



Eastern Michigan University

Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy 2022 Abstract List

Richard Callais

March 20th | 9-9:50am | SC 330

Persistence as a Four-Dimensionalist: Perdurantism vs. Exdurantism

The debate over persistence currently involves three competing theories—one three-dimensionalist theory called “endurantism” and two four-dimensionalist theories called “perdurantism” and “exdurantism.” This inner debate between the latter two persistence theories is what I aim to clarify, and ultimately, I argue that perdurantism is superior to exdurantism because exdurantism is too extravagant in counting ordinary objects in the world. Extravagant for the reason that objects in their entirety are bound to their momentary stages, and there is practically an interminable number of these stages, which is not reasonable when counting in the ordinary world.

Gillan Chalono

March 20th | 10-10:50am | SC 330

The Personal is Political: Property as a Distributive Interface

In “Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice,” G.A. Cohen provides a scolding critique of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* by illuminating its shortcomings in addressing the distributive consequences of personal behavior. Rawls’ solution to achieving distributive justice- the ethical distribution of rights and resources in society- is to apply regulatory principles to major political and economic institutions. Cohen correctly identifies that a genuine concern for distributive justice should account for the discriminatory social practices that perpetuate unjust distributions of wealth and power within our private lives. Yet, out of respect for personal liberty, Rawls has proven remarkably reluctant to endorsing the regulation of interpersonal discrimination. My paper will respond to Cohen and provide a defense of Rawls by exploring the far-reaching effects of the legal institution of property. I will argue that property, while enforced through legal institutions, has a demonstrable impact on personal behavior and social convention. Since private associations and social practices do not occur outside of a legal context, I believe that property law offers Rawls an avenue to exert a corrective influence discriminatory social practices that pose a problem for distributive justice without compromising his commitment to protecting basic liberties.

On the Truth Values of Definite Descriptions: Examining the Russell-Strawson Dialectic

A well-known critique of Russell's Theory of Descriptions, proffered by P.F. Strawson, is that a central tenet of the theory, the claim that any particular utterance of a sentence with a non-referring definite description must be either true or false, is mistaken. Strawson argues for the falsity of this Russellian claim in two steps. First, a demarcation is made between sentences and their respective uses and utterances. Next, an analysis of such utterances is presented, wherein they imply, rather than assert, parts of the logically existential proposition they are taken to be. In this paper, I aim to challenge Strawson's analysis and will argue that (i) we ought to take such utterances to really be asserting the logically existential proposition Russell analyzes them as, and thus that (ii) the utterances of sentences with a non-referring definite description do have truth values.

Self-Perception: Can an accurate self-perception be concluded without the perception of those around you?

This essay explores whether it is possible to develop an accurate self-perception of one's self without the opinions, views, and judgments of others. Philosophers such as Gloria Steinman, W.E.B Dubois, David Hume, and Patricia Hill Collins explore the topic of self-perception from different perspectives, but how can a person know who they accurately are without knowing what others think of them? Additionally, how can a person use the opinions of others to develop a healthy working self-perception for themselves without allowing the opinions of others to overrule the views they have for themselves?

Dubois and Steinem write about two ways self-perception can be perceived by someone when processing the opinions of others: the opinions of others can either be used as data or information or accepted uncritically as truth. This perspective determines if a person uses the opinions of others as a motivating force in their self-perception process or as a crippling weight. Through analyzing the works of Steinem, Dubois, and Hill Collins, we review what they thought were important factors to achieving an accurate self-perception among the opinions of others. Through exploring the writing of Hume, we examine two personal philosophical methods that could apply to developing an accurate sense of self perception.

Contrary to the definition of self-perception, even though this perception belongs to one's self, the opinions of others should not be ignored when developing an accurate sense of self-perception.

Norah Frye

March 19th | 9-9:50am | SC 352

Male Heterosexuality as Homoeroticism, Expanded: An Inquiry into Why Men Cannot Embody the Divine Feminine

This paper examines the manifestations of male heterosexuality in the 21st as they have come about in relation to, and in contrast with, the ideals of sexuality that are propagated and perpetuated by pornography. Through the invocation of a gaze that begins with an exploration of the plainly sexual, I attempt to name what sexual processes might be responsible for the separation between a type of truncated sex—that which is represented in pornography and is replicated in quotidian sexual interactions—and a less filtered type of sex—that which I have named organic eroticism. I argue that this latter type of sex is rooted in a profound type of femininity, and that its rejection has given way to what Marilyn Frye names male heterosexual homoeroticism. I argue that through the rejection of this profound feminine eroticism and the subsequent masculinization of sex, pornography has served to perpetuate and make common place a version of sex that is exclusively for and by men, and so is, in all respects, homoerotic (that is man loving). Even more, I argue that if Frye successfully defends male heterosexuality as socially homoerotic, and I successfully defend it as sexually homoerotic, then all aspects of male heterosexual love are man-loving, and some significant social overhauls are in order. Particularly, all people ought to be afforded radical sexual freedom, heterosexual men ought to renounce any homophobic beliefs they may hold, and heterosexual men ought to adopt an attitude of popular feminism.

Carson Johnston

March 20th | 2-2:50pm | SC 330

A Conversion to a Flourishing-Based Egoism: Discovering Morality's Prudential Rationality Through a Life-Valuing Ethic

How do we live a moral life while also living a life of value to us? A life filled with passion, interests, and relationships? This paper tackles a possible reconciliation between morality and rational prudence that ensures a moral way of life is valuable for the agent that lives it. The author is motivated to build a moral theory that is ¬good for ¬the moral agent—an individual deserving agency, autonomy, and discretionary power in part with moral structures. It is a theory that recognizes the human tendency to follow partial, self-interested, and typically prudent ends. The paper begins with a discussion on morality's prudential rationality through Gregory Kavka's (1984) paper "A Reconciliation Project". This is followed by a presentation of ethical egoism that places it at the centre of the project. From here, several objections to ethical egoism are raised and answered to establish a need to align ethical egoism with practices of flourishing-based egoism. It is through this notion of flourishing egoism where a reconciliation between morality and rational prudence is possible.

Sarah Khaleefah

March 19th | 3-3:50pm | SC 330

Justice and Autonomy in Islamic Bioethics

Islamic bioethics acts as a normative guide to issues in the medical and scientific fields based on the religious perspective of Islam. In this paper, I will discuss one of the principles of Western biomedical ethics using this perspective. In particular, I will demonstrate how this principle should be reformulated, by Islamic understanding, into the principle of respect for justice. The principle of respect for justice can be viewed in the same way as the principle of respect for autonomy, composed of the negative obligation to refrain from actions that destabilize justice (such as causing harm to others), and the positive obligation to actively participate in justice. Values of family, society, and public interest are highly regarded and promoted in Islamic beliefs, and are therefore taken into consideration with significant weight in a Muslim person's autonomous decisions. The ethical commitments that comprise the principle of respect for justice therefore narrow down Muslim individuals' sphere of autonomous self-determination as viewed from the Western perspective of autonomy. Autonomy in Islam incorporates the interest of not just the individual, but considerations and ethical commitments for the collective as well. Understood in this way, the Islamic principle of respect for justice is directly applicable to various topics of interest in biomedical ethics, such as immunization, where it mandates vaccination as a moral obligation for Muslims.

Omar Khali

March 19th | 4-4:50pm | SC 352

Self-Objectification and its Discontents: An Existential-Phenomenological Analysis of Body Dysmorphia

Body dysmorphia can be characterized as an excessive concern about one's overall appearance or a specific part of one's appearance. Like other psychological disorders, the cognitive-behavioral model has been the predominant framework used to understand the nature of body dysmorphia as well as to guide its therapeutic remedies. The model conceptualizes the issue primarily in terms of thoughts and behaviors, and the prescribed therapy reflects its assumptions—altering behavior and cognition to change “core beliefs.” However, my investigation of the lived experiences of those preoccupied with their body-appearance reveals that there is something more fundamental occurring that the cognitive-behavioral model/therapy does not sufficiently take into account: namely, the disorder's ontological-existential dimension. The central objective of the essay is to make explicit the ways in which this condition is essentially an existential-ontological

issue rather than merely a cognitive-behavioral one. The first section elucidates the ways in which the cognitive-behavioral model interprets and treats body dysmorphia, while also shedding light on the limitations inherent in its theoretical framework. From there, I provide a preparatory phenomenological analysis of the body in order to clarify what it means for the dysmorphic to inhabit the body as a “body-appearance.” The third section investigates the ontological-existential structures underlying the dysmorphic’s peculiar condition in order to disclose the intimate relation between Being-in-the-world and bodily existence. It is revealed in this section that the dysmorphic’s preoccupation with her body-appearance “closes her off” from worldly involvement. As a result of this ontological-existential structure, she lives her body primarily as an aesthetic object rather than as a lived body (the body as the means to enact agency). The final section explores the ways in which therapy can be reinterpreted in light of the ontological-existential implications discovered in the previous section. I argue that the objective in therapy should be to unite the dysmorphic to the world in meaningful ways such that the body takes on a new significance, one in which its agentic capacities are made manifest.

Kyle Kirby

March 20th | 1-1:50pm | SC 330

Obligation, Subjectivism, and Supervenience

In this paper I argue for a particular version of subjectivism about moral obligation, the view that an agent’s moral obligations depend on their beliefs. I ultimately claim that (1) an agent’s moral obligations supervene on their non-moral beliefs, and (2) this does not entail that moral obligations are not objective. I construct subjectivism from a unique formulation of the “ought implies can” principle. In this formulation of the principle, “ought” refers to an agent having a moral obligation. To explain the relevant sense of “can” for moral obligation, I introduce a novel notion of psychological possibility that captures which actions are possible for an agent to perform, given a connection between intentional actions and belief. I ultimately claim that accepting such a principle entails that an agent’s moral obligations supervene on their non-moral beliefs.

I then argue that a theory of objectivity that requires mind-independence either fails to account for facts about mental states or introduces a problematic category of subjective facts. I present an alternative theory of objectivity which does not face this problem, entailing that the dependence of moral obligations on belief does not exclude agents having objective moral obligations.

Cody McCain

March 19th | 11-11:50am | SC 352

The Anti-Ideology of Neoclassical Conservatism, Or, Revisiting Traditionalist Conservatism for the 21st Century

This paper identifies the is-ought problem and the Agrippan trilemma as overlooked areas in political philosophy, despite both problems being what constitutes the nature of ideology. Traditionalist conservatism alone, as described by Aristotle, Edmund Burke, and Roger Scruton, fails to solve these problems. Rights-based liberalism fails to solve these problems as well. To solve these problems, traditionalist conservatism, as well as a 'post-truth empiricism' and legal realism, are sublated into one another to avoid the is-ought problem and the Agrippan trilemma. This post-truth empiricism this new traditionalist conservatism uses, called neoclassical conservatism, is different from empiricism in that if the sense data which we base our customs, habits, and virtues upon changes, said customs, habits, and virtues change too. It is a descriptive account rather than a normative one. This allows for neoclassical conservatism to avoid the is-ought problem and the Agrippan trilemma, but preserve liberalism's explanatory power. That is, neoclassical conservatism avoids ideology and is thus an anti-ideology. Anti-ideology demonstrates the limits of politics before it divorces itself from reality. This strips our politics of assumptions made and ahistorical myths like progress. Communities would maintain themselves through virtues they become accustomed to accepting as successfully accounting for an empirically derived rational structure of reality. If this leads to a schism in a community, a successful account-- i.e., the sacred customs, habits, and virtues-- is prioritized and the community may split, instead of resorting to rule over others and therefore the ideology of empire.

John Milkovich

March 19th | 10-10:50am | SC 352

Home, Horror, and Anxiety

By using Kirsten Jacobson's conceptions of being-at-home I will argue that our experience of being-at-home does not necessitate a physical house which we inhabit but this often taken to be the case since the house recedes into the background of our experience. Through this receding, the home becomes our acting level which is the starting point for our projects in the world and informs how we take up those projects. I apply Martin Heidegger's distinction between fear and anxiety to show that the horrifying part of horror is not in the fear of the antagonist in the story, but anxiety over the breakdown of being-at-home. In this mood of anxiety, we experience the home in a way like an agoraphobe. The agoraphobe's home is a place which they are never at-home because of their nervous anticipation of leaving entering the outside world. In the mood of anxiety, we experience when we are horrified, we see our home as being exposed to what is outside. Therefore, a place like any other. Using Thomas Ligotti's short story "The Frolic" as an example I argue that we experience a breakdown of our being-at-home once we consider the possibility of intrusion by outside forces. Through this breakdown we can come to recognize that we created our being-at-home. By experiencing the breakdown, we can understand that we can change our home.

Elias Næss

March 20th | 2-2:50pm | SC 352

Wittgenstein as Therapist

What is Wittgenstein's method in philosophy? This essay seeks to unpack the different tools and techniques Later Wittgenstein uses in his Philosophical Investigations to guide the puzzled philosopher out of the confusion caused by the bewitchment of language. The thesis argues that Later Wittgenstein acts like a therapist treating a patient, where the patient is us, the ruminating readers of philosophy. By analyzing the tools and concepts applied in the Investigations, the essay suggests that Wittgenstein philosophizes with an eraser, as opposed to a hammer, by making otherwise unsolvable philosophical problems disappear. One of the concepts he uses to achieve this end is called language games. The paper describes Wittgenstein's comparison between games and language-games as a method to provide clarity into the nature of how language operates in any linguistic community. This gives language-users like ourselves a better understanding of what language can – and cannot – do for us as we attempt to navigate the complexity of the world.

David Nehlsen

March 19th | 9-9:50am | SC 330

Rethinking Thrasymachus: Class Struggle and the Fight for Democracy

This paper explores Thrasymachus' view on justice. Thrasymachus is the central figure in Book 1 of the Republic, wherein, he is typically seen as incoherent, or as defending egoism, nihilism, or legalism. This paper evaluates each of these perspectives, and offers a more untraditional interpretation of Thrasymachus's argument. Using The Republic and the writings of Thrasymachus as a guide, I argue that Thrasymachus does not defend any metaethical or normative ethical theory in this discussion; instead, he is presenting a challenge against our conception of justice, a challenge which can only be satisfied by democracy. This paper argues that Thrasymachus should be thought of as, above all else, an early class theorist and advocate of democracy.

Cal Nelson

March 20th | 4-4:50pm | SC 330

The Materialist Psychology of Marx and Nietzsche

The philosophies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche seem opposed in so many ways that makes them appear to be irreconcilable. For example, Marx's

political vision of a classless society is directly at odds with Nietzsche's pre-modern aristocratic tendencies. However, both of these thinkers have been employed over the past century to various liberatory ends. One calls to mind how thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse or Gilles Deleuze both utilized Marx and Nietzsche for their own projects of liberation. This raises the question: how is it possible to use such contrasting thinkers to work towards the same end? My answer is that there is a fundamental structural homology between Marx and Nietzsche that lends each to be complemented by the other. This homologous structure is the structure of ideology for Marx and the structure of the psychical space for Nietzsche. I argue, after analyzing Marx's fundamental characteristics of ideology, that Nietzsche's account of how the modern liberal Christian subject forms contains these same structural characteristics. This leads me to conclude that these two thinkers, Marx and Nietzsche, can be employed for the same ends because Nietzsche fills in the gaps of Marx's political analysis by providing an account of subject formation in terms Marx already utilizes.

Long Nguyen

March 19th | 11-11:50am | SC 330

Language and Common Sense in Berkeley's Philosophy

This paper discovers a way to read two theses in the philosophy of George Berkeley, idealism and immaterialism, as commonsensical. This interpretation, as I will argue, is plausible because it fits well with Berkeley's view on language. Were the argument to be successful, it would vindicate, at least in part, Berkeley's insistence that he is a philosopher of common sense.

Euge Power

March 20th | 9-9:50am | SC 352

Doubt and Ignorance: Similarities between strategies of Factory Farming and Big Tobacco

The (mis)information, marketing and advertising strategy of the intensive animal agriculture industry (the "Industry") deserves to be highlighted as its practices affect the billions of animals each year who face horrific suffering in both life and death under its control. This paper argues the truth of such animal suffering is obfuscated by a strategy of creating doubt and fostering ignorance among consumers which is comparable to the strategy used by the tobacco industry to maintain its assertions that smoking is not injurious to health. This original work utilizes a method of comparison between the conduct of the Industry and the tobacco industry. It also compares the likely consequences for the Industry should the shocking practices of factory farming become well known outside of activist and academic groups with the consequences suffered by the tobacco industry when knowledge of the dangers of smoking became common knowledge. By highlighting the above, this paper shows the strategy of creating doubt and

fostering ignorance by the Industry to obscure the deplorable nature of factory farming is strikingly similar to the strategy utilized by the tobacco industry to maintain custom of products shown to be injurious to health.

Thom Quine

March 20th | 3-3:50pm | SC 330

The Coarse Brothers

This paper takes a fresh look at issues of free will and determinism through the prism of a real-life incident, and presents a novel case for compatibilism. It is common for advocates of determinism to argue that free will, as commonly understood to mean the freedom to rationally control one's actions, cannot exist, since there is not enough time for conscious, rational deliberation to play a role in split-second automatic actions and reactions such as driving, playing sports, or even conversational speech. Such actions, say the determinists, must be pre-determined, or, as we might more accurately describe them, "pre-programmed". This paper will

argue that many such automatic reactions are learned behaviors, self-initiated and self-determined long-established habits, habits self-trained, practiced, and "self-programmed" in acts of free will.

Weiming Sheng

March 19th | 10-10:50am | SC 330

Plato on Knowing and Believing

We commonly think that "X knows that p" should always entail "X believes that p", "p" being some proposition. I give two reasons for why we think that: the hierarchy of conditions and the possibility of belief. I identify them, in conjunction, as necessary conditions for knowing to entail believing. I then look at a difficult passage in Book V of the Republic on epistemology, which claims that "what completely is is completely knowable; and what in no way is is in no way knowable" (477a). I discuss a veridical reading of "is" proposed by Gail Fine, and a predicative reading proposed by Julia Annas. I show that in both readings, since the two conditions previously identified as necessary for knowing to entail believe cannot be given in conjunction, Plato would be committed to the position that "X knows that p" does not always entail "X believes that p".

Malavika Suresh

March 20th | 11-11:50am | SC 352

Looking for Socrates' Definition of Virtue

In Plato's 'Meno,' Socrates and Meno attempt to define virtue in line with

certain criteria. However, they are unsuccessful in doing so and seem pessimistic about finding a definition. I argue that the criteria put forth by Socrates assumes moral realism. Given this assumption, Meno and Socrates' pessimism is undue since they ignore other metaethical traditions. I propose that moving away from realism towards a non-realistic tradition like expressivism may offer an account of virtue that need not fall in line with Socrates' criteria but still enable successful moral talk. By doing so, Meno and Socrates may be able to answer questions regarding virtue that they were pessimistic about being able to answer since they lacked an account of virtue.

Zach Tobias

March 19th | 3-3:50pm | SC 352

Imposed Food and Its Challenges to Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) declares that food security exists when all people have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. This is taken to understand food security in four measures: availability, access, utilization, and stability. The focus of this paper will be on access which concerns the affordability and allocation of the food supply (Ahteensuu & Siipi, 2016). I argue that social pressures on food choice, which I call food impositions, limit one's access to sufficient and safe foods by encouraging undereating in women and unhealthily high volumes of meat consumption in men. People of color are also subject to food impositions which identify certain places of food sale as "white spaces" and thereby discourage certain eating habits in communities of color. More generally, food impositions interfere with individual preferences which is an issue of sustaining food insecurity, but also interferes with identity expressions through food choice. Food impositions come in two forms both of which play the same, harmful role in our dieting practices. Positive impositions, which tell individuals what to eat and negative impositions, which tell individuals what not to eat. I will also respond to two objections. First, that this overgeneralizes the term "food insecurity." Second, that some food impositions are necessary or good.

Candice Wiesner

March 20th | 4-4:50pm | SC 352

Concepts, String Theory, & Separate Mental Realities

If philosophy beings with perplexity, then the idea of concepts has proven ripe fruit. Whether concepts are abstract objects, or whether they are physically realized mental representations, is an issue about the ontology of concepts- about what they are. Another question concerns their structure. Here, there is a divide between a traditional philosophical view and various contemporary psychological positions. Many philosophers have believed concepts are like definitions. In this classical view of concepts, concepts consist in a collection of other concepts that constitute individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. Within psychology, a dominant view treats concepts as something like packages of information about a topic, where this information ranges from more to less central to that topic. The psychologist view allows for a probabilistic structure of concepts. These two views are not consistent with one another. Yet, what if both views are correct? Is it possible to live in a universe where concepts can exist as mental representations in your head, but, also have a definite structure and exist somewhere other than conventional reality? Well, no, not in a universe. However, in a multiverse, it could be so. The idea of a multiverse, or many universes, may sound unnatural: most of us were raised to believe that the word 'universe' meant everything. Nonetheless, by allowing for more dimensions than the usual three, we can accommodate both the classical philosophical view and contemporary psychologists view. Living in a world that accommodates both views may not sound very impacting to our day-to-day lives, but upon further contemplation we begin to realize the drastic implication this has on how we understand consciousness in general. These are ideas of extreme importance. To accommodate something that is as foreign to our current physical picture as is the phenomenon of concepts, we must expect a profound change- one that alters the very underpinnings of our philosophical viewpoint as to the nature of reality.

Greyson Yousif

March 20th | 1-1:50pm | SC 352

Panopticism in Detroit: An Analysis of Project Greenlight

In this paper I will argue that Project Green Light's (PGL) presence in Detroit is unethical because of its oppressive overreach and coercive power that actually weakens civic society. My argument will proceed in three stages: First, I will explain Bentham's vision of the Panopticon and Foucault's critique in Discipline and Punish. Second, using modern Feminist theories of power I will show that PGL's use of power is coercive and oppressive. Third, I will show PGL's overreach into personal domains by analyzing surveillance capitalism. According to Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon is a self-sustaining humane penal system. However, Foucault reveals Bentham's blindspot to the oppressive and coercive power of the Panopticon. The Panopticon, as Foucault notes, expanded beyond prisons and has had its structure implemented in facilities such as schools, the home, and workplaces. What neither of them predicted was that modern surveillance would starkly change power relations in surveilled urban spaces through its strategic

management of remote cameras. These remote cameras act as a constant coercive reminder for self-policing, a practice that Sandra Bartky argues diminishes autonomy. Project Green Light (PGL) was introduced as a remote surveillance system to address Detroit's security and budgetary challenges, however, PGL's overreach into personal data and coercive power-over has significant negative social impacts. By introducing complex digital systems into Detroit, PGL has linked physical and digital space and linked the physical individual with a digital counterpart. PGL has created a digital architecture which oppresses and coerces self-policing Detroiters.

Xingyu (Brian) Zhou

March 20th | 11-11:50am | SC 330

Contrast and Synthesis Between Accounts of Christianity by Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Luther King Jr.

Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Luther King have drastically different perspectives regarding Christianity. The Nietzschean account of Christianity is mostly negative, in that Christianity is created by and for the weak and is a manifestation of the "slave morality", as in contrast with the good and noble "master morality". In comparison, Martin Luther King's perspective of Christianity is much more positive, to the extent that the Christian principle of universal love can drive social change for the better. In this paper, the roots of these two perspectives of Christianity are closely analyzed to see what the core differences are and whether they can be reconciled. It is eventually concluded that the two perspectives can be reconciled if the power of universal love is introduced into the Nietzschean philosophy of power, and the details of this new philosophy of power are then studied.