



Eastern Michigan University

Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy 2020 Abstract List

Natalie Anderson

Saturday | 3:00 – 3:50 pm | Tower 348

How the Self-Serving Attributional Bias Affects Student Learning

The self-serving attributional bias (SSAB) is a very common human bias. The SSAB, however, is at odds with being a good learner, since learning (often) requires learning from failure. In this paper, I explain controlled failure as part of good learning activity design. This design (among others) should include a metacognitive component wherein students are asked to learn about learning from failure, which requires them to come face to face with their own SSAB. In order to alleviate this conflict, I advocate for two designs found in the teaching literature: after-event reviews and guided reflection.

Murphy Cavanaugh

Sunday | 2:00 – 2:50 pm | Alumni 342

The Myth of the Class Division – The Philosophy and Logic Behind Plato’s Argument for Class Division in the Republic

Plato’s *The Republic* follows Socrates’ journey to define justice on the individual and city-wide level. By engaging with multiple men to define justice, Socrates describes a just city where the classes are divided according to a falsehood entitled *The Myth of the Metals*. Each metal, gold, silver, and bronze correspond to a different class with different tasks to perform, and when everyone performs their task, the city thrives. This myth, however, is a falsehood created in order to divide the classes. The myth helps justify the division by convincing citizens that their task or metal is innate. I argue that this leads to ineffective leadership because it could lead to citizens being put in the wrong class, citizens not being able to explore different tasks, or corrupt guardians. I question Socrates’ argument for the implementation of the myth because if we are choosing the rulers of the city based upon a myth that is fabricated in order to justify the citizen’s roles as innate, how can we know they will be the best rulers? Socrates would respond with his push for specialization and the specialized education for all citizens to excel at their task. I would further question how human nature plays a role but, I ultimately conclude that there are some citizens sorted into different classes who would be qualified to be a guardian. The question remains of what the education of the guardians will be like to ensure they are prepared to lead and rule their city.

Levi Durham

Saturday | 9:00 – 9:50 am | Tower 348

Originalism: More Than Mere Foolishness or Fraud

Over the last few decades, the Supreme Court has become increasingly divided along ideological lines, and the outcomes of controversial issues are often entirely dependent on whether the conservative or the liberal justices have a majority. When deciding difficult cases, Supreme Court Justices seem to have little common ground to serve as the basis of their decisions. There is frequently no agreed upon method for deciding the Constitutionality of actions, statutes, and lower court rulings. One method that could be part of the answer is originalism: the doctrine that states that the meaning of the Constitution is unchanging. However, originalism has many critics, which include prominent figures such as Justice William Brennan and Eric Segall. The goal of this paper is to defend originalism from attacks by these two opponents, namely, that originalism is either foolish or fraudulent. I contend that original meaning theory is a legitimate and often illuminating method of interpretation that has been successfully used in the past. I do this by laying out the cases against originalism, explaining how original meaning theory does not fall prey to Brennan's attacks, and by directly responding to Segall's argument. I do not claim that original meaning theory is the entire solution to the sectarian problem plaguing the Supreme Court or that it can determine every Supreme Court case. But I do think that original meaning theory can provide part of the answer, and that we should not dismiss it based on arguments like the ones Justice Brennan and Segall assert.

Emily Hunt

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

Poetry as Mediation: Buddhism, Daoism, and Han Sha

Language exists because one has an innate need to establish things that have not been previously established. Words are not founded in reality and what is said is hardly ever what is meant. Buddhism and Daoism each offer unique insight to how poetry works as a mode of meditation. Poetry offers a deeper, more scrupulous form of communication. Unlike other forms of writing, poetry more readily unearths depth and recognizes that one's inner chaos is dynamic rather than paralyzing. Through writing poetry, one learns to dance with disorder. The poet understands life has something beneath it, so she begins to peel away the skin with a careful hand. Through writing she is illuminated amidst the shadows of her depths. Through a process of igniting thought and burning away pain, a poem emerges in a smoky haze. In this way, poetry is synonymous with the art of mindfulness. Through examination of Han Shan the role of meditation is further established. It is a meditation in which one learns to accept things for both what they are and what they are not readily seen as. With each poem that is birthed, the author experiences a removal of self. This sort of transformation is highlighted through the examination of poetry in light of Buddhist and Daoist practice.

Matthew Kern

Sunday | 1:00 – 1:50 pm | Alumni 342

On Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel: A Naturalism to Defeat Nihilism

The philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte seeks to overcome the problem of nihilism, a problem he sees as posed by theoretical reason, no matter what system theoretical reason endorses. Fichte follows Kant in endorsing a similar version of transcendental idealism, and yet recognizes that one interpretation of Kant's system leads to nihilism, according to which the world is illusion. This causes Fichte to focus on the primacy of practical reason in opposition to the 'idle speculations' of theoretical reason to overcome this nihilism. What Fichte develops, however, does not solve the problem of nihilism, but merely presents a kind of moral monism which abandons the natural world with all of its valuable features in favor of a world of pure moral law closed off by itself. The goal of this paper will be to show that Fichte fails in this regard and to sketch an account of naturalism which accommodates human freedom, the self, values, and the importance of theoretical reason, and which can overcome the very real challenges that Fichte presents. It will be recognized that the naturalist account presented here bears philosophical resemblance to F. W. J. Schelling's critique of Fichte, most importantly in emphasizing the importance of theoretical reason. The methodology of theoretical reason on this account will closely match Schelling's view, but a view of emergence will be sketched which is inspired by Hegel. Finally, we will examine what further implications these issues have for solving the problem of nihilism.

Jennifer Kuo

Saturday | 4:00 – 4:50 pm | Tower 348

Is There A Case for Permissivism?

This paper discusses Schoenfield's arguments in favor of permissivism as discussed in "Permission to Believe," including its main intuitive and theoretical motivations. The focus is specifically on critically evaluating the arguments combating objections that cite permissivists' worrying arbitrariness in determining a truth-conducive method to lead to a conclusion based on a body of evidence. I argue that Schoenfield, in her defense of permissivism, uses instances of peer disagreement that do not qualify as permissivism due to inconclusive evidence, and that she does a better job showing alternative epistemic attitudes as implausible rather than strengthening the case for permissivism by overcoming major reasons to reject it. I also draw upon Horowitz's "Epistemic Value and Jamesian Goals" and Roger White's "Epistemic Permissiveness" to demonstrate that Schoenfield's arguments ultimately do not resolve permissivism's arbitrariness and question-begging.

Lindsey Merillat

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

Creating Destitution Through the Prevention of Famine: A Response to Both Singer and Timmerman

Peter Singer, in his essay “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” argues for the implementation of a moral obligation to send expendable income from affluent nations overseas to famine relief programs. He does this mainly on the premise that if individuals can prevent something bad from happening without sacrificing something as morally significant, they ought to do it, while also utilizing a thought experiment about the obligation to save a drowning child. However, Travis Timmerman, in his “A Reply to Singer,” claims that such a premise is invalid, spinning the thought experiment that Singer uses to mold to his argument, also noting that Singer’s premise two is too demanding. Thus, Singer’s argument regarding one’s moral obligation to send expendable income to aid famine relief becomes invalid overall. Despite Timmerman’s attempt to do such, his thought experiment actually proves Singer’s argument, and Singer overall glosses over the grander scheme of things. Poverty is relative, and affluent nations require things to maintain a livable lifestyle that less advanced countries may not even know of. With this in mind, Singer’s premise two becomes invalid simply on the basis that the larger picture is overlooked and different nations have different poverty lines, meaning that one is not morally obligated to send expendable income to famine relief.

Thomas Moore

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

A Reappropriation of Hegel's Political Theory: Is Sittlichkeit All It's Cracked Up To Be?

All too often, Hegel is falsely characterized. For some, his thought too confusing to be worthwhile. For others, he is a totalitarian who justifies state oppression of critics and the underprivileged. Yet despite these charges, Georg F. W. Hegel is still taken seriously by academia today. Crucial to understanding both his perplexity and his appeal is his conception of an ethical life that allows people within the State to find freedom and liberation in a way that avoids hindering others, and elevates peoples’ status in an objective, rational way. For Hegel, since the state is objective form of the concept of reason, the legal responsibility it has to its citizens is not contingent on what certain individuals within society see as reasonable. But what then should we make of social reformers? On this model, they seem to be an obstacle to society’s well-being. Should we think Hegel is opposed to them? Or, is he able to countenance reformers’ immanent critique of the State they inhabit? In this paper, I will argue that Hegel can support social critiques and that Sittlichkeit actually requires social reformers to promote moral progress and uphold the welfare of society. Ideally, I will offer a way to salvage Hegel’s thought from being falsely appropriated by totalitarian thinkers, and demonstrate how Hegel is more welcoming to the idea of social reform as a rational action — and moral duty — than the purely duty-based slavishness to the State with which he is often associated.

Sam Nesbitt

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

A Worldview Definition

Worldview approaches to contemporary issues in philosophy have become more popular in recent decades, given that knowledge of reality has been increasingly recognized to be influenced by many factors, which dismantles the idea of a neutral knower. Instead, every individual possesses a particular worldview that influences the way reality is perceived, data is interpreted, and experiences understood. In this paper, I offer a definition of worldview that I believe to be sufficient to explain how every person views reality. As will be demonstrated in the first section, the concept of worldview has been defined in many ways by many people, and after briefly examining these definitions, I will define worldview as the fundamental commitments of the heart that manifest in metanarrative lenses and a foundational set of metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological beliefs that are presupposed, consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, in the interpretation of reality, experience, and the formation of systems of thought that influence and mold the way humans live their lives. In the second section, I will unpack what this definition means, elaborating on each phrase of the definition. Lastly, I will answer some objections and implications to a worldview approach, particularly that of relativism.

Karina Ortiz Villa

Sunday | 1:00 – 1:50 pm | Tower 348

The Third Space Existence: On the Oppression of Men

This thesis analyzes the question whether men can be oppressed by virtue of being men. I argue that men can be oppressed by virtue of being men; however, our definitions of men and masculinity must be redefined and reclaimed from the dominant white perspective. My claims are: (1) current arguments on the oppression of men simpliciter are misguided as they fail to encompass the experiences of all men; (2) any question regarding the oppression of men must reject the current static and universal definition of men; (3) the oppression of Latino men qua Latino men is an example of men being oppressed as men. Therefore, (4) we must redefine and reclaim the definition of “men” and “masculinity.” Last, (5) this redefinition cannot be done a priori but must use intersectionality as a regulative ideal to illuminate the oppression of men that remains obscured in other, one-dimensional approaches to the topic of the oppression of men.

Brynn Ritchey

Sunday | 10:00 – 10:50 am | Tower 348

Optimism in the Sciences: A New Look at Old Practices

Optimism within the sciences commits us to expecting some future success in a scientific field of study or one particular aspect of a scientific field. Sciences generate a plurality of outputs, including truth, understanding, and predictions, so we should always have something to be optimistic about. I support the argument that there is no room for pessimism in the sciences; even if we cannot find any hard answers, we can easily determine what is not true. Using climate science and ecology, I illustrate six types of

optimism in practice and compare the implications of a single type of optimism across disciplines. I also argue that there can be many types of optimism existing in any one scientific field of study by highlighting just a few found in ecology.

Abhi Ruparelia

Sunday | 3:00 – 3:50 pm | Tower 348

Virtue, Perception, and Silencing

Over the course of several influential articles, John McDowell describes the practical reasoning of the virtuous agent using an appeal to his distinctive perceptual abilities. He argues that when the virtuous agent deliberates about a course of action, she does not see any conflict between the demands of virtue and other competing non-virtuous considerations. In fact, to such an agent's perception, the correct reasons for action appear, not by overriding or outweighing reasons for acting in any other way, but by *silencing* them. This conception of "silencing" is aimed at providing a novel understanding of Aristotle's account of virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and construes virtue through the lens of moral particularism. What exactly it means to silence a reason is a question that McDowell is highly vague about and leaves largely unanswered. Therefore, my goal in this paper is to critically examine the notion of silencing as a requirement for attaining virtue. To achieve this, I will begin by providing two possible interpretations of silencing, in cognitive terms, that have gained popularity in recent literature. Next, I will argue neither of these interpretations is satisfactory because they (i) run into conceptual difficulties about the difference between virtue and continence, and (ii) set the bar for attaining virtue too high for ordinary moral agents to uphold and thus remain unfaithful to their Aristotelian affiliations. Lastly, I will address any objections and counterarguments to my critique of McDowell's account.

Tommy Sanfilippo

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

*Alphas and Betas: An Exploration of Moral Membership Within the False Theory
Dichotomy of Humans and Non-humans*

Human history is littered with dark chapters in which entire demographics have been denigrated by the ruling class. Over time, many injustices have been acknowledged and attempts to rectify these situations have been made. However, we have yet to rectify our treatment of non-human animals. This is incongruent with our desire to view ourselves as a species that values justice and ethical behavior. Thus, it is obvious that changes ought to be made. The first of many steps will be to elevate non-human animals to the moral status of human beings.

In this essay, I will explore some of the justifications that have been used to maintain an anthropocentric worldview. I will also look into possible objections to the idea that non-human animals should share in the same moral status as human beings. By opening with a thought experiment, I take away the veil of preconceived notions

surrounding humans and their non-human counterparts, opting instead for a simpler examination of what has historically been an exploitative alpha-beta dynamic.

Ben Schwabe

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

Hegel's Two Faces of Patriotism: War and the Modern Liberal State

Modern political philosophy is split into two factions on the question of war. One faction, whose views predominate in the modern international system, includes Hobbes, Locke, and Kant and views peace as inherently more desirable than war. A smaller but no less forceful group, including Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Nietzsche, have either advocated for the importance of war or criticized the goal of perpetual peace. This division points to a legitimation crisis for the modern, rights-based liberal state: how can a state founded upon protection of life and liberty justifiably call sacrifice in war a duty of citizenship? In attempting to answer this question, Hegel draws upon each of these factions. He presents a two-part account of patriotism, arguing that governments must protect such rights and the prospect of material gain in peacetime for the development of patriotic sentiment, but that the manifest insecurity of material goods in the face of existential threats to the state allows citizens to understand that sacrifice in affirmation of the state is a higher form of exercising freedom and the essence of the relation of citizenship. In the absence of such a threat, economic life prevails over and obscures true political life, and thus leads to societal decay. Thus Hegel presents periodic but not perpetual conflict as necessary for political vitality. Such an analysis brings to light the relationship between war and the modern state and problematizes our widespread conviction in the categorical desirability of peace over war.

Ethan Smith

Sunday | 2:00 – 2:50 pm | Tower 348

Pouring from an Empty Cup: Balancing Human Rights with Fundamental Obligations to the Extremely Poor

Singer (2009) argues that people in affluent countries have a moral obligation to donate to aid agencies and otherwise support lifesaving measures in the developing world based upon three central premises. This paper critiques Singer by arguing to disprove his second premise. This states: “if it is one’s power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so.” The paper aims to disprove this premise by arguing that living a life that actually satisfies the moral demands of the premise would deprive an individual of their central human capabilities as described by Nussbaum (2000). The paper concludes by arguing that depriving any human of their central capabilities when it can be avoided is morally unacceptable, and that it can always be avoided because there are enough material resources in the world that nobody need be deprived of their capabilities. Taken together, these premises prove it is not always wrong to fail to prevent something bad from

happening, even if it is in one's power and does not require giving up something nearly as important, because doing so will result in a morally unacceptable situation even when not giving up something nearly as important.

Klayton Silverpen

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

Free Will and the Self: Why Defining the Self Can Help Answer the Question of Free Will

In the discussion surrounding free will, it is helpful to define the “self” that would be considered the agent that has the free will in question, but it is not often enough considered. Determinists and libertarians generally agree on a definition of free will that states that free choices are not choices that are caused by outside influences. Using this definition, both positions run into problems. Notably, determinism runs into the issue of responsibility. This paper argues that it is helpful to understand who is being considered responsible - in other words, what is the self - before trying to assign responsibility. This paper does not argue for a specific theory of self, but does give examples of how different theories of self might yield different takes on the self. It briefly considers a dualist position, and a reductionist position, before finally spending a little more time on the trend of theories that see the self as a construct or an illusion created by the brain. This final, more in-depth look goes into the distinction between perception and reality as a way of separating the deterministic, objective world with the world as it is perceived. Since the self and responsibility are both absent in a purely physical world, but exist in the perceived world, there is no contradiction in thinking of the self as being responsible, even if determinism is true.

Jack Vavrinchik

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

The Aesthetic Flow: Neural Correlates and Implications of a Goal-Directed Aesthetic Experience

This paper offers an argument for the existence of a type of goal-directed aesthetic experience. By weaving together recent research in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience, I show how an artists in flow experience—a necessarily goal-directed mental state—can nevertheless have aesthetic experiences. Recent approaches to understanding the aesthetic experience from the neuroscience perspective have suggested that a non-goal-directed (or disinterested, in Kantian terms) mental state is needed to achieve an aesthetic experience. I will argue that a non-goal-directed mental state is not necessary for an aesthetic experience.

What Makes an Oppressor?

This paper was written in response to Ann Cudd's Analyzing Oppression, and aims to offer an amendment to her definition of who qualifies as an oppressor. The primary argument of the paper argues that if an individual seeks to increase or maintain their privilege relative to another group is sufficient to qualify an individual as an 'oppressor'. Additionally, I expand on Cudd's analysis of deformed desires to include the desires of the privileged in order to demonstrate the ways in which members of privileged groups act to improve or sustain their privileged position. I argue that given that these desires are a direct result of a culture founded on contrived assumptions that some social groups are superior to others, these desires are not natural or universal, and would not be desirable in an egalitarian society. I present this expansion of Cudd's deformed desires with the hope that it may help us further distinguish between those who are merely privileged and those who are oppressors. Additionally, I hope it may provide an improved and more intimate examination into the experiences and motives of privileged individuals.
