Abstracts of the 18th Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference Papers

The following are abstracts from the papers that will be presented at the 18th Annual Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference, 15-16 November 2014.

The Ethics of Self-Fulfilling Belief
Gregory Antill (UCLA)

The Ethics of Belief concerns itself with the question of what we should believe. In this paper, I will concern myself with the ethics of self-fulfilling belief – the question of what we should believe about the class of propositions such that belief in the proposition makes that proposition true. Traditionally, answers diverge: evidentialists think one ought to suspend belief, while pragmatists think that one may believe whatever is best in line with ones needs.

In this paper, I will explore in more detail the reasoning involved in deliberating over self-fulfilling beliefs. I will argue that such exploration shows that the traditional account of the disagreement between pragmatists and evidentialists cannot be correct. By attending closely to self-fulfilling beliefs, we can better understand the way pragmatist and evidentialist norms actually diverge, and also learn important lessons about how to think of the norms and aims that govern theoretical deliberation more generally.

Noncognitivism and Epistemic Evaluations
Bob Beddor (Rutgers)

According to noncognitivists, moral beliefs are closely akin to desires. Moral beliefs, like desires, have a world-to-mind direction of fit, whereas non-moral beliefs have a mind-to- world direction of fit. In this paper, I offer a novel challenge for noncognitivism, thus construed. The challenge starts from the observation that both moral and non-moral beliefs are epistemically evaluable: we evaluate them based on whether they are epistemically rational and whether they constitute knowledge. Desires are not epistemically evaluable: my desire for a drink cannot be epistemically rational or irrational; similarly, it cannot constitute knowledge. A natural explanation for this difference is that only psychological states with a mind-to-world direction of fit are epistemically evaluable. But noncognitivists cannot accept this explanation, since they hold that moral beliefs have a world-to-mind direction of fit. Noncognitivists thus need to give some other explanation of why beliefs are epistemically evaluable, whereas desires are not.

Kant's Objection to the PII in the *Nova Dilucidatio*
Malte Bischof (St. Andrews)

In this essay, I examine Kant's objection in the *Principiorum Primorum Cognitionis Metaphysicae Nova Dilucidatio* to Leibniz's argument for the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (PII) as articulated in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence* and demonstrate its value for the contemporary debate about the PII. My examination of Kant's objection accomplishes three things. First, it fills a gap in the secondary literature since Kant's objection has not yet been examined. Second, it shows that Leibniz's theological argument for the PII is unsuccessful even if the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the Principle of the Best are granted. Third, it rejects an argument in favour of the PII recently advanced by Michael Della Rocca's argument for the PII*.*

Governmental Intentions Don't Matter for Legitimacy
Matthias Brinkmann (Oxford)

I start with a claim about individual morality: whether your actions are permissible is largely independent from the motives and intentions from which you act. It matters what you do, not why you do it. This suggests an analogous claim for political morality: whether the decisions of a government are legitimate is largely independent from the intentions and reasons for which government acts. If this is true, the presence or absence of public reason in arguing for a policy is irrelevant to its legitimacy, even if public reason is otherwise desirable. I explore some ways to escape the analogy, but find them unconvincing.

Aristotle on Why Only Humans Can Think.
Elena Cagnoli Fiecconi (Oxford)

In this paper, I argue that Aristotle, when he suggests that humans are the only animals who can think, does manage to identify some cognitive abilities that belong to humans only. These are the capacity to grasp causal relationships and the capacity to grasp generalizations. I suggest, furthermore, that thinking emerges from Aristotle's analysis as a rather unified activity, which can be employed in high-level tasks such as thinking about the first principles of science, as well as low-level tasks such as arguing and persuading an interlocutor.

Virtuous Distinctions
Will Fleisher (Rutgers)

Virtue epistemology is a family of epistemological theories which take some notion of virtue or competence as their central explanatory concept. This family has been divided into two camps: *reliabilists* and *responsibilists*. This division has been attributed in part to a focus on different types of virtues, *viz.,* faculty virtues and character virtues. I will argue that this distinction is unhelpful in this debate, and that we should carve up the theoretical terrain differently. I will present and defend three new distinctions. These distinctions will show us two important things: first, that responsibilists and reliabilists are actually engaged in different, complementary projects; and second, that the responsibilist critique of reliabilism misses the mark. Using these distinctions, I will present a

proposed way of reducing the character virtues the responsibilists are concerned with into terms of competences. While this will give us a unified account of epistemic virtues, it is not a reduction of the responsibilist project to the reliabilist one; rather, it as a way of securing the separate importance of each project by clarifying how they relate to one another.

Williamson's earrings
Jeremy Goodman (NYU)

I show that an old puzzle of Timothy Williamson's supports a novel argument against physicalism.

The Problem of Nomological Impossibility for Epistemic Structural Realism
Patrick Manzanares (Western Michigan)

The philosophical view known as Epistemic Structural Realism appeals to the concept of 'structure' in order to defend a version of Scientific Realism that nevertheless respects historical considerations of ontological discontinuity between successive scientific theories. It seems that the structures of some scientific theories are only continuous with the structures of successor theories when the former are characterized as nomologically impossible idealizations of the latter, since this continuity involves allowing some quantity in the formal structure of the successor theory to tend towards some physically unrealizable limit. But if this is the case, then the earlier theory cannot be physically realized. It is thus unclear in what sense the structure of the earlier theory can be said to accurately represent the physical structure of the world, since the former structure is *nomologically impossible*. If the nomological impossibility of the earlier theory's structure undermines the Scientific Realist's justification for believing in it, moreover, then the preservation of structure through theory change will fail to secure justification for the belief in the accuracy of the successor theory's formal structure. The Scientific Realist will thus be left with no reason to believe in the structural accuracy of current scientific theories.

Logic, Mass, and Surrogative Representation
Michaela M. McSweeney (Princeton)

I argue for an analogy between mass predicates and logical constants, and develop an account of surrogative representation that accounts for the similarities between the two. One theory surrogatively represents another (its "target" theory) when it captures a certain amount of important structure in the target, but fails to exactly match the structure of the bit of reality it is trying to capture. I argue that any theory involving either numerical mass predicates or logical constants must be a surrogate theory. It follows that no theory involving logical constants can be "joint-carving", and hence that, if we need logical constants to state our theories, it is impossible to state a joint-carving theory. I briefly discuss representation and uniqueness theorems for mass as what justifies our use of surrogate theories. In the final section of the paper, I explore some ways we might establish that a given theory stated in a language that uses logical constants is a good surrogate for our target theory. While we won't be able to prove representation and uniqueness theorems in the

logic case, there are other interesting routes we might go down.

Exclusion Arguments: A Dilemma for Interventionism
James R. Otis (Rochester)

In this essay I present Kim's (1998) exclusion argument against nonreductive physicalism. I show how List & Menzies (2009, 2010) escape the argument by revising the exclusion principle, denying its status as an analytic truth, and defending an interventionist theory of causation. This account of causation and the revised exclusion principle give the exact parameters by which mental causation might take place without requiring the rejection of nonreductive physicalism. I propose a dilemma for List & Menzies wherein interventionists are forced to choose between accepting disjunctive properties as difference-making causes or accepting that not all instances of causation have difference-making causes. I argue that both of these options are unsatisfying for an interventionist. The former is counterintuitive while the latter undermines the interventionist project. I conclude by reviewing potential replies to the dilemma and suggesting that they are unconvincing.

Reduction, Representation and 'Raising My Arm': A New Approach to Reduction in the Philosophy of Action
Thomas Quinn (Birkbeck)

The standard account of the nature of action reduces actions to purely physical bodily events. However, some antireductionists deny that actions can be reduced, based on the fact that our concept of action cannot be analysed in purely physical terms. The antireductionist's arguments are often dismissed based on a principle widely accepted in recent metaphysics: conceptual analysis has no bearing on metaphysical reduction. In this paper I examine the validity of this principle in a wider context, and show how this can lead to progress in the debate about action.

Drawing on John Heil's view of the relation between our thought and reality, I argue that both sides in the debate are partly right – and that we can find a middle way between reductionism and antireductionism that should be acceptable to both parties. The basis for this new approach is the recognition that whilst conceptual analysis cannot reveal the 'deep story' about the nature of phenomena, it does show us the limits of our ability to answer questions about these phenomena. So, whilst the existence of actions requires nothing more than physical stuff, all of the questions we can hope to answer about action will be in agential terms.

Conditionals, Conditional Probability and Simpson's Paradox
Ian Wells (MIT)

Stalnaker's Thesis equates the probability of an indicative conditional with the conditional probability of its consequent, conditional on its antecedent. This paper uses Simpson's paradox to motivate a new counterexample to that equation. The counterexample draws support from a principle linking probabilities of conditionals to rational preferences.