Eastern Michigan University
Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy
2021 Abstract List

ROOM A	ROOM B
https://emich.zoom.us/j/87084883340	https://emich.zoom.us/j/89305848150
ID: 870 8488 3340	ID: 893 2584 8150

Baty, Mitchell   *Saturday | 5:00-5:50 pm | Room A*

Temporally Incomplete Possible Worlds

Much of the modern discussion of free will has focused on Alternative Possibilities (AP). AP is generally understood as the ability to do otherwise. "Ability" implies possibility, making AP a modal statement. Any modal statement requires a theory of modality to understand what is meant by "possible." Possible worlds theory has largely been taken for granted as the correct modal theory in the free will debate. This paper argues that all metaphysical theories of possible worlds are incompatible with AP. The outline of a potential alternative semantical theory called Possible-Moments Semantics and an accompanying metaphysical theory of modality called Modal Branching Temporalism (MBT) are presented. I then argue that Possible-Moments Semantics and MBT should be preferred over possible worlds theory because they are compatible with AP and possible worlds theory is not.

Berger, Chloe   *Sunday | 9:00-9:50 am | Room B*

A Case for Creating Clearly Condemnatory Statues of Wrongdoers

In recent work discussing how we should address public statues of wrongdoers, people typically argue for either removing statues or retaining them, often with the addition of a contextualizing plaque, counter-commemoration, or other alteration. In contrast to mere removal or modification, I argue that one permissible alternative option is to create clearly condemnatory statues of wrongdoers, but only for wrongdoers with already existing statues. That is, we need not create statues of every wrongdoer; we should only create them following removal of the originals. While my arguments apply to wrongdoers generally, including confederates, colonizers, and genocidaires, I focus on

Columbus as a wrongdoer and the Columbus statue in Marconi Plaza in Philadelphia. First, I outline Helen Frowe's argument for our duty to remove statues of wrongdoers as part of the state's duty to condemn and repudiate wrongdoing. While I do not frame my argument in terms of duties, building on Frowe's claims, I argue that one permissible way of condemning and repudiating wrongdoing is to create condemnatory statues, and in cases involving serious rights violators, we ought to prefer creation of these statues over mere removal. I also draw on accounts of the value of blame to show how blame – and particularly the blame that condemnatory statues convey – demonstrates our commitment to morality. Finally, I address alternative options of retaining the statue and either adding a plaque, counter-commemoration, or vandalization, to illuminate some reasons why we might prefer condemnatory statues.

Bienstock, Julia   *Sunday | 11:00-11:50 am | Room B*

The Gender Binary as a Philosophical Problem

Deviance from the heterosexual gender binary is pathologized and seen as an individual physiological problem. I examine this binary social construct and explore different ways of functioning within it that are not misogynistic and homophobic. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of embodiment as a balance between realism and idealism, I explore the fluidity of gendered existence. I combine this with Lacanian psychoanalysis to demonstrate the unique form of freedom that defines gender difference. Slavoj Žižek is right that contemporary gender theory does not adequately distinguish imaginary from symbolic identity, and I show how a distinctive type of gender freedom arises from dissolving imaginary identities. More specifically, I show that aesthetic theory is crucial for understanding the freedom of gender. Using Martin Seel's neo-Kantian aesthetic theory, I argue that the best way to conceptualize gender is aesthetic because it allows us to think of sexual difference as enabling and inclusive, not oppressive and dominating.

Black, Kenneth   *Saturday | 4:00-4:50 pm | Room A*

Giving Up on a Unifying Account of Change

Objects persist through change—proteins fold, green leaves become red, and stones are worn smooth in the riverbed—but how is this possible? How can one and the same object instantiate apparently incompatible properties? Metaphysicians usually assume that, however change happens, one thing remains constant: the unity of reality. According to this assumption, there are never any incompatible facts, and all of reality is in agreement as to what is the case. Philosophers have gone to great lengths to cling to this thesis. But we might be better off without that assumption. Giving up on this assumption

leads to a view I will call incompatibilism, which I argue packs a serious metaphysical punch. It holds that reality as a whole is unsettled about what is the case, and certain facts (such as those in change cases) only obtain with respect to parts of reality. This way we can continue to believe that change cases involve one and the same object instantiating incompatible properties, without discarding the deliverances of physics with regard to the nature of spacetime.

Cao, Yunlong   *Saturday | 3:00-3:50 pm | Room A*

A Defense of the Second Analogy

In his book, The Bounds of Sense, P. F. Strawson commented that Immanuel Kant's argument in the second analogy "proceeds by a non sequitur of numbing grossness," causing a fair amount of debates. Kant's task in the second analogy is to argue that every event has a cause. Strawson criticizes Kant by claiming that in his argument, Kant not only changes the content of necessity but also shifts a conceptual necessity to a causal one. In this paper, I defend Kant's second analogy against Strawson's objection by arguing that Strawson misinterprets Kant's strategy.

Cheng, Anna   *Sunday | 10:00-10:50 am | Room A*

Psychopaths and Animals: Blame, Reciprocity, and Obligation

In "The Trouble with Psychopaths," Watson presents a novel argument that blameworthiness depends on reciprocal relationship. His argument supports the position that blameworthiness is not tied to the attribution face of moral responsibility. I will argue that, given that we have moral responsibilities to animals, closer examination reveals that Watson's account only shows that we conduct our practices of blame in such a relational manner. But reciprocity is not essential to blame. We can still get blame from attributive responsibility alone because psychopaths make judgments about their reasons for action. I will explicate Watson's defense from relationship that blame is exclusive to accountability. Then, I will examine how Watson's relational account of blame plays out in the case of harming animals, and I will reject its efficacy in dividing blame from attributive moral responsibility. My argument provides support to the position that having and violating obligations itself entails blameworthiness.

Cordeiro, Arthur Lopes C.   *Sunday | 2:00-2:50 pm | Room B*

The Unknowability of the Sensible World in the Socratic Dialogues

One of central doctrines in Platonic Epistemology is the unknowability of the sensible word. According to Plato, there's no (true) knowledge of sensible things. This view is connected to the Theory of Ideas, since ideas are the object of (true) knowledge. The orthodoxy of Platonic Studies in the Anglo-Saxon Academia, believing in a supposedly absence of a metaphysical theory in the Socratic Dialogues, holds that this epistemological view is, also, absent in these dialogues. We argue, by contrast, that it's more plausible, based on the secondary evidence (Aristotle, Diogenes Laertius and Olympiodoros), to defend that Plato believed that there is no knowledge about sensible things when writing the Socratic Dialogues.

Hernandez, Frank   *Sunday | 1:00-1:50 pm | Room A*

Wittgenstein on Reasonable Doubt and Calling Bullshit

In this essay I analyze a passage from Ludwig Wittgenstein's On Certainty. This excerpt contains the expression "O, rubbish!" (Ach Unsinn), which I consider to be both closely related to and distinct from the notions of "bullshit" developed by Harry Frankfurt and Gerald A. Cohen. The paper is organized in six sections containing 1) an introduction to the topic, 2) an explanation of "bullshit" as found in the works of Frankfurt and Cohen, 3) an explanation of Wittgenstein's work on certainty and propositions beyond doubt, 4) an identification of reasonable and unreasonable doubt and the latter's connection to "bullshit", 5) an explanation of the different kinds of "bullshit" I am considering with the intention of mapping them in relation to each other, and 6) a summarizing conclusion. The main purpose of this paper is to expound on Wittgenstein's views on "bullshit" and relate them to contemporary philosophy of nonsense.

Johnston, Carson   *Saturday | 9:00-9:50 am | Room A*

The Selective Bridge of Moral Decision-Making: Ethical Egoism to Utilitarianism

This paper presents the idea of the "Selective Bridge of Moral Decision-Making" as originated by the author. A process in which seeks to understand if choices made in the self-interest have the capacity to result in moral responsibility of the agent but also does not exempt such person from immorality. The paper examines moral decision-making from an ethical egoist perspective in conjunction with that of various consequentialist perspectives of utilitarianism that highlights the use of using such means to morality either individually or in conjunction. The selectivity of moral decision-making exists in that

ethical egoism or utilitarianism can be used together or separately to make decisions with moral or immoral consequences. The bridge implies that moral decision-making can also exist as a transition from an ethical egoist mindset to a mindset that includes fundamental utilitarian practices for moral responsibility. Ultimately, the "SBMD" is a process that allows for fluidity between conflicting branches of consequentialist philosophy to aid in moral decision-making on moral dilemmas of varying significance and impact to those involved. The paper explores various examples and questions in order to prove the effectiveness of the "Selective Bridge of Moral Decision-Making".

Khali, Omar   *Saturday | 3:00-3:50 pm | Room B*

Hegel, Marx, and the Realization of the Self in Work: Towards a Humanistic Ontology of Labor

It has become evident in advanced capitalism that the worker's relation between their labor and their selfhood remains unclear and distorted. For many, labor is merely a means for putting food on the table and a roof over their head. This does not mean, however, that labor in itself gives rise to this prevailing relation. The objective of this essay is to uncover a fundamental ontological characteristic of labor; namely, its ability to reflect one's subjectivity and capabilities as a human being. Guided by the writings of Karl Marx and G. W. F. Hegel, I expound upon this property in the first and second sections of the following essay. The first illustrates how one's unique human capacities—creativity, intelligence, etc.— can be expressed and cultivated only through labor, the objective transformation of the world. The second section attempts to demonstrate how the subjectivity reflected in one's creation (or product) attains certitude only when that creation is used and recognized by another. I contend in the last section that once there is a neglect of the intimate interrelation between labor and human subjectivity, forms of labor that estrange and disconnect workers from their creation (and thereby from their subjectivity and from one another) become socially and politically permissible.

Lawal, Joseph   *Saturday | 9:00-9:50 am | Room B*

Absurdity, Possibility, and Contextual Apriority

William Lane Craig has developed and defended a Kalam Cosmological Argument in which he argues (in part) that the universe began to exist. One way in which he supports this assertion is by arguing that if the universe did not begin to exist, then actual infinites would be possible, but the existence of actual infinites leads to unacceptable absurdities.

These absurdities, thinks Craig, are sufficient to demonstrate the impossibility of actual infinites. This paper challenges the move from absurdity to impossibility by appealing to the work of Hilary Putnam on apriority. Putnam contended that the history of statements held to be "analytic" or "immune to rational revision" is compelling reason reject the notion that any beliefs are truly immune to revision (or in his terminology, a priori) – he cites such cases as the change from a Euclidean to a non-Euclidean conception of physical space as clear instances wherein statements considered analytic and indubitable actually turned out to be false. After laying out Craig's argument and then developing Putnam's reasoning in some detail, I argue that the sort of rationalistic approach to metaphysics employed by Craig is challenged by an appreciation of the concerns which Putnam raises; if we can be mistaken about beliefs which were at one point held to be epistemic necessities, then we ought to be cautious about using the even weaker notion of absurdity as our guide to modal questions.

Milukas, Anna   *Sunday | 1:00-1:50 pm | Room B*

On the Defense of Aristotle's Treatment of Women

In History of Animals, Parts of Animals, and Generation of Animals, Aristotle makes several claims about the nature of the female that have been interpreted as sexist by feminist writers. There have been a number of defenses proposed as to why this is not really the case, and this paper examines two of these defenses against sexism. The first one argues that the treatment of women in his writings, such as his description of women as mutilated men and his fallacious assumptions about women's anatomy and women's inferior psychology, is not sexist because it is incorrect to try and judge Aristotle by modern standards of gender relations. The second argues that while Aristotle made statements in his work that seemingly treated women as lesser than men especially in regards to women's roles in generation of children, this too has been misconstrued by posterity and is also not actually sexist. However, both of these defenses can be rejected. They attempt to dismiss the charges of sexism first by employing too narrow a definition of ideological bias and too broad an allowance of other explanations, and secondly by attempting to excuse gender from the issue of generation yet nevertheless still failing to explain why women are assigned the lesser generative role.

Mitchell, Tristan   *Sunday | 3:00-3:50 pm | Room A*

Scientific Realism and Trust as a Remedy for Coronavirus Vaccine Skepticism

Vaccinations have saved millions of lives from preventable diseases since their discovery by Louis Pasteur in the 19th century. Despite this observation, many individuals are still reluctant to receive vaccinations themselves due to a lack of

information or distrust in scientific information. This is observed despite the fact that many individuals exercise trust in several other scientific discoveries, all the while lacking pertinent information. This demonstrates the importance of trust as it relates to science and its researchers. In this essay, I argue that values consistent with scientific realism can help to alleviate these apprehensions, and work towards justifiably trusting science and its findings. Among these values are sophisticated methods of observation to reliably detect natural phenomena, along with falsifiable experiments and collaborative efforts by scientists to refine theories. With these values considered, the efficacies of various vaccines are discussed, including MMR, DTaP, and HepB. Empirical evidence for these vaccine efficacies is also provided, along with the general theory behind vaccination and how it works. Finally, this information is applied to the coronavirus pandemic specifically, as a remedy for the stated apprehensions of many individuals. Ultimately, it is argued that the science behind coronavirus vaccination should be viewed as trustworthy because it is based on scientific values of observation, falsifiability, and robustness. Even if individuals lack pertinent information, they should still justifiably be able to trust the science behind coronavirus vaccination, just as they trust other key scientific breakthroughs and discoveries.

Nelson, Jay   *Sunday | 10:00-10:50 am | Room B*

The Comic Society

Simone Weil's description of Force from The Iliad or Poem of Force as that which turns a person into an object provides us with a very clear image of how Force operates on an individual and systemic level. This allows us to connect the ideas of Herbert Marcuse from the One-Dimensional Man in order to develop an understanding of society in terms of both the structural political instantiations of Force as well as the way it is perpetuated on an individual level. It is through the introduction of the three metamorphoses from Nietzsche as well as Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy that we come to see how the structural political version of Force penetrate the individual and force them into a state of life-denying thought. In order to break out of this state, we must reaffirm and strengthen our critical capacity through an expression of critical laughter. This laughter must be critical of the values of society through challenging them by taking the serious and obscene as a legitimate source of laughter. It is through this affirmation that we can reject the influence of Force upon us.

Scheider, Marshall   *Sunday | 3:00-3:50 pm | Room B*

On the Deconstruction of Metaphysics: Heidegger's Ontology of Objects

Martin Heidegger's Being and Time offers a sustained critique of the Western philosophical tradition. Specifically, Heidegger describes his project as a deconstruction

of prior ontological systems. His aim, however, is a positive recuperation and reformulation of the "question of being." Heidegger suggests that this question has been obscured and distorted by prior ontologists. He delineates his own metaphysics in a critical mode, positioning himself against various figures in the Western philosophical tradition, even as he forges his own, novel conception of the "being of beings." This paper presents a detailed reconstruction of Division I of Being and Time, drawing out the critical function of Heidegger's account while shedding light on his reading of the history of Western metaphysics. Centering on Heidegger's critical intervention in ontology, the paper shows that Heidegger's positive vision emerges through a complex engagement with Aristotelian and Cartesian thought.

Silverpen, Klayton   *Saturday | 11:00-11:50 am | Room A*

Reconciling Schroeder, Aparly, and Levy's View of Addiction

There is an ongoing debate about how responsible addicts are for their drug-seeking and using behavior, with much of the issue stemming from uncertainty regarding addiction. Addicts are often described as having "irresistible urges" but lots of non-addicts experience urges that can sometimes be extremely difficult to resist, and it is initially unclear what the difference is. Furthermore, some people can use addictive drugs without experiencing addiction, so it is again unclear why certain people struggle so hard to resist while others do not. A comprehensive theory of addiction should be able to explain these two things: what makes addiction qualitatively different from other strong urges, and why some people suffer from addiction while others do not. Timothy Schroeder and Nomy Arpaly answer the first question with a neuroscience approach, explaining that addictive drugs "hijack" the brain, causing the user to overlearn the addictive behavior and thus desire to perform stronger than they would normally. This explains how addiction is qualitatively different than other urges. Neil Levy answers the second question using ego-depletion, explaining that self-control is something that varies from person to person. I argue that combining the views of Schroeder, Arpaly, and Levy can provide an account of addiction that can answer both questions. Lastly, to answer the question of how to hold addicts responsible, I briefly argue that Schroeder and Arpaly's view should be preferred to Levy's.

Sirower, Ellen   *Saturday | 10:00-10:50 am | Room B*

God's Perfection and Omnibenevolence—Objections to Skeptical Theism

In this paper, I will begin by defining the idea of skeptical theism and its arguments in favor of not only God's existence, but also His omnibenevolence—or essence of being perfectly loving—along with all His other perfections. I will then present two objections

to those arguments. First, based on the argument that states that we have no reason to think the possible goods we know are representative of the possible goods there are, we have no reason to believe that God is a perfectly good being if it is not within our cognitive capabilities to conceive of a perfectly good being. Second, if God were truly omnibenevolent, then there is no reason for why God would withhold explanations of "entailment relations", or the potential causal relationships between the evils that people experience the possible goods there are, from victims of extreme evil.

Smith, Hailey   *Sunday | 11:00-11:50 am | Room A*

Palouse Prairie: Ethics Behind the Loss of an Ecosystem

There is an ethical tradeoff between growing high-yield agricultural products and the integrity and goodness of an ecosystem. Why must we protect an ecosystem and prevent extinction of other organisms? One might claim that the human benefit gained from environmental destructions for the purpose of agriculture is more valuable than any life or structure that existed in the ecosystem. In the case of the Palouse Prairie in Eastern Washington, early white settlers in the area valued the monetary gains from agriculture more than any goodness of an intact ecosystem. Unlike the benefits gained from farming (which could be attained through more sustainable means), what is lost with the destruction of an ecosystem or the extinction of a species can never be restored. I will argue that humans are morally obligated to not destroy living lineages when altering a landscape. A brief case study of the Palouse Prairie will illustrate that the small-scale, land-altering decisions made by the few farmers of the Palouse have caused long-term harms for the current and future inhabitants of the ecosystem. Because evolution grants the potential for any lineage to advance and better its individuals, the processes of evolution must be respected in any ecosystem. Any lineage's process of perpetuation must be morally considerable, as is any living organism's will to live. To offer a practical guideline for land alteration, I conclude with the suggestion that all lineages of life receive freedom of environment, perpetuity, and adaptation.

Speaker, James   *Saturday | 5:00-5:50 pm | Room B*

Maximum Sociability: Foucault and the Technological Imprisonment of our Future

The growth of authoritarianism in the eighteenth century had a daunting impact on the psychology of those exposed to it. Philosophers such as Michel Foucault explored this impact, and how it altered the societal structures of the world. Long after Foucault's death,

authoritarianism has a new vehicle for its means. While the structures which Foucault criticized still thrive, vast expansions in technology have captivated the psychology of the human race. The growth of the internet has given birth to social media - an idea intended as a platform of expression for the self. However, recent decades have soured the goodwill of social media and allowed the platform to grow into a far more insidious, destructive system of power. Even as Foucault wrote Discipline and Punish decades before the founding of Facebook or Twitter - these platforms for expression have mutated into authoritarian systems of control, corruption, and suffering. Foucault's writing is a warning which doesn't stop at criticism of authoritarian systems of government, but one which explores our future ahead. Social media platforms are the new prisons - their authoritarian natures destroying the core concepts of the human experience in exchange for a world of instant gratification and redefined reality. By exploring the literature of Foucault and similar thinkers, we can understand the future which these technological advancements have led us to and the possibility, or lack thereof, that we can alter it.

Tobias, Zach   *Saturday | 10:00-10:50 am | Room A*

Discovering an Animal Friendly Kantian Moral Framework

I argue that Kant's Humanity Formulation is not actually making an appeal to "humanity," but to personhood as characterized by one's possession of rationality, morality, and freedom and that nonhuman animals who possess these three characteristics should be awarded equal consideration under Kantian moral philosophy. Social structure, it seems, is dependent on its members' abilities to practice those characteristics, that is, without universalizable moral laws and categorical imperatives, a society could not function. Thus, the presence of a social structure, regardless of how sophisticated it is, suggests that its members are rational, moral, and free beings that should be considered in Kantian moral frameworks. Many animal species have complex social and labor structures and thus, those animals should, in line with Kant's philosophy, never be treated as a means to an end only and our interactions with animals should only continue if we are ready to universalize them with all relevant animals and humans. If we are to accept an expansion of Kant's moral philosophy to include some nonhuman animals, then we need to seriously reconsider and change many of our economic institutions which routinely treat animals as means to our human ends including, but not limited to, sectors of entertainment, product testing, and resource gathering.

Tran, Maria   *Sunday | 2:00-2:50 pm | Room A*

Seen But Not Heard: Children's Susceptibility to Epistemic Injustice

The phrase that "children should be seen and not heard" is a pervasive one. However, such a sentiment also implies that children's words and actions are not to be considered, essentially stating that children's testimony is invalid by default. Thus, children are more likely to experience epistemic injustice. While part of this phenomenon is due to prejudice, I argue in this paper that children are especially susceptible to epistemic injustice because they lack access to the conceptual resources that adults do. I use the concepts of testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, reliable ignorance, and conceptual resources as defined by Miranda Fricker, Kristie Dotson, and Gaile Pohlhause respectively to set the groundwork for my argument. Later, I use these philosophical concepts, along with anecdotal examples and information from the field of developmental psychology, to explain why children lack access to conceptual resources and why this necessarily makes them more susceptible to epistemic injustice. I provide the suggestion that, to combat this issue, adults should seek to understand children's testimony when there is the possibility that the child giving testimony has undergone a negative or otherwise concerning experience.

Tran, Quang   *Sunday | 9:00-9:50 am | Room A*

An Account for the Inalienability of the Right to Life: A Supplement to Amnesty

International's Argument

In the debates on the legitimacy of the death penalty, one prominent abolitionist argument refutes retentionist arguments by defending the right to life. Amnesty International adopted this approach in its statement released in 2007. This essay argues that such an approach assumes that the right to life is distinct from other basic human rights by virtue of its inalienability. Three accounts for why the right to life may be so unconditional and distinct from all other human rights are proposed by looking into the possible unique features that the right to life holds. These features include: 1) the necessity of the subject of the right for the largest number of other things, 2) the absolute irretrievability of the subject once it is lost, and 3) the absence of satisfactory substitute for the subject once it is lost. This paper argues that the last account is the most plausible. It agrees with our normative intuitions about which should be regarded as legitimate rights and it is able to justify these intuitive claims. Based on this account, overly long prison sentences, like the death penalty, are also morally impermissible — while torture, contrary to most abolitionists' view, may be morally permissible under some conditions.

Villeneuve, Hudson   *Saturday | 11:00-11:50 am | Room B*

On the Origins of Property

      This essay examines the philosophical origins of the concept of private property, especially in John Locke's Second Treatise on Civil Government and in Karl Marx's writings on property rights. Locke justified the taking of things held in common for private use by stating that when man adds labor to things in nature he has a right to it. This early conception of private property was developed prior to the development of industrial capitalism. Modern political philosophy still adheres to Locke's justification of property rights while ignoring the Marxist critique that was written as the rules of property accumulation changed. Property in Locke's conception is acquired by adding labor to nature. Today property is accumulated through capital. Today's political philosophy originates around an antiquated justification for accumulation of property, which has led to philosophical, moral and cultural justifications for wealth inequality, labor exploitation, and for market based theories of political economy.

Wiesner, Candice   *Saturday | 4:00-4:50 pm | Room B*

The Connection Between Humanism and Transhumanism: Giovanni Pico

      This paper grounds transhumanist values in the humanist tradition, specifically in Giovanni Pico's Oration on the Dignity of Man. Pico is a humanist hero, presenting ideas that human nature is unfixed and that we are free to change, enhance, and modify our nature. Focusing on the connection between humanist and transhumanist thought, this paper presents an evaluative argument to prove that transhumanist values are not new and critics are unsound in their evaluation of transhumanism as solely a concern for the future. Comparing Pico's Oration with transhumanist thought we see the similarities between humanism and transhumanism. The main difference is transhumanism's acceptance of technology as the means for continued evolution. Using examples that we are familiar with, such as eyeglasses or vaccines, we see that we use technology to change and enhance our identity as humans already and that this evolution has been with us since we first adapted tools. The human as we know it would not be where we are today without the help of technology. The aim of this paper is to show that the idea of human advancement has not only been with us since the Renaissance, but, with Pico's profound humanistic thought, we can trace the heritage of morphological freedom as our very human identity.