Keynote Speakers

Jennifer Saul (Sheffield)
Stop Thinking (So Much) About Sexual Harassment

This paper argues that philosophers (and others) have focused excessively on the definition of the legal term 'sexual harassment', both in the philosophical literature and in their real world behaviour. This narrow focus has led to both an impoverished discussion and an impoverished response to a serious and widespread problem. Drawing on my experience of running the blog What is it Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy, and on my discussions with those attempting to deal with the issues discussed on the blog, I argue that we have been asking the wrong questions and that this has greatly impeded our ability to act.

Candace Vogler (Chicago)
Anscombe's Complaint

There are many ways in which an action can be wrong. It can be a good sort of thing to do ordinarily that is bad under the circumstances or that is being done here and now for a bad end, for example. But an act also can be specifically wrong--bad in its kind, bad because of the kind of act it is. Some specifically wrong acts are objects of moral prohibition. In her 1958 essay, "Modern Moral Philosophy," Elizabeth Anscombe raises a series of objections against 20th century Anglophone moral philosophy which cluster around the claim that Anglophone practical philosophers lacked the philosophic equipment needed to comprehend moral prohibitions, and that this prevented them from making headway in work on practical reason and ethics. Drawing in part from work by Immanuel Kant (who is another target for Anscombe in her essay), and in part from social scientific work on risk assessment, I will try to motivate and defend one part of Anscombe's concern--the part that involves ordinary assessment of the consequences of actions and policies. In so doing, I hope to begin to show why failure to comprehend moral prohibition is a serious problem for practical philosophy.

Graduate Presenters (sorted alphabetically)

Rima Basu (USC)
The Inescapability of Diachronic Dilemmas

The toxin puzzle is a classic puzzle for theories of intention. However, what has remained overlooked in responses to the puzzle is that it is part of a family of problems in decision theory concerning reasoning over time, which I will refer to as diachronic dilemmas. I argue that by comparing the structural similarities between the payoff matrixes of these problems we can see that they share the same underlying form, and we can write a recipe for their generation that bears a striking resemblance to the recipe that generates Gettier cases. This similarity gives us good reason to think that if diachronic dilemmas can be recast in light of their resemblance to Gettier cases, this will remove much of their bite because the generation of diachronic dilemmas will be just as inescapable as the generation of Gettier cases.

Lucy Campbell (Cambridge)
The Conclusion of Practical Reasoning: Taking the Aristotelian Thesis Seriously

There is a debate over how we should understand the conclusion of the practical syllogism. Aristotle's view is that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action. This view has been though problematic in view of the fact that often we think about what to do and make a decision to act long before acting, and sometimes without acting at all. It seems that the Aristotelian will have to say that in such cases, practical reasoning is not concluded, and this is thought to constitute a reductio on the view: surely when I (say) decide on Monday that I will go to the opera on Friday, I have concluded some practical reasoning. I consider an attempt, due to Philip Clark, to reconcile the Aristotelian view with the observation that I can make a decision to act without acting, but suggest that Clark fails to get at what is important in the debate. My own defence of Aristotle involves demarcating two senses in which someone may be thought to draw a conclusion. In one of these senses, it is by acting that I draw a practical conclusion. I suggest that

this sense is fundamental to an understanding of practical reasoning and practical rationality, and that the Aristotelian view should be taken seriously.

Chihab El Khachab (Oxford)
Questioning Heidegger on Essence, Potential, and Modern Technology

In his famous essay on modern technology – "The Question Concerning Technology" – Heidegger proposes a (then) new way of thinking about technology, eschewing its technical dimension to examine its ontological "essence". This way of thinking is often criticized because it lends little attention to empirical nuances involved in the study of particular technologies. However, it seems unfair to discredit Heidegger's views without examining how his ontological perspective on technology can be extended into more practical, everyday technological concerns. This paper seeks to rebuild Heidegger's perspective on modern technology in a way which allows us to elaborate on its practical aspects. The argument is built in interrogative form, proceeding with three successive questions in mind: 1) what is "essence" in Heidegger's view?; 2) what is the "essence" of modern technology?; and 3) what are its practical consequences? Our central argument is that Heidegger's views open our modern technological world to becoming a series of pure, usable, exploitable potentials. This leads us, in turn, to suggest two directions in which we can think about modern technologies as potentials: 1) thinking about what general purpose these technologies are enabled to fulfill; and 2) thinking about how modern technologies interact with one another qua potentials.

Derek Green (Northwestern)
Simplicity and Abstract Objects: A Note on the Epistemology of Metaphysics

"Prefer simpler theories" is one of the most widely-endorsed principles of theory choice. A difference in simplicity between two or more theories provides a reason to prefer the simpler party because it uses fewer or less complicated posits. This paper challenges the application of the methodological principle to arguments in a topic of significant metaphysical interest. It examines the two primary reasons to prefer simpler theories in cases of equal adequacy, contending that these reasons don't lend any support to the virtuousness of simplicity for theories about non-empirical entities. The first applies only to objects in the spatiotemporal, causal world. The track record that renders the second reason probative is simply lacking for theories of abstracta. Thus, some other reason needs to be provided for considerations of simplicity to matter when deciding between these theories. It will conclude by replying to an attitude toward abstracta that metaphysicians would be likely to adopt in response to the criticism, showing that the attitude lacks conceptual space from which to present a coherent alternative.

Benedikt Kahmen (Aachen)
Correct Practical Reasoning

What distinguishes correct from incorrect instrumental reasoning? In his Rationality Through Reasoning, John Broome suggests that correct instrumental reasoning follows what he calls the Instrumental Rule. I shall argue that his version of the Instrumental Rule is incorrect, and suggest an alternative.
I will start by pointing out that Broome's formulation of the Instrumental Rule is a reaction to Frances Kamm's triple effect examples. I will then discuss whether this formulation of the Instrumental Rule is indeed needed to cope with triple effect examples, given certain assumptions about the relation between intention and belief. I will go through various of these assumptions, and argue for each that Broome's version of the Instrumental Rule cannot distinguish correct from incorrect instrumental reasoning. I will suggest that an improvement to the Instrumental Rule must be capable of coping with triple effect examples under any of these assumptions. I will conclude with a version of the Instrumental Rule that is capable of doing this.

Raphael Krut-Landau (Princeton)
Republican Freedom Revised

Once we have adequately unpacked the central claim of Philip Pettit's republican theory of freedom, we can see that it has two implausible consequences. The first is that you can increase your freedom of choice by convincing those in power that your agency is impaired. The second consequence is that your freedom of choice can be restricted very easily: your freedom will, all other things being equal, decrease if someone introduces any state of affairs that you oppose for non-egoistic reasons. This paper explains these problems, and presents a revised version of Pettit's theory that avoids them.

Matt Leonard (UC Davis)
Mereological Harmony and the Nature of Spacetime

This paper is concerned with two, perhaps initially unrelated, questions. First: what is the relationship between material objects and spacetime? While supersubstantivalists think that material objects are identical to their locations in spacetime, others maintain dualism about these two substances. Next: what is the relationship be-tween the mereological structure of material objects and the mereological structure of those objects' locations in spacetime? Mereological harmony is the view that the mereological structure of material objects perfectly mirrors and is perfectly mirrored by the mereological structure of those objects' locations in spacetime. In this paper, I look at one powerful objection against supersubstantivalism; namely, that it entails a whole host of controversial consequences. I then show that dualists who think that mereological harmony is true are stuck with the same set of problems. And thus, as I'll argue, dualists lose one powerful objection to supersubstantivalism.

James Otis (Western Michigan)
Rationality Revisited - A Dual-Process Defense of Reason as a Moral Epistemic Justifier

Sharon Street has argued that rationality cannot justify the sorts of moral beliefs endorsed by moral realists. By surveying contemporary psychological evidence, I aim to show that she is misguided on this count. While Joshua Greene and Jonathan Haidt have shown that certain moral intuitions are so entrenched in people that they often cling to them even when shown that these intuitions are irrational, I believe there is further evidence from dual-process theorists that this "moral dumbfounding" does not derail attempts to justify moral belief rationally. Leland Saunders has demonstrated a psychological mechanism that allows for decontextualized application of a rational system to our intuitions in a genuinely justificatory way. If something like dual-process theories turns out to be correct, then Street's challenge is defused. Furthermore, I show that the dual-process account lends itself particularly well to a realist constructivism.

Kristin Primus (Princeton)
Leibniz's Views of Divine and Secondary Causation

Scholarly consensus has it that Leibniz was a concurrentist, someone who maintains that God and creatures are both immediate co-causes of each and every effect in nature. Since concurrentism seemed to be the way to grant creatures genuine causal powers while not making God's involvement in creation too remote to be theologically objectionable, it was the dominant way of thinking about divine and creaturely causation in the early modern period. Leibniz certainly wanted to balance the metaphysics of causation with the requirements of theological respectability, and he certainly used words like concours and concursus, so it's natural to suppose he thought along concurrentist lines. However, I think we miss the ingenuity of Leibniz's thinking if we take his words at face value. In other work, I argue that texts from the 1680s onward that are often taken to betray Leibniz's concurrentist inclinations in fact reveal an allegiance to a position that is not at all easily categorized as concurrentism, but is closer to what has come to be called mere conservationism: God's causal contribution to the ordinary course of

nature is limited to the creation and conservation of creatures. In this shorter paper, I will focus on explaining how Leibniz's metaphysics of substance makes mere conservationism—an extremely unpopular position in the early modern period—less problematic.

Maria Svedberg (Stockholm)
David Lewis's Local Miracle Compatibilism

David Lewis has presented a reply to Peter van Inwagen's Consequence Argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism. Helen Beebee argues that Lewis's position, his so-called local miracle compatibilism, is untenable since Lewis cannot rule out the possibility of deterministic agents sometimes having the ability to perform acts that would have broken something that is a law of nature in the world they inhabit. I show that the truth of this claim depends inter alia on the nature of actions, or more specifically on the nature of decisions. Then I refute a defense of local miracle compatibilism proposed by Peter A. Graham. Finally I offer my own line of defense of Lewis, arguing that if we take Lewis's Humean view on laws of nature into consideration, it becomes clear that Lewis should have no problem, at least not in principle, to accept that deterministic agents sometimes have the ability to perform acts that would have been law-breaking relative to the world they inhabit. I also show that embracing this claim would in a certain respect be an improvement of Lewis's compatibilist position.

Emanuel Viebahn (Oxford)
What's in a that-clause?

It is commonly held that attitude ascriptions of the form 'S Vs that p' (e.g. 'Ken knew that Nicole was lying') consist of three parts: 'S' designates a subject, 'Vs' designates a propositional attitude, and 'that p' designates a proposition. However, there is linguistic evidence that allows apparently compelling cases to be made both for and against the claim that that-clauses in such ascriptions always designate propositions. On the one hand, a propositional analysis does not fit well with certain substitution phenomena in attitude ascriptions, where a that-clause is substituted with a description designating the same proposition (i.e. 'that p' is substituted with 'the proposition that p') or with a description designating a non-proposition (e.g. 'the state of affairs that p'). On the other hand, cases involving quantification and anaphora seem to support the propositional analysis of that-clauses. Several authors have addressed this evidence, usually with the aim of defending a propositional analysis. Drawing on further linguistic evidence, I will argue that that-clauses do not always designate propositions.

Alan Wilson (Edinburgh)
The Right to a Virtuous Electorate? Vice as Cause to Disenfranchise

It has recently been argued that restricting suffrage on the grounds of incompetence would be justified. This paper discusses a different, though related, question – would the possession of moral vice be legitimate grounds on which to deny an individual the right to vote? In an attempt to provide a positive answer to that question, I consider two different approaches. The first is Jason Brennan's argument that allowing certain individuals the right to vote is unfair on the grounds that it violates his 'Competence Principle'. Secondly, I consider the proposed social benefits thought to legitimise the practice of disenfranchising prisoners. In both cases I argue that we have better reason to deny the right to vote to the morally vicious than to the proposed main targets of the arguments – the epistemically incompetent and prisoners respectively. While any practical difficulties in identifying the morally vicious will not be discussed, consideration of the arguments in this paper does shed light on two further issues. I suggest that public dissatisfaction with the moral character of elected officials might be better addressed not by demanding better standards from our politicians but by demanding this of our electorate. And I also suggest that we have been given reason to criticize the current UK Government's stance regarding disenfranchised prisoners.