MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR THE STUDY OF
CRIME, SECURITY AND LAW

The Department of Criminal Law at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law, in Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany), is seeking to recruit a highly qualified

Postdoc (f/m/div)

with a research profile in criminal law theory, legal philosophy, or metanormative theory for the research project "Theory of Normativity and the Criminal Law – 'Normentheorie' between UK and Germany", jointly funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), starting on 1 February 2027 (or as soon as possible thereafter).

Background

The Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law (MPI-CSL) is a leading European center for research in criminal law, public security matters, criminology, and fundamental legal research. Our Institute is part of the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science – one of the world's most distinguished research organizations. The high level of its fundamental research is reflected not least by the 31 Nobel Prizes awarded to Max Planck scientists since the Society was founded in 1948.

The postdoctoral position is embedded in the independent Research Group "Criminal Law Theory" headed by Prof. Dr. Dr. Philipp-Alexander Hirsch. It is part of the Department of Criminal Law (Director: Prof. Dr. Tatjana Hörnle). This research group takes an interdisciplinary approach and is dedicated to the study of the normative foundations and functions of punishment and criminal law. Its researchers analyze criminal law and criminal procedure with regard to their underlying normative structures and principles, focusing on current challenges that arise in a similar way in different legal systems. The aim is to develop proposals for solutions to problems of criminal law that go beyond national legislation.

The Institute, with its approximately 190 employees, is located in Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany), a dynamic university city with a 900-year history. The city in the trinational border region (Germany, Switzerland, and France) impresses newcomers with its high quality of life and international flair.

The project

The postdoctoral researcher will work in the research project "Theory of Normativity and the Criminal Law – 'Normentheorie' between UK and Germany", which is led jointly by Philipp-Alexander Hirsch (MPI-CSL, Freiburg) and JP Fassnidge (University of Aberdeen) and runs for 36 months from 1 February 2027. The project asks what is distinctive about normativity in criminal law and how this bears on our doctrinal

understanding of criminal wrongdoing, liability, and punishment. German scholarship has developed a rich doctrinal paradigm in Normentheorie, but has rarely engaged with metanormative questions; Anglophone legal philosophy has produced sophisticated accounts of legal normativity, and analytic philosophy has developed a rich discussion on metanormative questions, but both have rarely brought them to bear specifically on the criminal law. The project addresses these complementary gaps by developing a shared analytical framework through which German Normentheorie and Anglophone theories of (legal) normativity can engage with each other, and by establishing a structured dialogue between UK and German scholars.

The project pursues its research aims on three levels. First, it seeks to determine which themes and questions are relevant to the normativity of criminal law and how the German and Anglophone traditions have addressed them, thereby uncovering the central lines of reasoning as well as the conceptual blind spots of each tradition. Second, it seeks to test, refine, and connect the competing accounts of both traditions with regard to specific doctrinal and theoretical problems of criminal law, such as the nature of norms and reasons, conduct and decision rules, duties and rights, responsibility, and the nature of sanctions. Third, it aims to lay the groundwork for a transnational, unifying theory of normativity in the criminal law. The postdoctoral researcher is a core member of the project team, which also includes a research associate based at the University of Aberdeen.

Your profile

You should have a strong academic background in criminal law theory, legal/practical philosophy, or metanormative theory, and a keen interest in interdisciplinary work at the intersection of criminal law and philosophy. The position is open both to legal scholars and to philosophers, and a willingness to engage with both disciplines is key. Ideal candidates will possess the following qualifications:

- A university degree in law or philosophy with outstanding results.
- Proven research excellence, as evidenced by a PhD in law or philosophy, as well as a good publication record or strong potential for publication in peer-reviewed journals or other equivalent research contributions.
- Demonstrable research focus on the normative foundations of criminal law and punishment, on legal or practical philosophy, or on metanormative theory and metaethics; familiarity with German Normentheorie is an advantage.
- Willingness and ability to cross traditional disciplinary boundaries and enhance innovative research approaches.
- A good command of English (the working language of the project is English) and a good command of German (at least the ability to read academic texts in German), since the project builds a bilingual frame of reference across both traditions.
- Experience in systematic literature work and collaborative research; editorial or translation experience is an advantage.
- Excellent communication skills and the ability to work effectively in a highly dynamic, interdisciplinary and international research environment.

Our offer

The primary purpose of the position is to carry out research within the project described above and to contribute to the academic activities of the research group. The position is designed to support your further academic qualification: through single-authored publications and the co-editorship of publications arising from the project (such as editions and collected volumes), you will build an independent scholarly profile and an international research network in UK and German criminal law theory and legal philosophy. The position is also compatible with pursuing a post-doctoral lecturing qualification (habilitation) based at a German university. All researchers at the Institute are given ample time to pursue their research, publish their own work, and to advance their academic careers. There is no obligation to teach, but we will gladly support you if you are interested in gaining teaching experience.

Our Institute offers unrivaled research conditions: access to an outstanding, specialized library (with approximately 517,000 volumes, 900 print journals, 100,000 electronic books and journals) as well as access to a comprehensive range of German and foreign case law and literature databases, well-equipped workplaces, and comprehensive administrative and academic support. Additionally, there are many opportunities for our researchers to participate in workshops, attend seminars and conferences, and liaise with world-renowned experts at both the Institute and as part of the Max Planck Law network – a framework of Max Planck Institutes engaged in advanced legal research. Collaboration with other researchers and international partners at the Institute is a key element of our work. Within the project, you will also work closely with the project team at the University of Aberdeen and take part in work-in-progress sessions and workshops in Freiburg and Aberdeen.

The position is full-time (currently 39 hours/week). Remuneration and social benefits are based on the German Civil Service Collective Agreement (TVöD Bund), pay category 13 (entry level depending on prior experience; https://oeffentlicher-dienst.info/tvoed/bund/). All mandatory social insurance contributions for health care, long-term care, unemployment, and retirement are included in the salary.

The contract is a fixed-term appointment for the duration of the project funding (36 months) in accordance with the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz, WissZeitVG). The work location is Freiburg im Breisgau/Germany. Ensuring the compatibility of family and career and a positive work-life balance is important to the Max Planck Society. We offer flexible working arrangements, including remote work, and there are a number of daycare spots at a nearby childcare facility. Generous opportunities for personal and career development are provided, including free in-house German language courses.

The Max Planck Society is an equal opportunity employer and supports diversity in the workplace. Applications from disabled persons are welcome. We also aim to increase the percentage of female staff members in fields in which they are underrepresented and therefore expressly encourage women to apply. Applications are also particularly welcome from persons with backgrounds that have so far been underrepresented in science and research with regard to gender, age, professional and cultural background, family situation, sexual orientation, and nationality.

Your application and further information

Your application should be written in English and contain the following documents in this order:

- Cover letter including your research interests, your motivation for joining the project, relevant research and work experiences, and an indication of your proficiency in English and German;
- Detailed CV;
- List of publications, and copies of relevant publications (max. 2), or writing samples (max. 2) of relevant work ready for publication;
- Copy of the doctoral dissertation;
- Copies of your academic degree certificates and, where applicable, work or professional qualification certificates.

Please submit your application via our online application portal by the closing date of **7 December 2026**. Click the 'I would like to apply' button on the bottom left of the job ad.
If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact Prof. Dr. Dr. Philipp-Alexander Hirsch (MPI-CSL Freiburg and EBS University for Business and Law; p.hirsch@csl.mpg.de) or Dr. JP Fassnidge (University of Aberdeen; jp.fassnidge@abdn.ac.uk).

For information about our institute, please visit our website at:
https://csl.mpg.de



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