

**2007 Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association
Hosted at UWE by the University of Bristol**

**PROGRAMME FOR THE OPEN SESSIONS
SATURDAY 7th July (4.30 – 6.30)**

SESSION I: Radical Pragmatics?

Chair: Andrew Woodfield (University of Bristol)

Adam Sennet (UC Davis)

Recanati on the Binding Argument

Dependent reading of sentences such as: *Everywhere I go, it rains*, have generated a great deal of interest as they stand to possibly teach us, on one interpretation of the data, interesting lessons about the syntax and semantics of sentences such as: *it rains*. Some have offered alternative treatments of the first that block any inferences about the proper treatment of the second. I will look at one of the leading contenders of the latter treatment (Recanati, 2002) and show that it is inadequate to deal with the full range of dependency data.

Emma Borg (University of Reading)

Minimal Semantics and the Nature of Psychological Evidence

Minimal semantics is sometimes characterised as a 'neo-Gricean' approach to meaning. This label seems reasonable since the key claim of minimal semantics is that there are minimal contents possessed by sentences (akin to Grice's technical notion of 'what is said by a sentence') yet these minimal contents need not be (and usually are not) what is communicated by a speaker who utters those sentences. So, given the affinity between the two approaches, we might expect that a well-known challenge for the Gricean - namely that their account fails to fit with the psychological evidence concerning linguistic understanding - could also be levelled at the minimalist. However I argue in this paper that minimal semantics is actually better placed than Gricean semantics to meet the challenge from psychological evidence. I conclude by suggesting that the way in which minimalism avoids this challenge also helps the account to avoid Clapp's objection that there are no grounds for selecting a correct minimal semantic theory.

Lenny Clapp (Illinois Wesleyan University)

A Plea for Contextualism

The disagreement between *Semantic Minimalism*, and *Contextualism* concerns the adequacy of *truth-conditional compositionality*: the meaning of a sentence S relative to a context C is a proposition (or a set of truth-conditions) that is determined by the semantic values of the words in S relative to C and the logical form of S. Contextualists have rejected this principle on the grounds that the truth conditions speakers interpret utterances as expressing are not determined by only such factors, and that pragmatic reasoning concerning contextually provided information plays a significant role in determining what is intuitively said by an utterance. In defense of truth-conditional compositionality semantic minimalists accuse contextualists of conflating *semantic content* and *speech act content*. I argue that this defense of truth-conditional compositionality fails to meet *the naturalistic challenge*, and that a certain sort of contextualism is much better suited to meet this challenge.

SESSION II: Causation, Necessity & Natural Kinds

Chair: tba

Dr Markus Schrenk (*University of Nottingham*) *Junior Research Fellow and Lecturer in Philosophy*

Nomological Necessity and its Relation to Causation

I aim to show that David Armstrong's nomological necessity cannot be as closely related to causation as he postulates it to be. Nomological necessity, N, is at the heart of Armstrong's analysis of laws of nature. N is a second order relational universal which, if it holds between two universals F and G, ensures that every uninterfered with F-token causes a G-token. In fact, causation is supposed to be nomological necessity's token instantiation. Yet, what is nomological necessity's instantiation—if it is instantiated at all—in cases where something, an H, say, interferes and so prevents G from coming about? Its instantiation cannot be causation for causation demands success. Yet, stipulating that in this case it does not instantiate at all confronts us with the challenge to motivate, within Armstrong's framework, how H prevents not only G but also N from coming about. Presumably, the prevention itself is law governed and not a mere accident. However, this leads to adventurous laws along the lines of $N(H, \neg N(F, G))$.

Here's a speculative but intuitive suggestion. Let N's instantiation (at least for the fundamental laws) be a force either pushing towards or pulling away from G. Then N can be instantiated in any case, counteracted against by other N-forces or not. Causation would be, consequently, the uninterfered working of a force and not (immediately) N's instantiation. You might reject this speculative move. In fact, you might be sceptical about Armstrong's whole enterprise. If so, treat the entire argument as a reductio for the nomological necessity account of laws.

Dr Rani Lill Anjum (*University of Nottingham/University of Tromsø*)

All Men are Animals : But what does it really mean?

The Fregean interpretation of general categorical statements like 'All men are animals' as universally quantified conditionals 'For all x, if x is F, then x is G' suggests that the logical structure of laws is conditional rather than categorical. Disregarding the obvious problem that the conditional is defined as a material conditional $(\forall x)(Fx \supset Gx)$, thereby being true whenever no xs are F, there are several reasons to be sceptical of Frege's equivalence between categorical and conditional expressions. Now many philosophers will claim that the material conditional interpretation of dispositions, laws or causation is generally accepted as wrong and outdated. However, the debate on these matters seems highly influenced by various extensional logical analyses of conditionals, including the material conditional. This should be clear from the fact that the debate seems to rely heavily on a logical vocabulary ('counterfactuals', 'possible worlds', 'potentiality', 'necessity') without being clear on whether or to what extent one accepts their technical definitions within various logical systems. To guarantee a non-Humean and non-extensional approach to causal relations, it is therefore important to be aware of the logical and metaphysical implications of the technical vocabulary. In this paper I want to show why extensional logic cannot deal with causal relations. Via a logical analysis of law-like statements 'All Fs are Gs' I hope to throw some new light on interrelated notions like causation, laws, induction, hypotheticality and modality. If successful, my analysis should be of relevance for a deeper understanding of any type of causal relations, whether we understand them to be laws, dispositions, singulars or categoricals.

Dr Francis Longworth (*University of Birmingham/Ohio University*)

Two Natural Kinds of Causal Relation

I suggest that there are two objective types of relation in the world that merit the term 'causal': those that make up the token counterfactual structure of the world, and those that make up its token productive structure. These relations constitute two natural kinds of causation. This distinction lines up approximately with Hall's 'two concepts' of causation.

Dr Emma Tobin (*University of Bristol*)

Natural Kinds, Causal *Relata* and Causal Relations

Realist accounts of natural kinds rely on an account of causation where the relata of causal relations are real and discrete. These views about natural kinds entail very different accounts of causation. In particular, the necessity of the causal relation given the instantiation of the properties of natural kinds is more robust in the fundamental sciences (e.g. physics and chemistry) than it is in the life sciences (e.g. biology and the medical sciences). In this paper, I wish to argue that there is a difference in kind between the putative natural kinds of the fundamental sciences and those of the life sciences, such that a uniform account of causation cannot capture both. The upshot is that we must either reject the claim that the kinds of the life sciences are genuine natural kinds, or accept that there are different kinds of causal relations involving the relata of natural kinds. I accept the latter. I reject the objection that the true causal relations that relate macro-level kinds are to be found by “going down a level” to causal relation at the fundamental kind, because the relevant causal mechanisms are not at the fundamental level. Since, autonomous mechanistic accounts of causal relations at the macro-level can be provided (e.g. in Biology and medicine), I argue that realism about the natural kinds of the life sciences is justified. I address the problem of negative causation as a counterexample to the positive account of causation that is entailed by realism about natural kinds in the life sciences. I argue that an acceptance of realist accounts of two different kinds of natural kind makes a uniform analysis of causation look unpromising.

SESSION III: Metaphysics

Chair: Robbie Williams (*University of Leeds*)

Max Kolbel (*University of Birmingham*)

A Problem for Contextualism about Vagueness

Contextualists about Vagueness (Kamp, Soames, Raffman, Graff) claim that the extension of vague predicates varies with context. This allows them to deny the major premiss of sorites arguments yet explain why it is impossible for us to find counterexamples. For example, they say that it is not true that for any number n of Euros, if having n Euros means you are poor, then having $n + 1$ Euros won't lift you out of poverty. They explain the attractiveness of this false premiss by saying that the context-sensitivity of "poor" makes it impossible to find a counterexample. This paper offers an objection to this explanation.

Dan Lopes de Sa (*NYU/Arche*)

Is the Problem of the Many a Problem in Metaphysics?

Is the problem of the many a problem in metaphysics? There are, to be sure, some solutions to the problem that would qualify as metaphysical. One can reject that there exist all the many things, or one can hold that there is a further entity with a better claim, after all—which is merely (indeterminately) constituted by the many, or which is in itself vague. There are well-known problems with each of these views. Be this as it may, what I want to argue for is that, once one grants the plausible—although controversial—view of vagueness as semantic indecision, the different solutions no longer differ metaphysically. The defenders of the different solutions agree in which objects do or do not exist, and in which properties they do and do not instantiate—when they are specified in a suitably neutral way. Their characteristic contentions involve how these are to be described in terms of our predicates 'is a mountain,' 'is a cat,' 'is a cloud,' or 'is a person.' The problem of the many is thus one about semantics. What need not go with a "deflationary" flavor: there seems to be a genuine distinction between the different solutions. But being this of a semantic nature, it constrains what the relevant considerations are. A subsidiary aim of this paper is actually to illustrate that the claim that a certain dispute is semantic rather than metaphysical is to be distinguished from the claim that the dispute is not genuine.

Casey Karbowski (*University of Chicago*)

Sider (and Lewis) on Composition

Most of us believe that, sometimes, a group of things comes together to compose a larger whole. For example, bark, branches, a trunk and some leaves jointly compose a tree. But do more exotic composites exist? Is there an aggregate of some space dust, the shoes on my feet, and the pope? Is this entity a genuine piece of the world's ontological makeup? Ted Sider and David Lewis have argued that in fact there is an entity like that, and many philosophers are happily joining them. They argue for a principle of unrestricted composition from considerations involving vagueness. However, their argument is ultimately unconvincing, as its underlying justification has implausible implications when applied to cases closely analogous to composition.

Dorothea Debus (*St John's College, Oxford*)

Recollective Memory and Our Concept of the Past

The present paper aims to show that a subject can only fully grasp the concept of the past if she has some experiential, or recollective, memories of particular past events. More specifically, I argue that (P1) in order for a subject to have a full grasp of the concept of the past, the subject needs to understand that particular events took place in the past. (P2) But then, in order for a subject to understand, in such a way that it might contribute to her understanding of the concept of the past, that particular events took place in the past, it is necessary that the subject have some recollective memories of particular past events. (C) Hence, a subject can only fully grasp the concept of the past if she has some recollective memories of particular past events. I defend the premises of the present argument against various objections, indicate why we should accept both premises, and accordingly end by endorsing the argument's conclusion.

SESSION IV: Aesthetics

Chair: ??

Aaron Meskin (*University of Leeds*) - academic

Interpreting the Popular Arts

David Carrier has argued that the interpretation of any 'genuine mass-culture art' differs substantively from the interpretation of high art such as old-master paintings. So while he is sympathetic with a form of intentionalism about the latter, he argues that intentionalist criticism is inappropriate in the case of popular arts such as comics. I argue that the discontinuity that Carrier posits between the interpretation of high and popular art is largely illusory.

Eileen John (*University of Warwick*)

Narrative Thinking inside Poetry

What happens to narrative when it is set within the frame of a poem? How do narratives in poetry function for us imaginatively, emotionally, and in terms of cognitive projects broadly construed? Along with functioning in complex but relatively well-acknowledged ways (e.g., engaging us with temporal and causal sequence, trajectories of emotion, and imaginative access to experiential perspectives), narratives are used within poetry to set up other projects: development of symbols, exploration of our attachments to causal understanding and to the fictional, and development of non-story-focused emotion, including what I will call 'philosophical emotions'.

Stacie Friend (*Birkbeck College, London*)

Fiction, Non-fiction, Both and Neither

Debates over the distinction between fiction and non-fiction typically involve two camps. On the one side are those who insist that because it matters for criticism, there must be a substantive distinction. On the other side are those who insist that because no such distinction is tenable, it must not matter for criticism. I argue that both sides are wrong. Although there is no substantive distinction between fiction and non-fiction that holds for all works at all times, classifying works as fiction or non-fiction can matter. The way it matters turns on how we understand genre classifications. Once we accept that fiction and non-fiction are genres that play a variety of roles in criticism and appreciation, we should accept that works may fall into either category, or both, or neither.

Bence Nanay (*Syracuse University*)

Are Photographs Transparent?

It has been claimed that photographs are transparent: we see through them; we literally see the photographed object through the photograph. Whether this claim is true depends on the way we conceive of seeing. There has been a controversy about whether localizing the perceived object in one's egocentric space is a necessary feature of seeing, as if it is, then photographs are unlikely to be transparent. I would like to argue for another necessary condition for seeing: that the way the perceived object looks would change if one's position relative to the object changed. I claim that since this feature is not satisfied in the case of seeing objects in photographs, photographs are not transparent.

SESSION V: Language and Reason

Alex Barber (*The Open University*)

The Role of Intention in Visual and Linguistic Representation

Forthcoming.

Jordi Valor Abad (*St. Andrews/Arche*)

Relativism and Faultless Disagreement

Relativism is best motivated by the idea that in certain areas of discourse it is possible for two people to disagree “faultlessly”. In this paper I examine the prospects of MacFarlane’s relativism (and similar theories) to account for the notion of faultless disagreement. I offer arguments for concluding that either they fail to capture the idea of disagreement or they fail to show that disagreement in these areas is faultless.

Darrell P. Rowbottom (*Edinburgh/Bristol*) and **Peter Baumann** (*Aberdeen*)

To Thine Own Self Be Untrue: Against the Cable Guy Paradox

In a recent paper, Hájek presents the following alleged paradox. You are certain that a cable guy will visit you tomorrow between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. but you have no further information about when. And you agree to a bet on whether he will come in the morning interval (8, 12] or in the afternoon interval (12, 4). At first you have no reason to prefer one possibility rather than the other. But you then realise that if you bet on the morning interval, there will certainly be a future time (in the morning and before the cable guy's arrival) at which you will (rationally) assign higher probability to an afternoon arrival than a morning one. You are also sure that nothing similar will happen if you bet on an afternoon arrival, so it appears that you ought to do so.

Dan Zeman (*Central European University*)

Context sensitivity, relativism and context-shifting arguments

The paper starts with distinguishing between three forms of context sensitivity: pre-semantic, semantic and post-semantic. Next, by means of an example from John Perry’s paper “Though without representation” a specific form of semantic context sensitivity is presented: context as affecting the circumstances of evaluation. The example makes it possible to distinguish between two roles of context: content-determinative and circumstance-determinative. Relativism – the view that the same utterance could be true with respect to a circumstance of evaluation and false with respect to another – is presented. Then it is claimed that relativism is a form of semantic context sensitivity in which context has a circumstance-determinative role. Finally, a peculiar form of argument adduced in favor of contextualism about certain domains is analyzed and rejected. This gives way to the conclusion that context-shifting arguments, when considered in connection with other semantic claims, support instead relativism.

Session VI: Epistemology

Chair: Finn Spicer (*University of Bristol*)

Aviezer Tucker (*Queens University Belfast*)

Inference from Multiple Testimonies Naturalised

This paper concerns the inference of knowledge from multiple testimonies. The basic puzzle of inference from multiple testimonies is how can multiple testimonies that may have *low individual reliabilities* generate *knowledge* that sometimes has different propositional content? As Kusch noted, beyond one off exchanges where beliefs are *transferred*, testimonies usually *generate* knowledge. An individual may reach a higher degree of belief in a proposition than the reliability she assigns to any of the testimonies from which the belief is inferred. I present a new and innovative application of Bayesian probability theory that models reliable inference from multiple testimonies to generate new knowledge. Unlike previous Bayesian treatments of this problem, I "naturalize" my philosophic modelling. Instead of explicating an a-priori model, I attempt to model the actual practices of professional experts who make it their business to generate knowledge from multiple testimonies: detectives, intelligence analysts, and historians. I do not assume here screening conditions, or any other kind of independence of testimonies. In most cases, when professionals infer from multiple testimonies, they do not assume that the testimonies are independent of each other. Indeed, they cannot make such an assumption because in most initial stages of inquiry such information is unavailable. Such screening conditions or independence are unnecessary because even when testimonies are not independent from each other, it is often quite possible to infer knowledge from them reliably.

Dan O'Brien (*University of Birmingham*)

Friendship and the Acquisition of Testimonial Knowledge from Unreliable Speakers

I argue that a speaker (*S*) can transmit testimonial knowledge even though he may be an unreliable testifier. Such transmission can occur if the unreliable speaker is a friend of the hearer (*H*). We are more receptive to some of the beliefs of our friends than to those of strangers, and this, I claim, is both morally and epistemically justified. A species of trust — intimate trust — is constitutive of friendship, and this demands that we believe our friends on certain matters even if there is limited or no evidence for the truth of what they say. In conversation with a friend — qua friend — we cannot be impartial, and since friendship is itself constitutive of what it is to be a person, then the epistemology of friendship must not be assessed according to the impartial epistemic standards relevant to strangers. We *should* be more open to what our friends tell us, and this increased receptivity allows us directly to inherit our friends' beliefs and also the warrant they have for those beliefs. Intimate trust therefore allows the flow of knowledge between *S* and *H* even where *S* is unreliable.

Martin Fricke (*National Autonomous University of Mexico*)

Moran on First Person Authority

In *Authority and Estrangement* (Moran 2001), Richard Moran suggests that first person authority rests on the fact that we can answer the question 'Do I believe that p?' by considering whether it is true that p; and we can do this because we can assume that our deliberation about the world determines what our beliefs are. But even if we make this 'Transcendental assumption' (Moran 2003: 406), it remains unclear how we can get from an answer to 'p?' to an answer to 'Do I believe that p?' O'Brien explains that we employ a 'practical procedure' (O'Brien 2003: 379) for making this transition. Whilst her reconstruction seems plausible, I argue that at best it only explains why our self-ascriptions of belief can count as knowledge. To explain why they are especially authoritative it remains to be shown why the practical procedure we employ for making them is better at producing true knowledge than the procedures we employ for ascribing beliefs to other people. I claim that this can be done by considering a parallel with drawing inferences. To go from 'p' to 'I believe that p' requires to hold on to a content of belief and to 'prefix' it with 'I believe that'. But the capacity for retaining and redeploying thought contents is constitutive of a large class of inferences. O'Brien's 'practical procedure' for self-ascribing beliefs should be as good at producing true knowledge as we are in drawing inferences without corrupting the contents of our premises and conclusions in them

Jordi Fernandez (*University of Adelaide*)

Thought Insertion and Self-Knowledge

Thought insertion is a disorder wherein the subject is under the impression that certain thoughts that she has are not her own thoughts. I want to offer an account of thought-insertion that rests on a certain model of self-knowledge. I will basically propose that the way in which subjects with thought-insertion experience their own thoughts lacks a certain kind of involvement. The relevant kind of involvement will have to do with the fact that, when one is normally aware of one's beliefs and desires from the first-person point of view, one is thereby invested in, or committed to, certain truths about the outside world. Why do subjects with thought insertion experience the lack of this kind of involvement in their thoughts? A certain hypothesis about self-knowledge can help us answer this question. We can call it the 'bypass hypothesis.' According to it, we form beliefs about our own first-order beliefs on the basis of our evidence for them. And we form beliefs about our own first-order desires on the basis of our grounds (in most cases, reasons) for having them. First, I will argue that the bypass hypothesis explains the fact that our experience of our own thoughts has the just-mentioned kind of involvement. Then, I will point at one feature of thought-insertion that strongly suggests that subjects with this disorder may not be able to form beliefs about their own thoughts through bypass.

Session VII: History

Chair: Andrew Pyle (University of Bristol)

Julia von Bodelschwingh (University of Göttingen)

Christians as model citizens in Hobbes' *Leviathan*

In *Leviathan* Thomas Hobbes uses two types of arguments for his claim that the sovereign should have absolute power in religious and civil matters: arguments from reason and theological arguments. This paper will examine the latter. Hobbes thought he could show that Christians had more reasons than non-Christians to be model citizens, whether or not they live in a Christian commonwealth. Nevertheless, I will show that his arguments, ingenious as they are, ultimately fail, because the religious scepticism that the arguments presuppose seems to make it impossible to be a Christian in a non-Christian commonwealth. Even in Christian commonwealths the arguments do not provide independent reasons for obeying the sovereign, because they presuppose what they try to show.

Catherine Osbourne (University of East Anglia)

Ralph Cudworth and the Presocratics

Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) has a fairly simple thesis to present: atomism (which we associate with Democritus) is basically true but only half the story. It is true about the matter side of the matter/spirit divide, but by its own admission secondary qualities are the effects of bodies in perceiving subjects. Matter would be inert without minds. According to Cudworth, the true position, substance dualism, was actually the system adumbrated by earlier Presocratics, before the ancient atomists themselves supposed they could ditch the spirit half of the story. In this paper I investigate Cudworth's attempt to trace dualism back to the Presocratics and his analysis of what temptations led atomists and Platonists to opt severally for the mistaken positions on either side, namely atheistic materialism, and idealism. In the shortened version I follow up one case study that speaks to modern concerns, namely his claim that the Presocratics already had a notion of the incorporeal. Cudworth is engaged in a philosophical debate, not a merely exegetical one: his arguments are designed to be about what is true not just about what the ancients thought. He musters an impressive array of considerations, and a barrage of learning, in support of his case, and it makes sense to take him as an ally, or an enemy in our own philosophical enquiries, treating the arguments he presents in favour of his view as worthy of serious attention (and refutation if necessary).

Anna Marmodoro (University of Edinburgh)

Is Being One Only One? The Uniqueness of the Platonic Forms

Each Form is unique in number; no two numerically distinct Forms can share the same nature. Plato argues for this claim in *Republic X*. I identify the metaphysical principles Plato presupposes in the premises of the argument, by examining the reasoning behind them, and offer a reconstruction of the argument showing the principles in use. I argue that the metaphysical significance of the argument's conclusion is to establish that if a Form F were not unique, if there were many Forms F, their nature would alter along with their number: a Form cannot recur without change in its constitution. This is why there can be only one Form for each character in the world.

Constantine Sandis (Oxford Brookes University)

In Defence of Three Socratic Doctrines

In this paper I defend three of the most notorious doctrines which Plato attributes to Socrates. The first is the 'theory' of forms, the second is the doctrine of recollection, and the third Socrates' contention that philosophers ought to be the guardian-kings of the ideal state. I do not claim that this interpretation (which owes a lot to Wittgenstein) is correct, but only that it renders the doctrines both relevant and plausible.

Session VIII: Mathematics and Structure

Chair: James Ladyman (*University of Bristol*)

Jill North (*Yale University*)

The Structure of Physics

We are familiar with talking about the “structure” posited by a given theory of physics, such as the spacetime structure of relativity. We also infer the existence of these structures. What exactly do we mean by this? What is structure in this sense, and what does the mathematical structure used to formulate a theory tell us about the physical nature of the world? This is particularly puzzling since there can be different mathematical formulations of a given theory. Do different formulations posit different structures, or are they just notational variants, different ways of describing the same underlying structure? I consider these questions by looking at the case of the Lagrangian and Hamiltonian formulations of classical mechanics. I argue that, contrary to what is standardly assumed, they are not genuinely equivalent. For there is a difference in structure, and this is an all-important difference. I go on to suggest that we should be realists about structure.

Oystein Linnebo (*University of Bristol*)

Bad Company Tamed

One of the most serious problems facing the neo-logicist project of basing mathematics on abstraction principles is the so-called “the bad company problem.” The problem is that a great variety of “bad” abstraction principles are mixed in among the “good” ones. The bad company problem shows that a deeper understanding is needed of the conditions under which abstraction is permissible. The aim of this paper is to explore a new attempt to provide such an understanding. This attempt is based on the very general idea that the process of individuation must be well-founded. Since an abstraction principle is naturally regarded as a device for individuating one class of objects in terms of another, the idea that the process of individuation must be well-founded can be used to motivate restrictions on our theory of abstraction. I explore some different restrictions of this kind and show that they result in consistent theories. A common and very surprising feature of all of these theories is their maximally permissive line on abstraction: *any* form of abstraction on *any* concept is permitted. Paradox is instead avoided by imposing severe restrictions on what concepts there are. This creates a safe environment for abstraction where what used to be the bad companions now re-emerge as perfectly good. I argue that this safe environment is attractive because the restrictions imposed on concept formation are quite natural and intuitive.

David Liggins (*University of Manchester*)

The Autism Objection to Pretence Theories: A Case Study

A pretence theory of a discourse is one which claims that we do not believe or assert the propositions expressed by the sentences we utter when taking part in the discourse: instead, we are speaking from within a pretence. This paper examines an objection Jason Stanley has launched against pretence theories. Stanley argues that if a pretence account of a discourse is correct, we should expect people with autism to be incapable of successful participation in the discourse. But people with autism *are* capable of participating successfully in the discourses which pretence theorists aim to account for, so all these accounts should be rejected. I show how to defend Stephen Yablo’s pretence theory of arithmetic from this objection, and I argue that this response is superior to Yablo’s own reply to Stanley.

Timothy Button (*Cambridge University*)

Weyl’s Tiles and Unpicturable Geometries

Discrete geometry tells us that every line consists of finitely many points. Weyl (1949) offered an eloquent argument against the possibility that space has a discrete geometry: he considered discrete points as adjacent tessellating tiles, and concluded that the metric of such geometries could never approximate Pythagoras’ Theorem. Discrete geometries have since been developed which contradict Weyl’s claim. In particular, Forrest (1995) advances a family of discrete spaces which demonstrably approximate Pythagoras’ Theorem. I investigate Forrest’s proposal in some detail. I argue that these discrete geometries are bought at a high price: the world at the level of the discrete point is unpicturable and ungeometrical. This suggests that discrete geometers are not making new claims about space, but are claiming that the world is fundamentally not spatial.

Session IX: Value Theory I

Chair: Seiriol Morgan (*University of Bristol*)

Neera Badhwar (*University of Oklahoma*)

Is Realism Really Bad for You?

Realism about oneself and one's circumstances has long been regarded as a hallmark of mental health and authentic happiness by psychologists and philosophers. This view has also long invited skepticism. In recent times, this skepticism has found new support in the work of some social and cognitive psychologists, most notably Shelley Taylor and Jonathon Brown, who claim that not only is realism not essential for mental health or happiness, but that beyond a certain point it can even be bad for you. More precisely, they claim that certain positive illusions about yourself and the world are more conducive to mental health and happiness than realism which, they argue, is more likely to promote depression and lack of mental health. Too many philosophers have taken it for granted that the Taylor-Brown thesis is valid without subjecting it to critical scrutiny or acknowledging the critical literature. I refute the thesis and show why, properly understood, realism really is good for you. (i) There is no good evidence for depressed realists, as Taylor and Brown themselves acknowledge in a later work, so their thesis, being comparative, is empty. (ii) Even if depressed realists existed, their depression would be due not to realism as such, but to the sad reality of their lives, or their unrealistic standards, or a depressive temperament. (iii) Neither lab nor field studies give any good reason to believe that most people are given to mild positive illusions about their abilities, achievements, control, or future prospects, although it may be that most people flicker between mild positive illusions, mild negative illusions, and realism in at least some domains of their lives. (iv) Even if most people are mildly deluded, there is no good reason to believe that they are happier and psychologically healthier than realists, since their self-reports about their happiness and health are subject to the same illusions as their self-reports about their achievements, abilities, etc. Further, there is a conceptual reason why people who exaggerate their achievements etc. *must* exaggerate their happiness. (v) There is both experimental and real-life evidence of realists who are happier and healthier than people with positive illusions. (vi) The claim that positive illusions about oneself promote growth and change and openness to new ideas and people, even if one is self-deceptively invested in those illusions, defies explanation, whereas the opposite claim is easily explained.

Havi Carel (*University of the West of England*)

Can I be Ill and Happy?

When we think about the good life, whether within an Aristotelian, liberal or other framework, we often try to spell out the conditions for such a life. These are freedom, health, access to social goods, self-fulfilment and so on. Although health is, of course, taken to be an essential element of the good life and a necessary condition for happiness, a particular issue seems to be insufficiently discussed in such accounts. This is the question: what happens to the good life or to happiness when health is permanently absent? This, I claim, is not a tangential or secondary issue but a fundamental one. It is fundamental because ultimately the vast majority of people die of some kind of illness and some spend a large portion of their lives chronically ill or disabled. So surely, any account of the good life or of happiness must consider the inevitable decline of the body and its consequences. But how should it do so?

Simon Kirchin (*University of Kent*)

Thick Concepts: Ethical, Aesthetic, Epistemic

In this talk I compare and contrast thin and thick concepts from across three areas: the ethical, the aesthetic, and the epistemic. Starting with Bernard Williams' distinction between thin and thick concepts, I think about their supposed action-guiding and evaluative nature, and what we should say about the supposed thin concepts from each domain. I build to the thought that, at least in regards of the aspects I consider, epistemic concepts are more like ethical concepts than they are like aesthetic concepts. I briefly offer speculation as to why this is at the end.

Mark Greene (*University of Delaware*)

Harming in Context in Context

In 'Harming in Context', Alastair Norcross argues that counterfactual notions of harm "do not have the kind of metaphysical grounding required to play fundamental roles in ethical theory." The problem is that there are myriad counterfactual alternatives, and a single act may appear harmful by comparison to some alternatives yet beneficial by comparison to others. I will consider two roles that harm might play in ethical theory; accounting for wrongdoing and assessing claims for compensation. In the former case Norcross's challenge need not be met, in the latter it can be met. First, I will argue that consequentialist ethical theories have no need for a notion of harm in order to give an account of wrongdoing. I also note that the same is true of many non-consequentialist theories. Second, although a notion of harm is central to assessing compensation, in this context I will show how the counterfactual possibilities that are relevant to identifying a harmful act can be distinguished from those that might make the same act appear beneficial. This is achieved with the help of a prior account of wrongdoing. Assessing compensation for wrongdoing may not be ethically fundamental, but it is the kind of work that can reasonably be expected of a counterfactual notion of harm.

Session X: Politics

Ben Colburn (*Cambridge University*)

Equal Autonomy and Common Humanity

I argue that considerations of common humanity imply that we should endorse a norm of non-discrimination: goods should be distributed equally unless there is a relevant difference that justifies a differential distribution. I argue that there is no difference relevant to the distribution of autonomy-promoting effort: hence, if the state should promote anyone's autonomy at all, then it ought to promote everyone's equally.

Alan Coffee (*Birkbeck College, London*)

Republican Freedom as Legal and Social Recognition

The basic structure of republican freedom (understood as the absence of arbitrary controlling power) has traditionally been applied to the legal or political arena to protect citizens from potential abuses of government power. However, as ideas of social equality has developed so I argue that republican freedom must be extended beyond the legal realm to include the background normative ideas (in the collective store of cultural ideals, concepts and traditions that underpin meaningful social action) that can also exert an arbitrary controlling influence over us. Without the right kinds of counter-measures which allow us to challenge dominating norms and ideals, then our freedom may be impaired just in the same way as the presence of dominating laws or institutions. Modern reconstructions of the classical republican models, in particular following Philip Pettit, have remained faithful to the traditional understanding of freedom, but in so doing have emphasised only one aspect of the historical ideal, namely the ability of citizens to manage their affairs without interference. My argument is that this focus on solely on citizens' options has obscured the both the motivation for and basis of the extension of freedom from the legal realm to include our relationship to social norms. This has restricted the ability of republicans to respond to cases of social discrimination which constitute genuine infringements of freedom. I argue that the Roman and early republican ideal of freedom as entailing a right to participate in law-making will make clear how legal and social constraints must be part of a single expanded concept of freedom.

Simon Hope (*Cambridge University*)

One Bad Argument and One Good One

I address the common claim that a conception of civic virtue can be justified by appeal to the requirements of the stability of a just institutional scheme. I argue that while the requirements of stability do invoke considerations of character, they do not necessarily invoke maxims of virtue; consequently, the only account of civic character that can be grounded in the requirements of stability is a very modest one.