



Eastern Michigan University

Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy

2019 Abstract List

Anderson, Natalie

Saturday | 4:00 – 4:50 pm | Tower 348

A Bayesian Justification for Movement in Pedagogic Practices

This paper introduces concepts in philosophy of science which are used to defend the use of movement in the elementary school classroom. I use Bayesian epistemology to show that the best available theory is to include movement, if the goal is retention of information and higher test scores. Richard Royall proposes an interesting concern for my Bayesian case because this inference pattern is not strong enough to make conclusions about action. It cannot tell us that we ought to care about student learning, for example. Helen Longino's conception of objectivity addresses this shortcoming. Finally, I briefly discuss the utility of movement even in our 'teach to the test' environment.

Angliss, Cameron

Sunday | 9:00 – 9:50 am | Tower 348

Cosmological Analyses of God and Time

I accept Saadia's argument that the lifespan of the universe is finite and defend this argument from several objections by delving deep into the nature of time itself.

Brown, Bella

Saturday | 4:00 – 4:50 pm | Alumni 342

The Shapes of Solidarity Through Difference

The following paper will track the subtle and not-so-subtle differences between various forms of feminism, specifically the differences between indigenous and white feminism. Though the differences can outnumber the similarities, I do not see this as a discouragement for forming intercultural bonds for a peaceful coexistence, in fact this is the opportunity for solidarity to change the perception and reach of feminism as a movement. Feminism has the potential for reaching a broader audience without minimizing the differences of separate groups. This paper does not call for the aggregation of different groups in order to further the goals of white feminism, but rather highlights the differences of indigenous and white feminism through historic and current context to show the specific needs of multiple groups. The works of Lorraine Mayer, Deborah McGregor, and Paula Gunn Allen are used to highlight the unique relationship of native women with the colonizer's culture in Canada and America, as well as what indigenous feminism looks like. Works by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Allison Jaggar are used to explore black and white (respectively) feminist perspectives. Intersectionality and sovereignty are two topics that will guide the paper in showing ways that solidarity can look, ultimately calling on informed digression of the individual.

Brennan, Devin

Sunday | 2:00 – 2:50 pm | Tower 348

Error Theory and Intrinsic Value

We all embrace error theories about some domains of discourse: from children's exclamations about Santa Claus to eighteenth-century chemists' discussions of phlogiston to ancient Greeks' proclamations about Zeus. In this paper, I argue for a local moral error theory that maintains that any moral discourse committed to intrinsic value errs. Two large steps comprise my argument for this error theory. The first step is conceptual: I show that some moral discourse, including virtue ethics, hedonistic utilitarianism, and Kantianism, requires that something possess intrinsic value. The second step is ontological: I argue that, necessarily, nothing has intrinsic value. Since intrinsic-value-laden moral discourse cannot succeed without bearers of intrinsic value, I establish my local moral error theory.

Cummins, Benjamin

Saturday | 9:00 – 9:50 am | Alumni 342

The Lowering Amplitude of Hedonic Adaptation

Human quality of life has improved massively and exponentially with the advancement of science. Modern engineering, technology and medicine have all led to a noticeable decrease in the frequency and severity of significant experiences of suffering. Not only do present day humans suffer far less on average than our ancestors from any time period, but comfort and constant entertainment stimulus have now become the neutral state in developed countries. Being that Hedonic Adaptation models happiness through a distinction against a lack of thereof, fewer experiences of suffering and more frequent experiences of pleasurable stimuli have brought about a recent change in human psychology: there is now a higher threshold for what stimulus will constitute a significant positive experience, and a lower threshold for significant negative experience.

Darling, Spencer

Saturday | 3:00 – 3:50 pm | Tower 348

Medical Speech Legal Not Moral

Arguments over freedom of expression are numerous, especially those regarding what should and should not be considered free expression. In this paper, I address a very specific area of speech, medical speech acts. Alternative medicine seems to use freedom of expression as a blanket of protection from their often-false claims being open to any kind of regulation. Focusing heavily on the legal precedent of the U.S and the philosophical principles that justify the regulation of professions like medicine; I argue that medical speech acts are not protected by those who are unlicensed citing legal precedent as well as legal principles to justify my claim. I briefly examine

my arguments from a freedom of expression argument made by philosophers like John Stuart Mill whose ideas are said to resemble the attitude towards free speech most similar to that of the U.S legal system.

DeMatteo, David

Sunday | 9:00 – 9:50 am | Alumni 342

New Imitations, Old Beginnings: Machiavelli's Teaching

This paper aims to answer one of the most vexing problems in Machiavelli interpretation: how can we reconcile Machiavelli's acknowledged debt to the Ancients with his startling self-consciousness of his own modernity? Rather than look at autobiographical material, this essay instead turns to his theory of politics in both *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, treating the texts as basically continuous with one another. Through closely explicating Machiavelli's creative appropriation of Aristotelian Political Theory, I argue that Machiavelli conceives of himself as a "founder" whose role is to reconstitute the life of ancient political theory through acts of interpretive violence, just as the leaders of polities must occasionally initiate "old beginnings" in order to renew the vigor of their political institutions. Machiavelli's dual-consciousness can thus be understood as itself expressed within his political theory and understandable in terms of it. The paper's argument will proceed in four steps. Firstly, I'll examine Machiavelli's new, anti-Aristotelian picture of the world, with its novel synthesis of chance, Fortuna, and necessity. Then, I'll consider how polities can and should be formed in the perilous new conception of the world that Machiavelli advances. Thereafter, I'll examine an outstanding problem in Machiavellian political theory: how do polities persist through time? Through answering this question, the whole notion of "old beginnings" emerges, and in the conclusion to the paper I'll suggest that Machiavelli conceives of himself as advancing precisely such an old beginning in political theory.

Fritz, Samantha

Sunday | 10:00 – 10:50 am | Alumni 342

Political Obligation and Lockean Contract Theory

In John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, he presents his notion of social contract theory: individuals come together, leave the state of perfect freedom, and consent to give up certain rights to the State so the State can protect its members. He grounds duties and obligations to the government on the basis of consent. Because one consents to the State, either tacitly or expressly, one has consented to taking on political obligations owed to the State. Locke also notes that individuals can withdraw consent and leave the State. This paper challenges the view that political obligation can exist under Locke's social contract theory. This paper first provides background for the argument by explaining Locke's position. Then, it examines what consent actually is, ultimately coming to the conclusion that tacit and hypothetical consent are not true forms of consent and cannot justify political obligation, leaving only express consent. Finally, using Isaiah

Berlin's notions of coercion and positive and negative freedoms, this paper looks at whether the current political system allows one to exit the State, leading to the conclusion that if individuals are coerced into consenting to the State, that consent cannot justify political obligation.

Harrington, Peyton

Saturday | 9:00 – 9:50 am | Tower 348

Why Virtue Cannot Be Taught: An Analysis of Plato's Meno and Anselm of Canterbury

In the Meno dialogue, Socrates and Meno discuss whether or not virtue can be taught. Socrates argues that virtue is neither taught, because there are no teachers, nor is it inherent because virtuous men sometimes have vicious children. Since both Socrates and Meno agree that if virtue is a knowledge, then it can be taught, it follows that since there are no teachers of virtue, then virtue is not a knowledge. The conclusion is that since there are certainly virtuous people, virtue must through divine dispensation, but this is not explained. In this paper, I attempt to explain what "divine dispensation" is and how virtue comes through it by analyzing Saint Anselm's idea of supreme essence and that man is a mirror of it. I argue that divine dispensation comes from this "supreme essence" by showing that this supreme essence is the source of all good things; that this source is not any particular instance of a good, but is 'good-itself.' It follows that virtue, as the source of all good things, is not any particular knowledge but the source of knowledge. Therefore, the source of virtue and the source of knowledge must be the same (since this essence is one). This essence, as the source of knowledge, must know itself; since man is (essentially) a mirror of this supreme essence, it follows that virtuous men know themselves. I conclude that, since virtue is knowing thyself, Socrates is correct: virtue cannot be taught because virtue is knowledge of one's self.

King, David

Sunday | 3:00 – 3:50 pm | Tower 348

Humility's Inner Dimension: A Search for Intrinsic Value

In their paper, "Humility and Epistemic Goods," Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood classify the intellectual virtue of humility in terms of its instrumental value such that humility becomes a component promoting truth and other epistemic goods. Roberts and Wood see humility as a good that is always working insofar as it relates epistemic knowers to each other and facilitates the pursuit of truth. Essentially, Roberts and Wood envision a kind of humility that aims towards certain intellectual ends. Central to their argument is a two-tier structure of epistemic humility, where humility helps the individual who possesses it, as well as promoting a social function. In this system, humility is on both levels instrumental. However, I argue that, from the basic frame Roberts and Wood give, there is a way of teasing out an intrinsic dimension to the virtue of humility if we analyse the first of the two tiers closely. I argue that there is a way of imagining a non-social, or at least an inner, kind of humility, a comportment towards the self as a knower that

can give intrinsic value to the virtue. In the inner dimension of humility, we see the self as epistemically flawed and prone to mistake. Humility, in the internal sense, is the recognition of this truth. With such a shift, the instrumental value is not lost; it is simply to say that humility has both intrinsic and instrumental dimensions, and that the intrinsic dimension derives from a comportment towards the self as a flawed knower.

Li, Gloria

Saturday | 11:00 – 11:50 am | Tower 348

Climate Change, Essential Goods, and Rawlsian Justice

Climate change is one of the most important social and environmental justice issues of the 21st century. As such, it deserves serious treatment by philosophers like John Rawls, perhaps the most important social justice theorist of the 20th century. In this paper, I first discuss Rawls' conception of a well-ordered society presented in *A Theory of Justice* and how climate change may be incorporated in his theory as an intergenerational savings problem. Then, I present a characterization of environmental goods like clean air and clean water as a special kind of good in Rawlsian justice and argue that this is a more effective way of incorporating environmental considerations into the framework of a well-ordered society. Essential goods, as I call them, can be distinguished by two particular traits: 1) their status as a public good, and 2) their status as preconditions for the usage of our primary goods.

By recognizing that essential goods such as clean air and clean water are preconditions for the proper exercise of our social primary goods, a precedence for the incorporation of environmental and climate implications into the fundamental aspects of a Rawlsian framework is thus established. This approach is unique in the literature because past papers addressing a Rawlsian reply to climate change and environmental concerns have focused primarily on the original position, just savings principle, or the two principles of justice. My concept of essential goods accounts for environmental goods as a necessary, and not just peripheral, element in Rawlsian political philosophy.

Miao, Lixing

Sunday | 10:00 – 10:50 am | Tower 348

Free Will as Self-Control

I argue that an agent enjoys free will when they are having self-control over their action. In order to figure out the type of self-control that free will requires I list the three kinds of constrained situations where an agent obviously does not enjoy free will: (1) the action is coerced; (2) the action is deluded; (3) there exists some inner hindrance to the agent's reactivity to the right reasons. A good conception of free will should not be too loose to allow someone in these kinds of situations to be counted as a free agent. I believe that an agent performs an action X with free will only if the action X is under the type of self-control which differentiates the action X from the

actions in any kind of unfree situation. The self-control that free will requires is a good understanding of the situation in which one acts and to be motivated by good reasons without being coerced. Although an agent is not able to control all the conditions that determine their actions, the possibility of self-control is not thereby precluded. In light of Augustine's comparison between two senses of freedom, I argue that delusion or ignorance of instrumental aspects and delusion or ignorance of the ethical aspects equally undermine freedom.

Minnich, Sarah

Sunday | 11:00 – 11:50 am | Alumni 342

The Possibility of Moral Action in a Kantian Epistemological Metaphysics

Immanuel Kant was an Enlightenment philosopher who strove to clarify the foundations of human knowledge and morality. Kant began his cosmopolitan efforts by establishing the metaphysical basis for all human cognition. His theories developed from an in-depth analysis of the writings of empiricist David Hume and classical metaphysical thought. Causality was a paradigmatic metaphysical concept that was assumed to be necessary and outside of the experiential world. Hume criticized the role of causality as understood by classical metaphysics and argued that knowledge can only be gained from experience. His argument was based on the forgoing understanding of possible judgements and necessity, which limited the amplification of knowledge to synthetic judgments of experience. In response, Kant offered a new form of necessity that accounted for the metaphysical basis for the possibility of all experience. Kant's understanding of human action in cognition informed his moral theory and the role of a priori concepts in moral action. Kant's moral theory is based on the possibility of a moral action being simultaneously free from natural determinism and universally necessary. Following his dedication to the ideals of the Enlightenment, Kant bases the possibility of morality on universal moral laws which are accessible to all rational beings. This paper will evaluate the possibility of moral action based on Kant's establishment of the necessity of metaphysical concepts in human knowledge and experience.

Mohan, Aarushi

Sunday | 1:00 – 1:50 pm | Tower 348

Watching the Dictionary Defining Itself: Understanding the Social Nature of Language-Games in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations

This paper uses Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* to study the definition of the word 'dictionary' in the Oxford English Dictionary. I propose that the social creation of meaning is characterized by a tension between the fixed usage of words and the possibilities for resignification. In studying how the dictionary preserves the customs that underpin language games while creating guidelines for shifting usages in the future, we can capture the essentially social nature of language. I analyze this juxtaposition of inheritance and futurity by both

considering the role of the dictionary in Wittgenstein's schema and delineating the structure of the dictionary entry itself.

Perry, Elijah

Saturday | 5:00 – 5:50 pm | Tower 348

Faith in Philosophy: St. Augustine's Doctrine of Divine Illumination

Philosophical inquiry, understood as the pursuit of wisdom in the attainment of truth, requires reason and revelation for its highest fulfillment. Intellect and faith are inextricably intertwined, although the objects of both may be different. This connection is explicit in Augustine's doctrine of divine illumination, indicative of a profound synthesis between the two dimensions of thought.

Thorburn, Vanessa

Saturday | 11:00 – 11:50 am | Alumni 342

Truth and Poetry within and without our Control

This paper offers a better understanding of Martin Heidegger's conception of Dasein as the "watchkeeper of unconcealment." In this paper, I define the role of the watchkeeper by demonstrating how Jacek Malczewski relates to his painting, *Death* (1917). In order to do this, I first explain key Heideggerian terms such as "Dasein" and "aletheia" or "disclosure." I explain how Dasein can be the being who unconceals and is not yet the origin of unconcealment. I locate the origin of unconcealment in the work of art. I argue that an artist may have an idea to manifest, but he or she cannot determine the end product. I also argue for a kind of mutual constitution between the artist and the artwork. As I make these arguments, I refer back to Malczewski and his painting, *Death* (1917) to better understand what the artist and the work of art do.

Trinske, Blake

Saturday | 10:00 – 10:50 am | Alumni 342

The Principles of Valuing Art: Reasoning a Work of Art's Value Using Principles Which Resonate with Audiences

Artistic expression is one of the most ancient and universal methods used by humankind to express their subjective inner worlds to others and reflect upon the objective world outside of themselves; but why is this important? Why is art, and what art can represent, valuable? Why is it worthy of our respect, admiration, and consideration? In this essay, I seek to answer these questions by drawing upon some of the aesthetic principles of valuation presented in *Critical Reasoning* by Brooke Moore and Richard Parker. Using these principles, I will evaluate Sandro Botticelli's painting, *La Primavera*, and explain why this masterpiece is valued as a treasure gifted to our world from a bygone Renaissance era. After establishing how and why we value works of

art, I will elaborate on a further reason for doing so by introducing a principle which I will call the transportive principle. Using this evaluative principle, I hope to add another important layer of richness to our explanation of why art is valuable to the human experience.

Vo, Christine

Saturday | 10:00 – 10:50 am | Tower 348

On Activating Socially Situated Knowledge

This paper argues that the current literature on socially-situated knowledge lacks an important consideration of what I call “identity activation,” or in other words, the feeling of intense resonance with a particular identity. Identity activation occurs when one perceives themselves as belonging to a particular group and consequently changes their habits, behavior, or sense of self. I argue that by interpreting identities as a characterization that one can activate, one can inhabit social situations in different contexts, potentially resulting in a change in how one accesses socially-situated knowledge. I first clarify the differences between situatedness and social position and I consider the possible implications of identity activation. Then I propose two possible responses on the behalf of standpoint theorists. The first dismisses the possibility of identity activation resulting in a difference in experience--rather, it’s better to say that individuals are in a better position to understand their experiences. The second response is the one I champion, which argues that identity activation does, in fact, result in different situatedness. As a mere introduction to the possibility of a theory, I call for further exploration of the effects of identity activation in traditional social epistemology.

Wahbeh, Rama

Saturday | 5:00 – 5:50 pm | Alumni 342

Technology and the Modern Age

Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition* focuses on the *vita activa* or the “active life”. She discusses how the modernity of society has affected and changed the conditions of the active life. She separates the active life into three parts: labor, work, and action. Arendt later talks about the alienation of modern society and how, with the growth of technology, we have become more limited in our freedoms and how much control we have on the consequences of our actions. I am going to talk about how Arendt’s point relates to social media in this modern age.

Williams, Lauren

Saturday | 3:00 – 3:50 pm | Alumni 342

Ozturk's Disanalogies

In this essay, I will suggest that Burkey Ozturk fails to adequately defend his negotiative theory of identity in his article, “The Negotiative Theory of Gender and Identity and the Limits of

First-Person Authority.” I argue that the analogies he presents to support his theory fall short of doing so because there are significant differences between the cases he presents to elucidate intuitive acceptance or rejection of another’s self-identity. Moreover, he does not explore all possible counterarguments to his argument from analogy. The aim of this essay is to elucidate disanalogies in Ozturk’s series of cases that could explain why the cases should be treated differently, address possible objections, and respond accordingly to demonstrate that the analogies between his cases do not hold.

Wilson, Finn

Sunday | 11:00 – 11:50 am | Tower 348

Moral Responsibility and the Swerve

On the Nature of Things is a poem written by Titus Lucretius Carus explaining some aspects of Epicurean philosophy, including ‘the swerve’. He believed the swerve involved random alterations in the motions of atoms that supported ‘libera voluntas’, which is often interpreted as ‘free will’. The precise way in which the swerve is supposed to accomplish this has remained open to interpretation. Furthermore, Epicurus’s concern for moral responsibility has long been read into the argument for libera voluntas. Many commentators believe that the intention of the swerve was to preserve both free will and moral responsibility against the threat of causal determinism. Yet, this belief results in a dilemma: in trying to protect the legitimacy of moral responsibility, the swerve unintentionally destroys it, since we cannot be held responsible for indeterministic swerves of atoms. In response to this issue, some commentators have tried to reinterpret the swerve in ways that reconcile the randomness of the swerve with moral responsibility. However, it is important to note that Lucretius never writes that preserving moral responsibility is the purpose of the swerve. In this essay, I will argue that a more productive way of interpreting the swerve is to disconnect it from Epicurus’s emphasis on moral praise and blame. More specifically, we should not assume that the swerve as described by Lucretius was an attempt at salvaging moral responsibility. Avoiding this assumption allows us to better understand Lucretius’s account of the swerve and steers us clear of the previously stated dilemma.
