error dynamics.

It is also important here to adopt a historically profound and culturally nuanced perspective. Have certain societies, eras, and intellectual and religious orientations distinguished themselves through the development of specific techniques and rules for dealing with mistakes? How wide is the range of susceptibility to error at different times, and what are the consequences of such errors in each case? Are there historical examples of fatal errors and deliberate deceptions that offer particularly valuable insights for today? Which errors can be considered inevitable given a certain level of knowledge, and at what points have ruling dynasties, nations, or scientific institutions truly "taken a wrong turn"?

Today, the question of an organization's "culture of error" arises in all institutions, companies, political and administrative decision-making processes, and economic workflows. Is it easy to admit mistakes? Are there control mechanisms in place to intervene at an early stage? Are processes organized in such a way that it is possible to

view misjudgements, mistakes, or obstacles caused by persistent deception not merely as unpleasant setbacks, but also as an important source of learning?

The desire to avoid mistakes is always a reasonable and legitimate concern; and the impulse to avoid admitting one's own mistakes is also understandable. Nevertheless, this cannot be the sole guiding principle of scientific or social action - precisely because every substantial mistake also holds enormous potential for learning and improvement. Drawing on a slogan coined by economists, one could say: Never waste a good mistake.